

In Search of an Identity: The Changing Fortunes of Liverpool's Theatre Royal, 1772 – 1855

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Alexandra Appleton, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Alexandra Appleton

Date: 5 February 2015

Abstract

My thesis provides the first analytical study of the Theatre Royal Liverpool from 1772 to 1855. It offers a new and original contribution to the increasing volume of provincial theatre studies in Britain. Liverpool's theatrical history has hitherto been left in the annals of time, despite the port's important national and international position during the long nineteenth century. I believe that by examining Liverpool's theatrical and cultural identity during this period, we gain a fresh and important perspective on its complex and evolving regional character. Much has been written on the port's economic and commercial history but such an analytical study of its theatrical productions and performance history provides an incredibly important cultural insight in to Liverpool's developing maritime identity from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century.

I have focused my research primarily on events occurring at the town's Theatre Royal as this was the only theatre to exist throughout this whole period. Although little is known about the history of the Theatre Royal and the pivotal role it had in the cultural evolution of the present day city, I believe that its pattern of productions, fortunes and managerial decisions provide a fascinating insight into the changing character of this North West port.

This thesis brings a new dimension to the well-known historical character of Liverpool by examining the evolution of theatrical practice within the port. Beginning with the town's application for a royal patent in the early 1770s, I explore Liverpool's dramatic engagement with naval warfare, changes in attitude to the slave trade, local social decline, expanding transatlantic links, and changes in theatrical taste. My thesis concludes with the establishment of Liverpool's celebrated global reputation in the mid-nineteenth century. I use playbills, newspaper reports, archival resources and contemporary narratives to examine the role of the Theatre Royal in Liverpool's cultural development and self-conception.

Introduction

Historian Graeme Milne describes the historical representation of Liverpool and its immediate locale as “a place of greater extremes than most, and not quite in the mainstream of British history” (*Trade and Traders* 2). He argues that its distinct maritime outlook and peripheral geographical character afforded it a unique identity unmatched by any other urban centre in the British Isles throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis seeks to demonstrate the ways in which an examination of the port’s theatrical identity during the long nineteenth century provides a new perspective on its complex regional character. I argue that, although Liverpool believed itself to hold an exceptional position within the nation across this time period, it was fundamentally insecure in its identity and reputation. I will show how the town’s theatrical history highlights its ongoing struggles with pride, local and national reputation, and civic development. This thesis offers the first cultural history of Liverpool’s Theatre Royal from 1772 to 1855, analysing the link between the theatre’s productions and performance choices and the complicated identity of the town¹.

My research focuses primarily on the Theatre Royal (the only theatre to exist throughout this time period) and traces its pattern of productions and changing fortunes, ending in its critical decline. Little is known about the history of the Theatre Royal and, in particular, the pivotal role it had in the cultural evolution of the present day city. It has all but faded from public memory and little has been written about its history or relationship with the town. Substantial studies of Liverpool’s theatrical history have tended to begin in the early years of the twentieth century when the city’s first repertory company was formed at the Playhouse Theatre in 1911. Harold Ackroyd’s chronological and geographical study of Liverpool’s theatrical landscape, *The Liverpool Stage* (1996), traces the development and growth of local theatres from the nineteenth century onwards from a very factual point of view, highlighting particular changes in management and name, architectural

¹ Liverpool did not receive city status until 1880 and for the purposes of my research I therefore refer to it as a town (although many of the historical texts cited within this thesis tend to describe it as a city from the 1830s onwards).

design and technical advancements. Indeed the only existing text that looks at the Theatre Royal at any great length is R.J. Broadbent's *Annals of the Liverpool Stage* (1908), which provides an anecdotal and subjective narrative of the history of all the city's theatres from the seventeenth century onwards.

This thesis traces the changes in the town's character from the Romantic period through to the mid-Victorian age and explores how the productions and dramatic literature emerging from the town during this period provide a fresh perspective on the core issues underlying Liverpool's civic identity. Although the town presented a proud image of its own regional and theatrical uniqueness, such professed exceptionality was not always the case and I believe that this is substantiated through such an extensive study. It is tempting to endeavour to provide one micro-argument for the whole thesis but this is impossible to do when dealing with such a lengthy time period. I have therefore found it useful to put the theatre in context and, where appropriate, to compare it with provincial and national trends and practices to present a finely calibrated examination of the theatre which reflects the complexities of its history. I have concentrated in this respect particularly on Manchester (whose developing civic identity offers a useful comparison to neighbouring Liverpool), maritime-based Bristol, and Bath (whose close proximity to London and early patent made it a key player in eighteenth-century provincial theatre), as well as providing brief glimpses into other regional theatres. Although it is again tempting to dwell further on lengthy and detailed provincial comparisons, the parameters of a thesis, and the need for a hitherto undeveloped piece of research on Liverpool's theatrical history, do not allow for this. It is my hope however that, with this initial groundwork completed, further provincial comparisons can be explored at length.

Although very little has been written on Liverpool's pre-twentieth-century theatrical history, developments in theatre studies in recent years have led to increased attention to drama in other provinces. Since the turn of the century an increased volume of new work specifically looking at regional theatre and its practices has fought back against an earlier "prevalent assumption regarding

provincial homogeneity” (Sullivan 2). Kathleen Barker’s original ground-breaking provincial research on Bristol’s Theatre Royal has since been succeeded by a growing wave of contextualised research in the twenty-first century which deliberately engages with the immediate environment in which the theatres practised. Joanne Robinson’s study of performance culture in Nottingham (“Mapping Performance Culture: Locating the Spectator in Theatre History”) offers a new insight into the possibilities for exploring regional practices, whilst Linda Fitzsimmons provides a focused study of the position of the Theatre Royal York within its immediate locale during the mid-nineteenth century (“The Theatre Royal, York, in the 1840s”). Equally important in terms of regional identity and theatrical practice is Jill Sullivan’s analysis of the provincial pantomime in the nineteenth century, *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860-1900*, focusing on productions in Manchester, Nottingham and Birmingham. My thesis considers these works in particular as constructive examples of environment-focused theatrical research in the provinces and aims to contribute a new, important regional study of a unique and distinctive maritime town.

Until the 1960s, studies of popular theatre were discouraged as they did not fit in to the accepted traditional literary practices carried over from the late nineteenth century. Jane Moody noted that only in recent years had interest in the late Romantic era risen, before which “scholarship on the Romantic theatre rarely strayed far from the plays of canonical poets such as Coleridge and P.B. Shelley” (“The State of the Abyss” 119). Peter Thomson believes that many literary critics ignored or criticised early nineteenth-century English theatrical genres, such as the burlesque and extravaganza, because of the difficulties in accurately categorising and explaining them (199-201). Accordingly, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were traditionally viewed as a period of dramatic decline and the practices, or performance histories, of individual theatres were thus often disregarded. As the long nineteenth century progressed, theatrical entertainments at illegitimate theatres, such as the extravaganza, pantomime, melodrama and burlesque, received little critical attention and, equally, similar examples of popular entertainments at licensed theatres were conveniently forgotten or ignored as periods of dramatic decline. In her essay, “Melodrama

and its Criticism”, Juliet John looks at the earlier critical rejection of melodrama and notes that this genre was viewed with suspicion thanks to its visual and physical appeal:

The aesthetic simplicity of melodrama, its ‘non-elite’ audiences, its demonstrative rather than analytical mode, and its devaluation of both spoken and written language meant that it was fundamentally threatening to Victorian and early twentieth-century notions of Literature and Culture, on which academic study of the Arts was based (4).

This kind of critical response to the nation’s theatrical practices has now been outmoded for some time and important studies have been carried out on popular forms of nineteenth-century entertainment, as well as the cultural and social impact of minor theatrical venues. I am indebted to the recent meticulous analyses of nineteenth-century theatregoing practices, including the relationship between the stage and the audience, carried out by Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow. Equally, Jacky Bratton’s examination of ‘intertheatricality’ and the stage in her book, *New Readings in Theatre History* (2003), reminds us that exciting new waves of research are opening up fresh interpretations of historical theatrical cultures. In addition, Elaine Hadley’s study of the social implications of the melodramatic mode, Jill Sullivan’s work on regional pantomime and Jane Moody’s research on the historical impact of regional theatre, have provided a valuable grounding from which to further engage with many of the lesser-known afterpieces that appeared on Liverpool’s playbills and often revealed most about the mood and character of the town throughout its theatrical history. However there is still much work to be done on the impact and influence of popular entertainment across the nation’s theatres (both legitimate and illegitimate) and my thesis embraces this challenge by offering a detailed analysis of Liverpool’s theatrical journey during the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century.

I have chosen to begin my theatrical exploration in the early 1770s and conclude my research in 1855 as I believe this was the period of most significant change to the town’s infrastructure and civic outlook, as well as its early theatrical history. I begin with Liverpool’s application for a royal patent in 1771 and finish my analysis at a time when the Theatre Royal had

lost its cultural dominance in the town and no longer held the symbolic importance associated with it in its earlier history. However Liverpool's mercantile identity and fiercely criticised trading history have tended to overshadow the city's cultural past. Thus, while other key commercial urban centres (such as Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh and York) have inspired detailed theatrical studies, Liverpool has so far been ignored. This omission is remarkable because, from the late eighteenth century onwards, Liverpool held great importance as Britain's biggest and most profitable port and trading centre. It was second only to London during this period as the most important provincial town in the country, in terms of commerce, geographical position and economic influence. The social, economic and political transition of Liverpool from a relatively small fishing port to Britain's most influential international trading centre has been well documented. The mid to late eighteenth century saw a period of rapid commercial expansion as the town emerged as a thriving trade metropolis, only to be faced with the national growth of the abolitionist movement and threats of French invasion and trade disruption by the end of the century. The beginning of the nineteenth century saw Liverpool struggle to contend with these internal and external threats, re-emerging as a commercial, and also cultural, northern strong-hold in a politically conflicted nation. The town underwent a considerable cultural reinvention after a troubled reputation in the national press only twenty years before for being uncivilised and uncultured. Yet towards the end of my research period, in the mid-nineteenth-century, the town was once again struggling to balance a prosperous commercial outlook with growing social unrest, at the same time as its theatrical economy faced a new challenge through the changing theatre regulations in the decade following the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act.

As this is the first study of its kind, my examination of Liverpool's theatrical identity is, broadly speaking, historicist and empirical but brings interdisciplinary analysis to bear on a wide range of primary sources to better understand Liverpool's theatrical identity. This flexible approach best enables a thorough examination of a previously unresearched field. The work of Broadbent has proved of great value in many respects but its style and content also raises complications when using his work as a basis for any further research. Written in an age before professional scholarly practices

had been established, Broadbent's culturally important but highly subjective thesis essentially singles out events and anecdotes of note that he believes will be of particular interest or amusement to his reader. He draws on newspapers, civic records, historic playbills, but he also, and perhaps most importantly, includes local gossip and anecdotal stories alive in the city at the turn of the twentieth century. Whilst the latter source of information has strict limitations, his musings offer an entertaining and important dimension to Liverpool's potential theatrical history. Where possible I have located the original sources used by Broadbent in 1908 although, occasionally, the materials either no longer exist or have been inaccurately cited by the author and their origin is therefore unknown. I have used Broadbent's narrative text as an initial groundwork for my study with the understanding that his findings often contain ambiguity and imprecisions and therefore require further investigation. To this end I have relied upon editorial and promotional evidence from newspaper archives, parliamentary transcripts, legal documents and architectural designs, in order to bring together a comprehensive representation of Liverpool's theatrical landscape.

The second kind of archival resource fundamental to my research is the home-grown plays written and / or produced explicitly for Liverpool. Some of these scripts can be found in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Library, whilst others are listed there as being licensed but the texts have not been kept in their entirety. In certain cases I rely instead on the local newspapers reproducing the play texts either in their entirety or in parts. However in several instances, the scripts of locally produced plays simply do not exist anymore and we can only rely on newspaper articles reporting the scenes, plots and character types of these productions. Once again, there are many issues of reliability, bias and editorial procedure that surround the use of such resources but, as Jim Davis noted in his 2011 essay "Research Methods and Methodology", "it is very difficult – perhaps impossible – to write history in which some form of speculation or imagination does not occur, either in making connections between sources or in assessing new evidence that has been unearthed or in filling in the gaps when evidence is unavailable" (92). In the absence of any other

material, I am grateful that these reports exist and that they can be considered in their theatrical context.

Placing so much emphasis on the importance of editorial and archival material raises several challenges. The printed playbills tend, by and large, to provide straightforward factual evidence of production dates and cast lists. However they are also extremely important for hints of a theatrical world beyond the listed productions – the culture of the theatre itself and its position within its immediate locale. Examples of such information include observations or notices from the theatre's present manager(s), changes in price, or occasional comments from the actors themselves. Jacky Bratton encapsulates the importance of the playbill when she notes that one must “read the bill whole, and understand that every element on it is a signifier which, like all signifiers, has a meaning only as part of a system of relationships” (*New Readings in Theatre History* 39-40). I have adhered to this belief and have, when relevant, produced a combined analysis of printed playbills with longer newspaper editorial, placing them within their immediate theatrical and social context. The availability of contemporary newspaper reports about Liverpool's theatrical activities has been crucial for my research as they offer the most direct way of confirming, firstly, what was actually produced at the theatre on a weekly basis and, secondly, what the potential response or reaction was to these performances. Both local and national papers also report several other important issues that affected the position of the theatre within the town, such as changes in management, actors' engagements and legal disputes. However, as with all regional theatre research, editorial bias and intent naturally play a part in provincial and national newspaper reports and thus “must also be viewed with a degree of suspicion” (Robinson 15). Yet, equally, examples of political and social opinion in print provide useful evidence of the complex and divided character of this port in a constant state of flux.

My work also draws on recent studies of Liverpool's history and society which seek to provide a balanced and detailed depiction of the city's past and engage with all aspects of its social,

economic and political identity. The work of John Belchem and Graeme Milne has proved invaluable in this area. Belchem coined the phrase “Merseypride” in an attempt to re-tell and analyse the city’s social, political and cultural history (*Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism*), whilst historian Arline Wilson noted the separate identity of the port at the turn of the nineteenth century: “As a great commercial entrepot, Liverpool, although in the industrial North, was not of it, thus rendering it atypical” (“The Florence of the North?” 34). This body of cultural research is considered alongside key literary and dramatic works that contextualise performance practices and ground Liverpool’s theatrical history in its cultural framework. I believe that this type of multifaceted approach ensures the most productive methodology for regional theatre historians especially, as in this case, where little previous research has been carried out. Every town (or city) has its own unique identity and therefore needs “a micro-historical methodology” that is able to “engage with the environment in which performances were produced” (Sullivan 11). In adopting such a methodology, I hope to provide the missing analysis of early Liverpool theatre and review its relationship with the society in which it operated.

The thesis is organised in to five chapters. The first, “In Search of a Theatre Royal”, charts the foundation of the Theatre Royal in the late eighteenth century and Liverpool’s quest for a royal patent. I look at how this new cultural venture related to the town’s expanding commercial identity and what challenges were raised to the town’s early theatrical aspirations. The chapter then looks at the specific challenges to Liverpool’s cultural identity which were intrinsically tied in to its civic character and economic foundations. I consider in particular how the Theatre Royal addressed the debates raised during the abolition movement and how it sustained cultural interest in a predominantly commercial town. Furthermore I explore how war with France and Britain’s increased naval activity had an impact on the town’s theatrical programme. The chapter concludes with an examination of the Theatre Royal at the end of the eighteenth century and asks how the theatre reflected the town’s complicated identity in the light of a period of rapid expansion and evolution. Chapter 2, “Revival, Growth and Tension at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century”,

carries this theatrical analysis through to the early years of the nineteenth century and explores the re-emergence of Liverpool's cultural identity through the opening of the new Theatre Royal in 1803. After a turbulent few years the town strove to reinvent its local and national image and the influence of William Roscoe and his cultural aspirations affected the course of the theatre's decisions at the beginning of the century. This chapter therefore seeks to question how the town balanced culture and commerce through the theatre, including its national dramatic aspirations, theatrical engagement with the slave trade, the local impact of current theatrical trends in the capital, and the emergence of a new confident, critical voice. With the development of Liverpool's international reputation and position, the argument then turns in chapter 3 ("A Transatlantic Outlook and an International Theatre") to consider what impact this status had on the town's theatrical output. I look especially at the relationship between the port and America and examine the peripatetic theatrical links between the two. Keeping this transatlantic outlook in mind, this chapter returns to consider Liverpool in the aftermath of the Abolition Bill and to explore how this new ideological approach to the slave trade was represented on the port's stage. I question whether there were any changes in performance choices and dramatic attention and, if so, how this reflected changing ideas within the town.

By the 1830s Liverpool's rapid expansion and maritime evolution began to have a noticeable impact on the town's social and cultural infrastructure. The fourth chapter, "Competition and Responsibility in 1830s Liverpool Theatre", considers how the Theatre Royal engaged with its local community through charitable evenings, amateur performances and the increasing volume of home-grown drama appearing on the Liverpool stage. This analysis seeks to explore how activities at the Theatre Royal reflected current civic attitudes and responsibilities within the town. By this period, however, the Theatre Royal was not the town's only theatrical venue of significance and the rise of neighbouring minor theatres, eager for a share in the theatre's audiences and profits, caused several legal disputes and a sense of cultural unease within the town. This chapter looks at the growth of Liverpool theatre, how the Theatre Royal adapted to its new competition and, most importantly,

what this tells us about the changing tastes and entertainment choices of Liverpool's audiences. My final chapter, "Global versus Local – A Theatre of the World", furthers this exploration of changes in theatrical entertainments from the late 1830s onwards and looks at how Liverpool's global identity was epitomised on its stages through various nautical productions and increasingly diverse, exotic acts designed to both entertain and amaze local audiences. I question the significance of these engagements and analyse their impact on both local audiences and also the Theatre Royal itself. Specifically, I consider how the theatre managed the increasing desire for more popular, colourful sources of amusement and how this affected its position within the town. Equally, how did these changes in popular taste contribute to the suggested decline of the theatre? I look at the traditionally accepted idea of the decline of the Theatre Royal following the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 and suggest that the condition of the theatre post-1843 was not as clear-cut as was suggested in contemporary newspaper reports and later criticism. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how the Liverpool Theatre Royal adapted to changes in dramatic entertainment and the desires of its local audiences with a focus on the introduction of the Christmas pantomime in the 1850s, which emphasised regional stories, characters and settings to create popular theatrical productions that affirmed the civic identity of Liverpool in the mid-nineteenth century.

This chronological journey through Liverpool's theatrical history therefore aims to provide a new and original examination of the town's cultural identity from 1772 to 1855. The ongoing influence of a distinctive regional pride and self-defined exceptionalism is evident throughout the immense civic, geographic and commercial advancements made by this great British port throughout the long nineteenth century. Its maritime character and global outlook afforded Liverpool a complex and continually evolving theatrical and cultural identity which should take a more significant place in nineteenth-century theatre studies.

Chapter One: In Search of a Theatre Royal

The Theatre Royal Liverpool opened in the newly built Williamson Square on 5 June 1772 to “universal approbation” (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 15 Jun 1772) and considerable interest across the country. The distinguished playwright & manager, George Colman the Elder, had written a proud and spirited prologue to mark the occasion emphasising Liverpool’s economic and commercial prosperity. Yet within a couple of years the theatre had come under public scrutiny and criticism on both a local and a national scale. As I shall explore, the theatre’s first decade saw public riots, deaths onstage and off, a well-publicised actors’ strike and scathing reports of Liverpool’s audiences in the national newspapers. By the end of the eighteenth century this theatre was frequently portrayed throughout the nation as a rough and uncivilised institution. This chapter thus aims to explore why the Theatre Royal experienced such a rocky beginning during a period in which Liverpool established itself as a prosperous and commercially important port. I will explore the idea that the fast-paced development of Liverpool affected the cultural requirements and social behaviour of the town’s inhabitants, revealing a unique civic pride mixed with an insecurity that was grounded in the sudden transformation of the town. Furthermore I will seek to establish whether the barrage of negative reports was truly deserved. After a rapid boom period, the town faced two considerable threats to its maritime identity: namely, the Abolitionist Movement and the Napoleonic Wars. The force of such international upheaval had a significant effect on Liverpool’s cultural development and I will argue that the Theatre Royal became a prominent symbol of the town’s uncertainty, with the struggles facing the theatre in the eighteenth century highlighting core issues underlying Liverpool’s civic identity.

I will divide my analysis in this opening chapter into two main sections. Firstly I will consider the foundation of the theatre from the mid-eighteenth century until it was fully established in 1780, considering the campaign to gain a royal patent pre-1772 and how the efforts to open this new theatre demonstrated differing local and national views of the town; the position of the theatre

within the town, its construction and audience composition as a reflection of Liverpool's economic and civic character; and the implications of the specific rifts and incidents that plagued the theatre in its early years. I will then move on to look at the period from 1780 to the end of the century and consider how the theatre played a key part in the town's reaction to the Abolitionist Movement; the position of the Theatre Royal at the centre of national criticism of Liverpool's cultural identity; and, finally, how Liverpool found its own particular cultural identity at the end of the century through the dangers of the Napoleonic Wars.

1768 – 1780: Aspirations to be a London of the North

At the time of the Theatre Royal's opening, Liverpool was in the midst of a century of considerable growth, both in terms of population and commercial output. From 1701 to 1773 this developing small town grew from around 7,000 to number over 34,000 inhabitants, the majority of this increase owing to the commercial and manufacturing opportunities available for incoming migrants (Power 22). Liverpool was now jostling with Bristol for the position of England's second major port, with four new wet docks built by the end of the eighteenth century and approximately a sixth of tonnage from all English ports passing through its docks (Sharples 10). Although the town is well-known in British history for being the country's most important slave trading port, it also had a significant trading pattern which included tobacco, sugar and raw cotton (Power 23). Liverpool's central location, between the Cheshire salt-mines and the Lancashire cotton mills and coal mines, was a major factor in the growth of the town's trading links. From the mid-eighteenth century, canals were constructed across northern England, with those such as the Bridgewater Canal (1757-61) and the Leeds-Liverpool canal (1770-1816) linking the town to major industrial areas (Power 25). Such rapid development had a significant effect on the cultural identity of the town.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, Liverpool's theatrical venues were irregular and rudimentary at best. Performers had the option of the small Cockpit Yard, the equally small Blackberry Lane Theatre (also previously a cockpit), or the Old Ropery Theatre, which was built circa

1740 and had a dual function as a dance academy and early assembly room (Broadbent 14-17). These locations were primarily functional spaces where performances of all kinds could take place and, although few records remain as to the specifics of their construction, performers and, occasionally, the exact location within the town, we do know that they were makeshift arenas that were all abandoned by the mid-century. Liverpool's first established, single-function theatrical venue did not appear until 1749 with the completion of an early theatre in Drury Lane, a street sitting on the edge of the town's busy, bustling dock area (Stobart 474). Although the location paid tribute to London's renowned Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the road name was all the buildings shared. Indeed the setting held little practical appeal for most. Historian Jane Longmore describes it as "a crude affair" ("Civic Liverpool" 142) but it did conform on the most basic level to the eighteenth-century theatrical norm with a pit, gallery and seats on the side of the stage for wealthier patrons (Broadbent 20). Boxes – "erected just as a partition for the better sort to withdraw from the near contact of drunken sailors" (Broadbent 35) - and dressing rooms were added during the building's renovation and reopening in 1759 and with these additional features it thus became the first theatrical institution of a standard appropriate for a prospering town (Aughton 74). Samuel Derrick, the Master of Ceremonies at Bath, offered this positive image of the theatre's make-over during a visit in 1760:

The Liverpool playhouse, which is very neat, [...] will hold about £80. Here a company of London performers exhibit during the summer season, and acquire a great deal of money. I saw several pieces really well done [...] The scenes are prettily painted, the clothes very rich, and everything carried on with amazing propriety. They play three times a week; and behind the boxes there is a table spread, in the manner of a coffee-house, with tea, coffee, wines, cakes, fruit, and punch, where a woman attends to accommodate the company on very moderate terms, with such refreshments as they may prefer (Broadbent 39).

The London performers Derrick referred to included the well-known actors George and Isabella Mattocks, Ned Shuter, an established comedian at Covent Garden, and the dance-master Signor

Grimaldi. However whilst Liverpool's Drury Lane had enhanced its facilities and appearance enough to attract London performers during the summer months, this refurbished cockpit was still far removed from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

For most of the eighteenth century the Theatre Royal Covent Garden and the Theatre Royal Drury Lane technically held the monopoly over drama in the country. The 1737 Licensing Act had restricted licensed drama to patent theatres in the capital and all new works were put through the rigorous political and social censorship of the Lord Chamberlain's office. However by 1760 Members of Parliament had begun to review their opinions on the granting of royal patents, influenced by Samuel Foote's successful petition for the Haymarket Theatre in London and also by the growing numbers of provincial towns eager to stage drama in theatres honoured by royal decree. It must be pointed out here that many towns (including Liverpool) openly flouted this act by staging drama anyway, safe in the knowledge that, as long as the local Magistrate turned a blind eye, they were far away enough from the capital to go unnoticed. Yet despite the apparent ease in flouting the law, the royal patent was the theatrical Holy Grail. Edinburgh was the first provincial town to gain royal approval in 1767, signalling that there was a gradual acknowledgement "that provincial theatres could preserve, rather than undermine, order and good government" (Moody "Dictating to the Empire" 24). The main practical advantage to achieving a royal patent was that it provided insurance and security for theatrical buildings and materials (Lowndes 22). However, ideologically, the coup of being awarded a royal patent was a more symbolic source of pride, "marking a community's coming of age" (Russell 226). With Edinburgh's successful petition swiftly followed by Bath and Norwich in 1768, Liverpool was keen to demonstrate its new prosperity and leave its unsophisticated and illegitimate theatre behind.

In 1768 William Gibson, the manager of Liverpool's playhouse, presented a petition to the Corporation of Liverpool, the town's council, to be allowed to apply to parliament for permission to build a new Theatre Royal under the auspice of a royal patent. In his 1908 volume, *The Annals of the*

Liverpool Stage, R.J. Broadbent cites the following entry concerning Gibson's petition from the Corporation Records, dated 7 December 1768:

It is ordered that the Mayor, Magistrates and Council of his Corporation agree to Mr. Gibson's petition for erecting a Playhouse in Liverpoole, upon the same terms, conditions and agreement as was entered into with the Magistracy of the City of Norwich in the like case, and that Mr Gibson be desired to send Mr. Mayor copys [*sic*] of all Acts necessary to be done previous to obtaining the Act of Parliament, and that the Lord Chamberlain be prayed to grant the same License and no other, as was granted to Norwich, and all proceedings to be done at Mr. Gibson's expence (Broadbent 44)².

There are two particularly interesting aspects to this extract when we consider how Liverpool's theatre reflected the character of the town. The first is the keen emphasis on Mr Gibson obtaining exactly the same standard of licence and honour that Norwich obtained that year and nothing less. As Jane Moody notes, such an honour tapped into the provincial pride of towns "eager to prove the wealth and gentility of their inhabitants" ("Dictating to the Empire" 24) and Liverpool was no different. As shall be seen in later actions by the town council, Liverpool was already eager to keep up with its contemporaries and saw itself as a competing urban force in the provinces. However the second point of note seems in conflict with this urban pride as the corporation states just as firmly that the onus and full cost of being granted this royal honour is on Mr Gibson alone. The wealthy merchants and businessmen eager for their place on the provincial ladder were not willing to pay for it at this early stage. This attitude suggests a hypocritical willingness to accept the proud honours bestowed upon the town through the efforts of others, with the option to build on them and claim them for their own at a later point.

² Where I have quoted text from archival resources I have retained original spellings and punctuation and, where relevant, I have also used the original abbreviations for old money. These early Corporation Records no longer exist and so I have had to re-produce this excerpt from Broadbent's annals.

However Gibson's first attempt in 1770 failed to get through the House of Lords and another petition was therefore put forward the following January, sparking a fierce debate within the Houses of Parliament and interested public alike. On 25 February 1771 the bill was submitted to the Upper Assembly and split the voters as follows: "22 were for it, and 21 against it; 5 proxies for, and 2 against it" (*General Evening Post* 26 Feb 1771). An important consequence arising from the split opinion in parliament is the anger and disbelief it sparked in the interested public. In a letter to the *General Evening Post*, "A Speculative Man" points out the need for theatres in the provinces and the suitability of Liverpool as a venue for a Theatre Royal: "But it was rather a cause of wonder [...] that any doubt should arise to the permitting of a theatre to be established in so flourishing a place as Liverpool" (*General Evening Post* 2 Mar 1771). The writer goes on to accuse parliament of stifling brilliance and withholding a useful public service by snobbishly limiting theatre licences to London and select provinces only: "But now genius is discouraged, and the public suffers inconveniences, from a restriction that is serviceable in no one point, but very harmful to many" (*General Evening Post* 2 Mar 1771). Another letter written to the *General Evening Post* moved the debate up a gear by fiercely criticising any moral objections to the new Liverpool theatre. Addressing the letter "to the Right Rev. The Lords Spiritual", the author is quick to point out that no such moral or spiritual objections were made to the similar petitions of northern towns York and Hull:

If your duty did exist as strongly in former instances as it does now, why were you silent when those fatal precedents were established? If it did not then exist, and now does, what new corruption in the morals of the stage has given rise to it? Whence has it sprung? Where do you fix it? Not in Liverpool, I trust, not in the place in question (*General Evening Post* 12 Mar 1771).

Whilst the established eighteenth-century church mostly supported the spread of legitimate theatre, "the seventeenth-century Puritan hostility to the playhouse continued throughout the eighteenth century" proclaiming that theatres in labour-intensive, commercial outlets would inspire laziness and debauchery and seduce audiences in to onstage worlds of questionable morals (Brewer 333). In 1764 John Wesley claimed that the theatre effaced "all traces of piety and seriousness out of the

minds of men”, and instead pushed them towards “indolence, effeminacy, and idleness” (Baer 195). What is striking about the above letter in particular is the passion and fervour articulated in its language and punctuation. The author deploys the condemnatory, righteous language to his own ends in order to portray the ideas as ridiculous and extreme. His deliberate emphasis in the first sentence on the so-called “wicked and corrupt majority” who are in favour of the bill is offset by his subsequent challenge to the opponents as to whether they doubt the opinion of their King, and this majority, in his agreement to the growth of licensed provincial theatre: “And can it be supposed H—M—has blindly subscribed to an act which is to counterwork his own example, and rob his princely virtues of their influence?” (*General Evening Post* 12 Mar 1771).

But what made Liverpool the subject of such concern? As the last observer noted, no such extreme opposition had been made to previous petitions and Liverpool was, in fact, the next in a rapidly growing line of towns to be granted the honour. Instead I believe that the capital viewed this relatively new, economically vital and internationally renowned trading centre predominantly as a commercial working town, in which theatre attendance could potentially damage the productivity of the town’s economic output. “A Speculative Man” reminded his readers that whilst “I am no approver of dissipation or extravagance in any order of people, and least of all a trading community, where time should not be wasted, because it can be well-employed”, he also believed that a theatre is infinitely preferable “either to gaming, drinking or even feasting, as generally least expensive, and less likely to be indulged in to an inordinate degree” (*General Evening Post* 2 Mar 1771). In their study of *Early Manchester Theatre* J.L. Hodgkinson and Rex Pogson note that Manchester also attracted some opposition to their petition three years later in 1775, although this time the bill was passed first time. They attribute this to “customary fears that the working classes would be seduced from their labours, and their minds corrupted by such plays as *The Beggar’s Opera*” (75). However, unlike Manchester and other similarly labour-intensive British towns, Liverpool’s isolated north-western location looking out over the Atlantic resisted identification or empathy with the dominant southern localities. To an extent Liverpool’s merchant community encouraged that separation, as an

element of northern independence placed them in a better position to establish the town as a strong, unrivalled port. John Belchem states that the port prospered through its isolation thanks to “a proactive (and comparatively youthful) risk-taking mercantile oligarchy at the helm, unrestricted by chartered companies or guilds” (“Introduction” 13). However such deliberate independence worked against the town in its quest for a royal patent as their opponents used it to block the town’s petition. Liverpool thus became an unfamiliar industrial territory where cultural distractions would only cause damage, to both the labour and the labourers themselves. In his essay, “Classy Northerners: Class, Space and the Wonderful Illusion”, Christoph Ehland identifies the southern alienation from the North West in the views of eighteenth-century travel writers who “were apt to look at the industrial cities of the North as a phenomenon rather than as real places because they evidently had difficulties in relating their experiences to traditional notions of England” (365). With this isolated position in mind, the letter from the “speculative man” acknowledges that whilst he supports Liverpool’s application, he does not desire any leisure facility to encourage idleness or disreputable behaviour – a reference to the potential moral and economic concerns in a growing commercial town such as Liverpool: “I am no approver of dissipation or extravagance in any order of people, and least of all a trading community, where time should not be wasted, because it can be well employed” (*General Evening Post* 2 Mar 1771). Yet he is quick to round off the letter confirming his support, with an assertion that, as “some recreation is needed”, the theatre is the least dangerous leisure facility for such a town (*General Evening Post* 2 Mar 1771).

Despite the fierce debate, the House of Lords finally agreed to the proposed bill on 8 March 1771 and “an Act to enable His Majesty to license a Playhouse in the Town of Liverpool, in the County Palatine of Lancaster” was passed in the same session (*Journals of the House of Commons* 23 Jan 1770). However the eagerly awaited decision ended on a sour note with the death of Gibson only three months later. The sad irony in his efforts for the town is expressed by ‘W.H.’ in a eulogy printed in the *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*: “by his credit with the people of Liverpool he got an unanimous petition from them to the Lords and Commons to grant him a royal patent,

which he obtained. He underwent great anxiety in soliciting this matter, and when he had succeeded, he died" (24 Sept 1771). Yet for a short period Gibson held the honour of being the owner of a royal patent and to this end he staged a season of productions under Royal licence at the first Theatre Royal in Liverpool's own Drury Lane. Whilst the location remained the same until new premises were built, playbills for the season now contained the following warning: "'Not any money under the Full price to be taken during the whole Performance. Not any Servants admitted into the Gallery without paying" (*The Liverpool General Advertiser or the Commercial Register* 14 Jun 1771). This addition points towards an elevation of the theatre's status and practices as a result of obtaining a royal patent – no concessions or allowances would be made. It was a firm announcement that the days of the unpatented theatre of the town's past were being left behind; Liverpool was looking forward to a culturally prosperous future, as well as an economic one.

Liverpool now followed in the provincial footsteps of Bath, Edinburgh, Norwich, York, and Hull. Such an honour demanded a new building and also a new location that was suitable for a Theatre Royal. Yet what did this mean in practical terms for Liverpool and how would a new theatre fit in to the dynamics of this busy port town?

Commerce versus Culture?

On one level, the construction of the new theatrical premises in Williamson Square in 1771, one of the most expensive provincial Theatre Royals built upon receipt of letters patent during the eighteenth century³, can be seen simply as a well-judged economic investment for the wealthy merchants of the town. Two-thirds of the original thirty shareholders were from this business-oriented section of society and their economic interest paid off as the total share issue of £6000 immediately soared and paid a regular 5% interest to the individual investors (Longmore "Civic

³ The outlay for Liverpool's new Theatre Royal came to approximately £6000 (thirty shares of £200 each). In comparison, Manchester's Theatre Royal cost £2000 to build in 1774 (forty shares of £50) and the Theatre Royal Margate cost approximately £3000 in 1787. The expenditure on Newcastle's new Theatre Royal came to the slightly more costly figure of £6800 seventeen years later in 1789.

Liverpool 1660-1800", 144). However such a cultural institution also provided "a vehicle for projecting the town's image and identity to its citizenry and the country as a whole" and it was therefore deliberately designed as an impressive symbol of the town's economic prosperity (Stobart 472). Trade and its linked industries had boosted Liverpool's national and international status and they were therefore of the utmost importance in the town's daily life. The town was governed by a Common Council, with the Mayor at its head, and it was made up of the wealthy and often self-made men of the town (predominantly successful mariner merchants), who "bound together Liverpool society, linking politics, trade and finance to build a commercial activity" (Longmore "Civic Liverpool 1660-1800", 119). This wealthy merchant population were proud of their economic success and keen to transfer their achievements into cultural affluence.

Pride in the suitably grand Theatre Royal is evident when we consider the opening night on 5 June 1772. The opening prologue on this exciting night was written by George Colman the Elder and was presented to the "polite and crowded audience" (*The History of Liverpool* 148) by the manager, Joseph Younger. Neither of these men were from, or had any previous connections with the town but Colman's words recognise the strength of civic pride. The piece is explicit as to the debt the Liverpool theatre owed to the commercial prosperity of its merchants. The opening lines of the prologue immediately acknowledge the direct relation between receiving the royal patent and the growing success and reputation of the town, indicating that commercial prosperity not only encouraged cultural development but also made it physically possible: "Wherever commerce spread the swelling sail, / Letters and arts attend the prosperous gale" (Colman 13). The prologue further fuels Liverpool's growing civic pride by juxtaposing Britain's pride in its great playwrights of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the town's pride in the river Mersey and the opportunities it has afforded the region:

The British Muse unveil'd her awful mien,
And Shakespear, Johnson, Fletcher, grac'd the scene.

Long too has Mersey roll'd her golden tide

And seen proud vessels in her harbours rise (Colman 14).

The description of the waters of the River Mersey as “golden” produces an aesthetically rich and opulent vision of the source of the town’s commercial success that is furthered with verse that continues to align commercial and cultural success, whilst at the same time outlining the town’s meteoric rise:

Oft on her banks the Muse’s sons would roam,
And wish’d to settle there a certain home;
Condemn’d alas! to hawk unlicens’d plays.
Your fostering care at length reliev’d their woes,
Under your auspices this *Staple* rose.
Hence made free merchants of the letter’d world,
Boldly advent’ring forth with sails unfurl’d,
To Greece and Rome, Spain, Italy, and France,
We trade for play and opera, song and dance. (Colman 14)

Colman’s deliberate emphasis on Liverpool’s pride in both its maritime heritage and exciting future seems to identify the governing sentiment among the merchant and wealthy inhabitants of the town. Not only has the port achieved considerable commercial recognition for its shipping and trade exploits but, Colman suggests, it has been culturally legitimised as a result of its success and growth.

However, Broadbent tells us that there was also a second prologue under consideration for the theatre’s opening night but, he believes, “it arrived too late to be of service” (56). He identifies this second text as written for the occasion by “Dr. Aikin”; most probably John Aikin, the physician and writer who had a surgical practice in Warrington at the time of the Theatre Royal’s opening in 1772. In the biography of her father, Lucy Aikin notes that it was early in the same year when “he first ventured to solicit the notice of the public in a character which he never acknowledged as incompatible with his professional one – that of a polite writer and cultivator of elegant literature” (19). His first work, *Essays on Song Writing, with a collection of such English Songs as are most*

eminent for poetical merit was published in 1772 and he later went on to become the editor of the *Monthly Magazine*. On this occasion, Broadbent lifts the second prologue from an appendix in *The History of Liverpool*⁴. Published in 1810, this lengthy review considers the history of the town from the early 1400s until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although it was published anonymously, it is frequently referred to as *Troughton's History of Liverpool* and it seems highly plausible that it was written by Thomas Troughton, a local writer who also produced *The Liverpool Dramatic Censor* (1806). As I will explore in the next chapter, the critical tone and high-minded opinions featured in *The History of Liverpool* certainly bear a striking similarity to the style of the earlier theatrical work. However in this case, it is useful to consider Aikin's piece in relation to Colman's work as his choice of language and civic focus dwells on the same governing sentiments considered by Colman. Slightly longer in length, the opening verse of Aikin's prologue echoes the idea of the long history of the town on the banks of the River Mersey but offers an even humbler image of its maritime beginnings:

Where Mersey's stream long winding o'er the plain,
Pours his full tribute to the circling main,
A band of fishers chose their humble seat;
Content'd labour bless'd their fair retreat:
Inur'd to hardship, patient, bold, and rude,
They braved the billows for precarious food:
Their straggling huts were rang'd along the shore,
Their nets and little boats their only store. (*History of Liverpool* 321)

As Aikin's prologue continues, it is evident that Colman was not alone in emphasising the intrinsic link between Liverpool's commercial and cultural success or in stressing the importance of its maritime endeavours on the development of the port. Indeed Aikin goes further than Colman to portray the town as a singular location, noting:

⁴ *The History of Liverpool*. p.321-2.

At length fair Commerce found the chosen place,
And smil'd approving on th' industrious race
Lo! and she waves her hand, what wonders rise,
Stupendous buildings strike strike th' astonished eyes: [...]
With busy toil the crowd'd streets resound.
And wealth, and arts, and plenty spread around [...]
This night the Muse's messenger I come
To bid you welcome to their new-rais'd dome:
Where art, where knowledge reigns, they love the soil
And the free spirit of commercial toil; (*History of Liverpool* 321-2)

His description of Liverpool as commerce's "chosen place" affords the port an almost semi-divine state and thus elevates it, in the eyes of its intended audience, as a uniquely special location, richly deserving of, and at ease with, every form of cultural and commercial reward.

Jon Stobart defines this idea of civic enlightenment as evidence of Pierre Bourdieu's idea of "cultural capital"⁵, not only reflecting economic capital but also allowing towns to "acquire status and be labelled as civilised" in the eyes of the rest of the nation (472). Both Colman's and Aikin's prologues allude to Liverpool's expected cultural development in the wake of its economic prosperity and the town's wealthier inhabitants began to compare their social habits and interactions with those of other prosperous provincial towns. By the 1760s similarly commercial towns, such as Birmingham, Sheffield and Bristol, had undergone an urban renaissance with desirable leisure and educational activities acknowledged as a suitable and proper accompaniment to commercial success (Stobart 473). Thus ballrooms, assemblies, libraries, concert halls and, of course, theatres quickly sprang up across these urban centres. Despite celebrating and promoting its commercial isolation as a successful trading location, Liverpool was also keen to develop its

⁵ For further reading on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital see his 1986 essay "The Forms of Capital" in J. Richardson Ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (1986) 241-258.

cultural capital and keep up with its contemporaries in demonstrating its prosperity. When Dr Moss wrote his guide book to the town in 1797, he considered Liverpool to be an eighteenth-century “prodigy of the modern world” and offered its cultural advancements throughout the century, as well as its commercial gains, to support this elevated belief (Brazendale x). Liverpool was the first town in the country to build a subscription library in 1758, the Liverpool Academy of Arts was established in 1774 (although it closed down shortly after until revived in the nineteenth century), a grand new town hall was commissioned in 1772, and the Ranelagh Gardens were opened for “Ladies Walks”, shortly followed by St James Walk in the 1760s (Stobart 474). The highly anticipated construction of a new Theatre Royal in 1772 was therefore an intrinsic part of Liverpool’s growing cultural self-promotion.

The most prominent aim of the town’s council in advancing the port’s national image was to improve the external appearance and layout of the old streets and buildings. As such, the new building for the Theatre Royal in Williamson Square was part of a larger scheme to expand the town and build a grander, wealthier area away from the bustling docks (*Appendix 1*). This move highlighted the division between cultural and economic pride that existed in the town’s rationale during this period. Whilst Liverpool was fiercely proud of its international trading position and the wealth it generated, the civic pride of the wealthy mercantile population impressed upon them the need to remove the town’s cultural image away from its working areas and to follow the lead of other wealthy provincial towns. It is worth noting here however that although Liverpool clearly expanded into smarter, grander areas, it did not spread out as quickly as has sometimes been suggested. By 1780 it was still a comparatively compact town for such a power in the trading world, with the business elite preferring to stay relatively close to the heart of the town’s commerce (Longmore 155). But this new urban area did hold a deeper social significance as the town left behind its small, mixed class inhabitancy so that the wealthy merchants, lawyers and brokers could move to the newly built, modern streets and squares. By the end of the century there were concrete signs of “a growing physical separation of classes in Liverpool” (Power 30) and the

expensive, grand new Theatre Royal can be seen as an outward symbol of the increasing wealth and social divide.

Although historians have remained divided about how much of a distinct class culture, as we would now identify it, had been established by the end of the eighteenth century (O’Gorman 327), the development of Liverpool certainly points towards a wealth and power divide, if not easily labelled yet as class division⁶. Historian Maxine Berg points out that the entangled social behaviour and interplay between what we would now call the elite and the well-to-do middle classes mingled together, often confusingly, to produce a “vision of accessible gentility” where “politeness, civility, and taste became social markers more significant than material wealth” (205). David Cannadine also notes that contemporary writers and critics of the eighteenth century were constantly reviewing England’s social system, sometimes identifying a two-pronged crowd versus gentry classification but other times insisting on three sections of society with a rising middle group (28). By the second half of the century this changing conceptualisation of society raised a further, more flippant system of social classification: “in 1770, the author of *The Cheats of London Exposed* postulated a four-fold division, which ran from ‘The Nobbs’, via ‘The Citizens and their Ladies’, to ‘The Mechanics and Middling Degrees’, and eventually reaching ‘The Refuse’” (Cannadine 28). The French critic César de Saussure then produced his own classification of eighteenth-century English society, dividing it into “the lower classes’, who he claimed got drunk on liquor and beer, and the ‘higher classes’, who he thought preferred to get drunk at night on port and punch” (Cannadine 31).⁷ More importantly, what these varying categorizations tell us is that the language of hierarchy was omnipresent in eighteenth-century society and the improvements and expansions made to Liverpool’s physical and

⁶ David Cannadine reminds us that the late eighteenth century pre-dates any definitions of class structure and that any use of the term “class” during this period does not correspond to our modern definition: “using this model of society, and putting men into classes, literally meant classifying them individually according to the prestige of their social rank” (*Class in Britain* 27).

⁷ In addition to Cannadine, further theoretical reading on the concept of class and British society in the late eighteenth century can also be found in Patrick Joyce’s *Class* (1995).

geographical layout transferred this theoretical language of division and classification into a dominant social reality.

Through the act of constructing and subsequently patronising buildings and institutions such as the Theatre Royal it is evident that that town's wealthy inhabitants were aware, in Pierre Bourdieu's words, that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* 6). As they capitalised on the spoils of their commercial success, the attention to, and subsequent demand for, fashionable institutions and commodities increased. The emphasis Liverpool's wealthy residents placed on being seen to have taste suggests that despite their affluence, the commercially-minded port maintained a sense of insecurity about its position as a culturally prosperous town.

It is significant therefore that the Theatre Royal Liverpool was the most expensive provincial theatre constructed in the early 1770s. Built by subscription, thirty townsmen each contributed two hundred pounds in return for five percent of the profits and a transferable season ticket (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 13 Jun 1772). The theatre was deliberately designed by Sir William Chambers as a grand and magnificent piece of architecture to be admired and noted across the nation.

It is indeed a most charming building, completely fitted up in every part, substantial, convenient, and elegant [...] The front is elegant, and ornamented with the King's Arms cut in stone; a piece of work which does the artist much honour. The inside of the house is indeed truly pleasing.

Simplicity and grandeur here are happily united (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 13 Jun 1772).

By exhibiting its wealth in a culturally tasteful and desirable display, Liverpool wanted to prove itself to be keeping up with, if not bettering, hierarchical expectations. Indeed this desire to keep up was bred by a spirit of competition which encouraged this provincial North West town to over-compensate for its insecurity and compare itself with the wealth and grandeur of the nation's

capital. The author of the above letter to the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, “a Liverpool Gentleman”, clearly wishes to portray the town and its theatre as keeping pace with London’s cultural opulence, noting that, although nowhere near as deep as the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, the Liverpool stage is “from side to side some inches wider” (13 Jun 1772). The Theatre Royal building thus had the dual functions of demonstrating the wealth and prosperity of Liverpool through a crown-honoured institution, and also encouraging the self-confidence and self-importance of the wealthy Liverpoolians in the knowledge that their commercial trading port in the North West was able to prove itself culturally as well as economically equal to the best of the nation’s towns and cities.

The Opening Years of the Theatre Royal

When the theatre opened in 1772 it was under the joint management of Joseph Younger and George Mattocks. Younger had achieved relative prominence as prompter at Covent Garden, whilst also acting at the theatre and regularly touring the provinces (Highfill, Burnim & Langhans 365). Broadbent describes Younger as “a very capable actor, despite a persistent lisp” (53); a report that is borne out in *The Theatric Tourist* of 1805, which identifies the manager as being “fond of acting, notwithstanding his impediment of an obstinate lisp” (12). George Mattocks and his wife Isabella were, Broadbent believes, “always favourites with the local playgoing public” and had made their first appearance at the Liverpool Drury Lane Theatre in 1767 (54). He further supports this statement by noting that until their engagement that year, there had been no green room in the old theatre and “so inadequate was the dressing-room accommodation that these artists had refused to come down on account of that deficiency” (41). No evidence remains to support this anecdote but the Mattocks had, by the late 1760s, established themselves as successful performers at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden and a description of the early Liverpool theatre in *The History of Liverpool* agrees that many of the performers came from the Theatres Royal in London for the summer season (141). Their continued association with Liverpool perhaps explains Broadbent’s subconscious

change in possessive pronoun when relating the history of Isabella Mattocks in the town. He acknowledges that she “belonged to Covent Garden Theatre”, yet he then goes on to say that “our Mrs. Mattocks (*née* Isabella Hallam) was a very good low comedy actress, and a capable performer in other lines” (61-2). For the first three years of their management, the Liverpool theatre operated independently from any other provincial theatres. However in 1775 Younger and Mattocks also took over the newly patented Manchester Theatre Royal and ran the two theatres concurrently, sharing the same stock company until 1781 when they began to operate separately (Hodgkinson & Pogson 78). By 1800 Manchester was the epicentre of a circuit which included Chester, Shrewsbury and Lichfield whilst another successful northern circuit run by Charles Whitlock and Joseph Austin incorporated Chester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Preston, Whitehaven and Lancaster. Unusually for this period, Liverpool remained independent of these circuits, reflecting the town’s firm belief in its individuality and unique status as a successful, yet ideologically and commercially isolated, international port.

Whilst newspaper editorial and contemporary reports have provided a reasonable indication of the elegant exterior of the new theatre, we are able to deduce the layout of the theatre’s auditorium from notices of performances in the local newspaper. In 1773, playbills in *Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* advertised tickets at the following prices: boxes at 3s 6d, pit at 2s, 6d and seats in the gallery for 1s. If we follow the seating patterns of the Theatres Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden, it seems reasonable to assume that the boxes would hold “the more aristocratic, fashionable and affluent patrons”, the pit meanwhile containing “intellectuals, less affluent gentlemen and professionals”, whilst the tickets for the gallery may have been sold to “tradesmen and their wives” (Davis 57). However this categorisation then goes on to examine the poorer class of spectators in a further upper gallery at these London theatres and we may therefore assume that as Liverpool’s ticket prices were relative to their trade-based population and there was not a fourth level of the auditorium, the division of spectators will probably have also included labourers, sailors and trades men and women in the cheaper seats in the gallery. This is not pure

speculation as we know from a newspaper article in 1772 that a sailor was killed during a stampede at the theatre and the gallery audience is described as being made up of “shopkeepers, tradesmen, sailors, farmers, &c” (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 29 Aug 1772).

Ticket prices advertised on the playbills seem in proportion to the nation’s patented theatre prices as a whole. In May 1775, the Reverend James Woodforde of Weston, Staffordshire, recorded in his diary that he and a friend paid five shillings each for seats in the Prince of Wales’s box at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden (Sherbo 88). This statement is borne out by examples of playbills for both patented theatres in the capital during 1773. Playbills printed in *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* on 2 Jan 1773 recorded that prices at Theatre Royal Drury Lane were advertised at 5s for the boxes, 3s for the pit, 2s for the gallery and 1s for the upper gallery. Prices at Covent Garden were exactly the same, apart from the slightly higher price of 2s 6d for a seat in the gallery (*The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 2 Jan 1773). An avid theatre-goer and, fortunately for us, also a keen diarist, Rev. Woodforde most often frequented the Theatre Royal Norwich (Sherbo 87). In 1781 he recorded that he paid twelve shillings for four tickets in a front box at the theatre (Sherbo 88). Closer to home, the newly opened Manchester Theatre Royal charged 3s for a seat in the boxes, 2s for the pit and 1s for the gallery (Hodgkinson & Pogson 79). Liverpool’s ticket prices therefore seem to be roughly in line with other provincial Theatres Royal, rather than the higher costs commanded at London’s Theatres Royal.

The opening seasons at the Liverpool theatre operated during the summer only, when all the London Theatres Royal had closed and their performers commenced their provincial engagements. The new theatre opened on 5 June 1772 and closed three months later on 11 September. The following year, the theatre again appears to have opened for the summer season from 4 June to 13 September 1773 (*Appendix 2*). Many of the early playbills now exist in the private collection of the modern day Liverpool Athenaeum but, until 1779, we are reliant on the playbills reproduced in the local newspapers for details of performances and company members. This raises its own problems

as the *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* was only printed on a weekly basis and would usually feature a playbill for the Friday evening and then sporadic notices for future productions throughout the week. Broadbent also proclaims himself unable to offer much assistance with the content of the theatre's opening year as he declares that the earliest playbill he could discover was for the first night of the second season (60).

Taking the availability of primary source evidence into account, it seems that Younger & Mattocks did not try anything too adventurous in their opening years (*Appendix 2*). Instead they held to the traditional format practised at patent theatres in London and across the country, advertising a tragedy, comedy or, occasionally, a ballad opera, as the main attraction and following this up with a lighter farce, burletta or interlude. Bath was among the first provincial towns to be granted a Theatre Royal in 1768 and it is therefore a useful comparative location. William Lowndes reminds us in his study of the theatre that "Bath's initiative, it seems, set the trend for considerable improvements in the standing of the provincial stage throughout the country" (22). Thanks to a comprehensive calendar of performances at the theatre from 1750-1805 (compiled in 1977), we are able to directly compare Liverpool's first three seasons with those in the southern spa town. Bath's season ran from September to June but the 1772-1774 calendars at Bath read very much like the Liverpool playbills, with favourites seemingly including a regular dose of Shakespeare, Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, Richard Cumberland's *The Fashionable Lover*, Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore*, Isaac Bickerstaffe's *Love in a Village* and James Thompson's *Tancred and Sigismunda*, to name but a few. In her study of Bristol's Theatre Royal, Kathleen Barker also notes that during the forty-six night season in 1775, Shakespeare featured on eleven evenings and the remaining performances were roughly equally split between comedy and tragedy (*The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 26). According to playbills from the 1773 and 1774 Liverpool season, the company included well-known and respected London performers who regularly toured and often managed theatres in the provinces, including George and Isabella Mattocks, John Palmer, John Quick, Richard

Wroughton and Charles Lee Lewes⁸. Out of these key players, Quick regularly appeared at the Bristol Theatre Royal, becoming joint manager in 1777 (Barker *The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 37), whilst Palmer was a mainstay of both the Bristol and Bath companies, acting as Treasurer at the Bath Theatre Royal from 1767-1780 (Bryant et al., 27-67). It seems, therefore, that there was little in Liverpool's performance history in its early years to isolate it from its contemporary provincial Theatres Royal. Although the town had achieved the coup of being awarded the first patented theatre in the North West, thus reassuring its residents of the standard and quality of their company and the productions staged, there was no sense of a distinct or unique Liverpool theatre in these opening years.

Yet the first season of Joseph Younger and George Mattock's company did not prove the celebrated and revered success that it had been built up to be. From Gibson's first petition to Parliament in 1770 to the company's opening night, Liverpool and its Theatre Royal had been a prominent and divisive topic in newspaper articles and national discussion. There is considerably more space devoted to the North West theatre in the London newspapers than any other provincial theatre during this period. It is therefore not surprising that despite a glowing letter of support and appreciation for the theatre published in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* shortly after the opening night, criticism was not far behind. In a letter from Plymouth dated 14 July 1772, the author derides the company's actors for being "deficient in voice" and lacking in passion or enthusiasm, as well as directly attacking the actor-manager position of Joseph Younger: "But the great misfortune is, that a very good prompter and a truly honest man will mistake his abilities, and get from his proper station behind the scenes, to make a very indifferent figure on the stage" (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 20 July 1772). The letter suggests an element of ill feeling, as Plymouth had been unsuccessful in gaining a new Theatre Royal shortly before one was awarded to Liverpool – "an impotent attempt of some interested player, to instil in the minds of the

⁸ See *Appendix 2* for full company listing.

uninformed, a prejudicial opinion of Mr Younger and his company" (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 21 July 1772) – but its sharp negativity clearly aimed to throw a shadow over the newly established theatre and to plant seeds of doubt about the standards of the company performing under a royal patent.

Doubts over the quality of Younger and Mattocks's management had been instilled in the readers of the London newspapers, considerably undermining the national status of the Liverpool theatre. This was not eased by further reports one month later of a dramatic event in the theatre's busy auditorium. In an ironic twist of the social and economic divisions imposed by the wealthy patrons of the town, all of the theatre's patrons, rich and poor alike, were forced together in a spectacle as dramatic as anything seen onstage. In a letter to the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, dated 29 August 1772, the author describes the scene of a mass stampede after erroneous calls of "fire" were heard throughout the theatre. The panic and confusion resulted in multiple injuries and the fatality of an American sailor when he was "pushed over the banister and trampled to death" as the whole auditorium rushed for the doors en masse, many leaving their belongings behind (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 29 Aug 1772). But the author of the letter also finds a vaguely humorous element to the aftermath of this commotion when all economic classes were unusually thrust together in a bid to reclaim their belongings (although how some women had left the dresses and undergarments, as mentioned below, is tactfully ignored):

At so unfortunate an event, it may be deemed inhumanity to indulge a smile, but a cynic could hardly keep his muscles the next day, when the wealthiest inhabitants of Liverpool, together with the wives of shopkeepers, tradesmen, sailors, farmers, &c crowded the hall of the theatre, which was an exact representation of a shop in Monmouth Street; one claimed a cloak, another a petticoat, a third a pair of shoes, a fourth a gown (29 Aug 1772).

This account from a bemused onlooker successfully undercuts the proud self-importance of the town's wealthy elite and also offers the first indication of the initial problems and protests that would besiege the Theatre Royal in its first few years. This fatal accident proved to be only the start

of several public disturbances, criticisms and threats that would disrupt the Theatre Royal during a testing stage of its history.

In 1774, Younger and Mattocks found themselves coming under fire from an entirely different quarter: the actors themselves. On 20 December Joseph Younger was forced to publish a letter to the general public in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* answering the charges brought against him by his own performers eight days previously. His company had accused Younger of overcharging them for theatre costs on the benefit nights – a system whereby each performer could host an evening at the theatre under his own name and then take the profits from the night's takings after paying the management a set charge to cover the running costs. In the letter, dated 12 December 1774, they declare that the charges Younger has set are “most extravagantly exorbitant” and therefore withhold their appearances on stage until a further agreement has been made (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 20 Dec 1774). A report in the *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* confirmed that the theatre was presently closed “owing to a violent dispute between Mr. Younger, the acting manager, and the majority of the performers, on account of the sum demanded from each performer for the expences [*sic*] of their benefit night” (17-20 Dec 1774). With the actors on strike and his reputation on the line during this first test winter season at the theatre⁹, Younger's response is necessarily defensive as he is forced to publicly justify his own expenditure and theatre running costs to the nation:

In the sum demanded for their benefits (though they assert the contrary) the usual bills are included; there is not a shilling for rent, wear and tear of a very valuable and expensive wardrobe, set of scenes, and all other necessary apparatus belonging to a theatre, or my trouble of conducting it, reckoned in the weekly charge [...] I flatter myself that I shall find every impartial person of my opinion, when I declare that myself and partners have expended several hundred pounds in the necessary apparatus for carrying on this scheme, that we have never yet divided a

⁹ This first winter season opened on 14 October and closed on 23 January 1775. It was not repeated in the winter of 1775 but returned with a very short one month season in October 1776.

single shilling, or received one penny interest for the money laid out; but on the contrary have yet a large incumbrance [*sic*] to clear off (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 20 Dec 1774). Despite the coverage in the national press, no mention is made of the strike in the local newspaper, suggesting that there was either a reluctance to grant this protest any more coverage than was necessary or a deliberate move on the editor's part to remain impartial in this dispute. Unlike David Garrick's understanding with the major London newspapers during this period, there is no evidence that Younger or Mattocks had any influence with the local press at this time. Certainly, the newspaper had not, as yet, printed any reviews or critiques of its new theatre. Equally no playbill is printed in the weekly edition for Friday 16 December of this year. Although Younger did not bow to the demands of the actors for a lower charge, and there are no newspaper reports following this date to suggest that the company took their protest any further, the effect of the report was to further criticise and demean Younger's management during the theatre's crucial early years. More importantly for the town, the idea of such vehement protest in the provinces from a group of actors largely composed of seasoned London performers threatened to once more undermine the growing confidence and pride in the town's cultural identity.

By the mid-1770s criticism in the national press had turned to directly address the proud nature of the town, depicting a conceited and unwarranted provincial arrogance from a town far above its station. An article in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* sarcastically commented on what the reporter perceived to be the conceited 'know-it-all' stance of Liverpool's theatre-goers. In July 1775 Charles Macklin was engaged for a short period at the town's Theatre Royal. Macklin was by then seventy-five years old (or possibly actually eighty-five as he continually lied about his age) and had had a long, well respected career in the theatre. His decision to return to playing the great Shakespearian tragedy roles in his seventies was the cause of derision and ridicule at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, although William Cooke notes that he still had the intelligent delivery and expression for the addresses and monologues, if somewhat lacking in youthful energy, and so he travelled around the provincial theatres instead (285). However whilst London audiences

were quick to criticise his portrayals, their reporters were also hypocritically quick to judge any negativity from their contemporary provincial reviewers: “As the Liverpool audiences affect to be great judges of the drama and dramatic representations, we may possibly hear of a theatrical critique upon the veteran actor’s skill as a tragedian, dated from the Golden Lion in Dale Street” (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 4 July 1775). The Golden Lion was Liverpool’s largest Public Inn and would have been well-known as a coach stop for travellers. Sarcastic jibes in the press such as this demonstrate that whilst Liverpool was a source of national pride in terms of its successful trading links and commercial output, and considered itself to be culturally prosperous, London was not yet prepared to regard it as a contemporary developed town. By the end of the decade Liverpool’s theatre-going residents clearly had other ideas, however, as feelings of self-importance and pride rose to a peak and exploded; Liverpool’s residents demanded equal theatrical privileges with the nation’s capital.

In April 1779 a case came to the Court of King’s Bench over a riot at the Theatre Royal Liverpool during the previous summer. The anger of the rioters stemmed from a feeling of injustice and inequality when comparing themselves to the nation’s capital. The actions of some of Liverpool’s more vocal residents demonstrated once again that there was, at this point, no sense of a distinct Liverpool theatre nor a desire for one. The town had not established its own theatrical identity and displayed its insecurity as it struggled between being commercially unique and aspiring culturally to be a Northern London. According to a newspaper report, the rioters had protested against the lack of London comedians appearing on the Liverpool stage (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 29 Apr 1779). They were not getting the resources of the London theatres and were prepared to make their dissatisfaction known through violent protest. If we consider the programme of the theatre in 1778, the complaints of the rioters now seem somewhat unjust as, although they did not get the actors they wanted, they were entertained with fresh drama advertised as coming direct from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Richard Cumberland’s tragedy, *The Battle of Hastings*, had only been premiered in London the previous season “with great applause”

and was performed for the first time in Liverpool on 18 July 1778 (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* 17 July 1778). Indeed only a month before the *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* reported that both George Colman the Elder's *Female Chevalier* (1778) and Richard Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777) were to be performed during the summer season, "Mr Sheridan having kindly granted Mr Younger with a copy of his celebrated comedy" (5 Jun 1778). Although, of course, Liverpool was not the only provincial centre to produce the comedy just one year after its London premiere, neither was it lagging behind its contemporaries. Younger produced the play in Manchester, also advertising it as being performed with the special permission of Sheridan (Hodgkinson & Pogson 94), and, despite its proximity to the metropolis, Bath had the "notable compliment" of receiving the script for the play at the same time as Liverpool in 1778 (Lowndes 30). *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* also reported the preparation of George Colman the Elder's latest comedy, *The Spanish Barber* (1778): "And the public are requested to remark, that from the particular indulgence of the Author, the Theatre Royal, in Liverpool, is the only Theatre out of London where this Comedy will be performed till it appears in print" (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* 31 July 1778). Whilst we cannot be absolutely sure that this was the case, we do know that the play did not appear in Bath until 12 December 1778, over four months after Liverpool (Bryant 63). The keen reassurance to the people of Liverpool that they were keeping up with the contemporary audiences of London highlights the feelings of dissatisfaction and simmering unrest in the theatre-goers of the town from the beginning of the season.

If we look back to the beginning of the theatre's 1778 season, it is evident that Joseph Younger knew his decision to engage no London performers would cause protest in the town. He first mooted the idea in 1777 in an attempt to imitate Tate Wilkinson at York by only engaging a company of provincial players. It was partly an attempt to copy one of the best-known and revered provincial theatre managers and also a move to reduce costs as London names began to demand bigger fees (Broadbent 71). Public outcry from Liverpool audiences halted his plans but, on the

theatre's opening night on Monday 15 June 1778, he decided to go ahead with the proposal despite reportedly being "threatened by the townsmen with all manner of pains and penalties if they persisted in their scheme" (Broadbent 71). This reckless move cost the theatre money but also threatened its cultural standing within the town. Once again the *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* did not include a playbill for this week and, in fact, did not refer to the theatre at all until the 26 June. Knowing his decision was not popular, Younger tried to petition the audience for peace before the programme began on the opening night. However his words only angered "the crotchety Liverpool public" more (Baker 34). In a letter to Elizabeth Inchbald (who had made her first appearance on the Liverpool stage in the summer of 1776), John Philip Kemble described the audience as "remorseless villains", who "threw up their hats, hissed, kicked, stamped, bawled, did everything to prevent [Younger] being heard" (Boaden 91-3). Rather comically, contemporary reports then suggest that Younger sent one of his company, William Siddons, onstage wearing a wooden board printed with Younger's petition to the crowd – against which were thrown potatoes and broken bottles (Broadbent 72). After these failed appeals, the unhappy audience then embarked on a brief, but violent, riot: "In accordance with an honoured tradition of theatrical riots, this would consist of wrecking the playhouse, which whimsical pastime was forthwith undertaken with a will" (Baker 35). Although Herschel Baker uses language of riot tradition and historical precedence, this was the first physical example of audience displeasure at Liverpool's Theatre Royal. If we take the reports of narrators such as Broadbent and Baker at face value, supported by first hand evidence from John Philip Kemble, it seems that the riots showed Liverpool in a distinctly unattractive light and appeared to confirm the town's moral and cultural deficiencies. The violent actions of protesters in the audience, coupled with Younger's immediate defensive actions, suggest that the dominant sense of local pride and accomplishment had swiftly turned to an aggression born out of a combination of arrogance, self-importance and insecurity.

However, if we delve deeper and place these unfavourable depictions of the Liverpool audience within a wider context, the town's national image was not portrayed as negatively as it

might first appear. On 20 June, five days after the riot began, the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* printed the first report on the incident, bringing it to wider, national attention. In this brief paragraph, the newspaper notes that a correspondent had informed them of the riot but does not provide any background or reasoning behind it: “we guess, that it arose from Mr. Younger’s attempting to open the Summer campaign, without a London company – a circumstance which the inhabitants could not brook, as they have been accustomed to London performers for a great number of years past” (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 20 June 1778). Although vague in its content, the hypothesis of the article does not lay any blame at the door of the local audience and certainly does not immediately condemn the Liverpool public, as might perhaps be expected from the above accounts. Instead, four days later, the same newspaper publicly defended the intent of the rioters, if not the actions. It suggests that, although it was a great shame that the riots occurred and that two such seasoned actor-managers would suffer from this disturbance, ultimately the Liverpool public had right and reason on their side:

Although the loss that Messrs. Mattocks and Younger will necessarily suffer, in case their present *corps* of irregulars are not suffered to take the field at Liverpool, will be, (like many other misfortunes which have from time to time befallen those *hapless* theatrical commanders) a matter to be lamented: certain it is, the Liverpool lads have a right to be dissatisfied; and as Liverpool, Bristol, and the Haymarket, are the only situations in the kingdom in which our winter performers can acquire even subsistence money in the summer, Messrs. Mattocks and Younger, (who have themselves for years belonged to the Theatres-Royal in town) are not to be justified for having attempted to exclude their brethren from one of the three places in which they can alone expect to make a successful campaign (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 24 June 1778).

It must be noted however that although the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser’s* coverage of the riots does not lambast Liverpool’s unhappy audiences, nor does it praise or elevate the people of this town as culturally superior. Instead the primary concern of this newspaper is to look out for the

treatment of the capital's performers. This reaction is further supported by a piece of editorial in the London newspaper, the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* during the same week. This piece states that "the London actors are not a little pleased with the opposition given to Mess. Younger and Mattocks at Liverpool: they considered that the plan adopted by these gentlemen was to them really injurious [...] This scheme, if it succeeded, would occasion several of the performers being totally idle during the season that the winter theatres royal are closed" (22 June 1778). It therefore seems clear that, on this occasion, London's newspapers had no interest in offering any substantial critique of the behaviour of this northern infant Theatre Royal, choosing instead to make this a case resting on theatrical business and commercial decency.

With the useful benefit of hindsight the complaints of the 1778 rioters highlight a certain irony, as well as an element of misinformation. Whilst they complained about the lack of London names coming to Liverpool, the current company included William T. Lewis, who was a regular performer on the London stage at Covent Garden and, twenty years later, would become joint manager of the Liverpool theatre. The opening night of the season also advertised the forthcoming engagement of David Ross. Ross had an established theatrical history behind him at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane, although he was now in the twilight of his career and had performed on the London stage for the last time that year. In a decidedly defensive tone Younger included a footnote on the playbill for 5 June 1778 declaring that Ross's engagement, together with the coup of acquiring Sheridan and Colman's latest plays, "will this season afford a variety of entertainments, and prove to the public that the Managers leave nothing in their power undone to merit their favour and protection" (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* 5 Jun 1778). Furthermore, amongst the company were brother and sister Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble. Siddons had made her debut at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1775 to massive criticism. Following this disastrous appearance she spent the next six years in provincial theatres working "for prolonged periods with managements she trusted, culminating in her great period of success in the theatres of Bath and Bristol" (Manvell 39). One of the main companies in which she seems to have placed her

confidence was that of Younger and Mattocks, as she travelled up north and was, we know from playbills at Liverpool and Manchester, performing on these stages by the autumn of 1776.

Once again, reliance on Broadbent's analysis of the Theatre Royal's history becomes problematical as he admits that he is unsure of the exact date of Sarah Siddons's first appearance in Liverpool: "Although Lee Lewes states that Mrs. Siddons was sojourning in Liverpool with her two children about November, 1775, I have never been able to ascertain when she first played here. At any rate she performed a number of parts during the winter season of 1776" (66). Upon further investigation, Broadbent is proved right in his tentative findings as she is not listed on any of the playbills printed in the *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* during the 1775 season and nor does she appear in the summer of 1776. The winter season that year had a brief run from 11 October to 8 November and it was during this month that Sarah Siddons appears to have made her debut on the Liverpool stage. Her name appears on the playbill for the opening night, playing the lead role of the scheming prostitute Sarah Millwood in George Lillo's *The London Merchant; or, The History of George Barnwell* (1731). This season also featured the local debut of Siddons's close friend, Elizabeth Inchbald, making her first appearance as Juliet on 18 October 1776.

Shortly after his sister's debut on the Liverpool stage, John Philip Kemble secured his first theatrical engagement at Liverpool, joining the company in 1777. Herschel Baker records that Sarah Siddons actually rescued him from jail whilst he was trying (unsuccessfully) to make his way as an actor. It seems that he had been arrested in Worcester after obtaining a suit without paying for it and, from there, Siddons brought him to Liverpool: "That benevolent lady, then an actress of some standing and renown in the provinces (though her triumph in London was still five years off) came to her brother's rescue. She paid off the tailor, who was demanding his pound of flesh, and took her bedraggled kinsman back with her to Liverpool" (Baker 31). The playbills tell us for certain that he was a regular member of the company by the autumn of 1777, often appearing on stage with his sister in both major and minor roles in a series of Shakespeare tragedies, including *Banquo* and *Lady*

Macbeth (31 October), Tressel (a non-speaking role) and Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III* (3 November), father and daughter Capulet and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* (7 November), Lord Audley and Countess of Salisbury in *Edward the Black Prince* – more commonly known as *Edward III* (24 November), and Laertes and Hamlet¹⁰ (3 December). Broadbent records Kemble's first appearance in Liverpool on 27 June 1777 as the Earl of Somerset in *Sir Thomas Overbury* (69). Although the *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* advertised the opening night of the 1777 season on 2 June and produced sporadic brief notices on current productions at the theatre, no playbills were printed in the newspaper until 25 July. We cannot therefore confirm Broadbent's statement but we can confirm that, although he appeared towards the end of the summer season, he was not a regular performer on the Liverpool stage at this point. He is first mentioned in the newspaper playbills as Edwin in *Matilda* on 8 August 1777 and then again, one month later, as Roderigo in John Fletcher's *The Pilgrim; or, The Humours of a Mad House* (1647) on 12 September but no more. Interestingly, Baker suggests that Younger had not hired Kemble for his talent at this point but, rather, to appease his sister: "Mrs. Siddons was a star; her brother was countenanced by Younger for purposes of policy, for leading ladies, then as now, were temperamental creatures and not unmixed blessings" (31). The tentative introduction of Kemble to the local audience would appear to support this claim but his growing presence on the Liverpool stage that autumn and his rapid success on the provincial circuit affirmed Younger's trust in this unknown struggling actor.

However Siddons and Kemble were, at this point, not London-approved performers and their engagements did not satisfy the local protestors. Younger was forced to make two well-publicised attempts to get the audiences back on his side. The first was to secure the appearance of Charles Lee Lewes. A well-known physical comedian, Lewes had established himself at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden and his performance in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1773 had

¹⁰ Sarah Siddons's performance as Hamlet was advertised as being the third time she had performed this role and would be produced for one night only. In his biography of the actress, Thomas Campbell states that she first played Hamlet in Manchester in early 1777, going on to reprise the role years later in Dublin, but never in London. He does not, however, refer to her engagement in Liverpool (79).

brought him popular attention and acclaim. A footnote on the bottom of the playbill for 10 July 1778 highlights the demand for his comedic talents on the town's stage after being delayed in his engagement due to an injury: "Mr. Lee Lewes is not yet sufficiently recovered of the hurt in his foot to perform Harlequin; as soon as he can with safety do so, the public may depend on seeing him in that character" (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle*). Sure enough, the following week he appeared as Harlequin in *The Birth and Adventures of Harlequin*. His dominant presence from this point on in the season's programme signalled a clear effort to repair the source of the initial protest. The second was to employ John Lee (1725-1781) for a short engagement on his return to London. Like David Ross, Lee was also at the end of his career and this engagement does not seem to have been so favourably received by the Liverpool public as the notice on the bottom of the playbill advertising his engagement included an appeal for an open mind:

It may be fairly concluded that not consideration will influence liberal minds to refuse their patronage to those strangers, who, by an exertion of their abilities, shew a desire to please them. Visits of this kind too, paid by experienced actors, open a new field for the exercise of Taste and Judgement; and enable the Lovers of the Stage to chuse, from ocular proofs rather than reports, proper candidates for their future favours (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* 4 September 1778).

One week later, Lee printed his own entreaty to the town, hoping that the "displeasures of the town will so far subside" so as not to affect the enjoyment of the rest of the audience who have paid to enjoy an evening at the theatre (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle* 11 Sept 1778). The entreaty on the playbill to the Liverpool public to trust their own judgement and decide on the abilities of the performers before them, rather than relying on reports from the capital, indicates that the unrest in the town was far from over.

According to biographer Herschel Baker, the riots in Liverpool were so severe that Sarah Siddons cut her engagement short in order to remove her family from the town, with Kemble not far behind:

With one accord the children of Roger Kemble resolved to shake the dust of the city from their feet as soon as possible. Mrs. Siddons roundly declared her intention of never playing in the odious place again, and her brother gave the bumptious Liverpoolers to understand that they were all like Captain Driver in *Oroonoko* (36).

Kemble's purported reference to the character of Captain Driver was particularly hostile in the light of the town's trading links and I will return to analyse its significance later in the chapter. However little, if any, reference is made to Siddons's early engagements at Liverpool in biographies of the actress and we might easily therefore presume Baker's accuracy in the immediacy of her departure here with little other evidence to go on. Upon checking the playbills for this season, Baker's account of the actress's flight from the town is not quite as dramatic as he suggests. In actual fact, Henry and Sarah Siddons remained in the Liverpool company with her brother for the whole of the 1778 summer season, appearing regularly on the playbills until the final night of the season on 16 October. Thereafter she left the port and did not return to the Liverpool stage until 1783. It seems more likely therefore that, whilst the family certainly seems to have desired to leave the town as quickly as possible, as provincial performers with a family to support and no other position to go to straight away they honoured their engagement in Liverpool. John Philip Kemble has provided us with first hand evidence of his wish to leave Liverpool as quickly as possible in an application written to Tate Wilkinson at York:

If I thought our late tumults here were unknown to you, I would describe them, but I believe I may be assured you have heard the whole adventure, and spare myself the hateful office, of being the historian of my own disgrace – Mr. Younger has sent out an address to the public in which he informs them, Mrs. Berry, Miss Younger, Mr. Lee Lewes, and Mr. Dodd (all established London players) have been applied to, and their answers daily expected – He has promised not to offend them again, and now I believe they will suffer us, *strollers*, to proceed, by way of keeping their scenes and benches in some tolerable good humour (36-7).

Kemble was successful in his petition and subsequently moved to the Yorkshire circuit that autumn. Like his sister he had no further engagements in the North West port for several years, eventually returning in 1784.

The first years of a theatre are important in establishing firm roots and a solid reputation yet Liverpool's Theatre Royal struggled to find either as the company's actors, audience members and management were subject to much criticism in the local and national estimation alike. If we consider the nature of the issues raised against the theatre, it seems that the problems were caused by a combination of Liverpool's fast-paced transformation into a wealthy, cultural town, as opposed to a solely commercial outlet, and a series of events outside Younger and Mattocks' control. After a rapid expansion in trade and industry, the town's elite were keen to set in motion a comparatively swift cultural revolution. Yet such rapidity engendered two key effects in the first decade of Liverpool's Theatre Royal. The first was an inflated, London-centred expectation in some of the town's inhabitants as to the theatrical resources Liverpool should attain. Liverpool had not yet developed its own theatrical niche and its cultural insecurity came to light through the town's demands to have the best of London's theatre. The second was a sometimes cynical and frequently disparaging reaction from the rest of the country against a provincial town that could appear so haughty and self-important in its theatrical aspirations. If we add to this circumstances outside the control of the theatre – such as the mistaken fire stampede and, outside the control of anyone, the onstage death of Mr Carpenter, “a very promising young man in low comedy characters”, from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1776 whilst playing the Clown in *Harlequin Sorcerer* in Liverpool (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 12 Sept 1776)¹¹ – it is clear that the theatre's opening decade was never going to be straightforward. Unfortunately for Younger and Mattocks this trend continued into the 1780s as the port's fundamental insecurities came to light on stage.

¹¹ It is important to note that, again, Broadbent does not include the dramatic onstage death of Mr Carpenter in his annals, reinforcing the highly selective nature of his work.

1780 – 1800: The Growth of a Regional Theatre

By the end of the eighteenth century, the physical effects of Liverpool's rapid expansion were taking their toll on the governing structure of the town and the impact of this was felt in the town's theatrical activities. As the town grew, so too did the internal criticisms and differences of opinion. Whilst John Whale defines Liverpool's character in the 1780s as "politically conflicted" (91), Jon Stobart goes further in pinning down the central conflict in the city to the growth of a rivalry between two key groups that had always been present but now rose to the fore. The common council, a largely commercially-focused body consisting of "staunchly Tory and Anglican" men who "dominated the town politically and socially", found themselves increasingly challenged on the government and running of the town by a number of radical, non-conformist, wealthy Liverpool residents including, most notably, William Roscoe, William Rathbone, James Currie, and Rev. William Shepherd (Stobart 479). There was one issue central to Liverpool's economic and social character, upon which these two factions could not agree, and it had a significant effect on the direction of the Theatre Royal.

In 1787 the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed and with it came a new wave of criticism to be levied at Liverpool. Although anti-slavery appeals were by no means a new or sudden idea at this point, the organisation of a large, vocal society posed an interesting dilemma for this northern trading post. Public interest in the cause was heightened and, as such, Liverpool's commercial history and reputation were called into question. Between 1791 and 1807 (the end of the British slave trade), 77-79% of slave ships from Britain left from Liverpool making it "the most important port of departure for transatlantic slaving voyages before the nineteenth century" (Power 15). It had surpassed London and Bristol's trade as early as the 1740s and had subsequently boosted the economic fortunes of many of the town's merchant residents

The pride of the town's traders in their maritime achievements found a cultural outlet in the programmes of the Theatre Royal throughout the 1780s. Younger and Mattocks clearly realised that

paying regular homage to the town's economic foundations and civic pride through various dramatic genres was guaranteed to keep the auditorium busy. We only have to look at the playbills throughout this decade to see that the programme frequently ended with a maritime-themed afterpiece. If we take the seasons in 1783 and 1784 as a representative example, we can see in *Appendix 3* the volume of such afterpieces produced, with a nautical piece included on a regular basis. In particular, there were several specific pieces that paid homage to the town's maritime dependence and were clearly designed to feed local pleasure and pride. As Jacky Bratton notes in the introduction to *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage 1790-1930*, theatres deliberately "attracted interest by the topicality and relevance of a play's title and supposed subject-matter" (4). A decade before the national rise of interest in the cultural representations of imperial news and naval warfare, Liverpool's maritime industries and exploits were of considerable interest and appeal to the inhabitants of the port. We do not know much about these productions, bar what was printed on the playbills – this predominantly included title, genre and the occasional lengthier description of featured scenes and / or characters. On 11 August 1783, the playbill concluded with an interlude entitled *A Medley; or, The Sailor's Return to Liverpool*. This piece was advertised as including "a view of the town from the Cheshire Shore; the new Battery; Ships entering the Harbour, and landing of the Seamen from their Boat" ("Theatre Royal Playbill Collection" Vol.2). The following year, John Quick wrote an afterpiece for his benefit evening at the theatre entitled *Tony Lumpkin's Adventures in a Trip to Liverpool*. We know nothing else about the production, save that the title character refers to a character in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, which Quick created at Covent Garden in 1773. Although the piece does not have an overriding nautical sound to it, its promise of an adventure in Liverpool suggests that it featured scenes of local interest, such as the docks and quayside. This seems all the more certain when we consider a later production in 1789 entitled *Tony Lumpkin's Ramble; or, A View of Christmas Holidays*. This was advertised as being written by an anonymous Liverpool author and featured scenes detailing Lumpkin's voyage to Liverpool, a description of the Exchange, an accident at the docks and the Theatre Tavern ("Theatre

Royal Playbill Collection” Vol.2). Similarly the playbill for 29 November 1784 included a new pantomime with a distinctly Liverpool feel:

A New Pantomime (never performed before) called

The Dutchman Trick’d;

Or, Harlequin’s Return from Guinea

To conclude with an exact representation of

The Ship’s Coming Round the Rock,

Bidstone Lighthouse,

The Ceremony of the Signals,

A View of the Fort, and the River Mersey,

And the Landing of Harlequin at Liverpool (*Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser* 25 Nov 1784).

The title of the pantomime makes clear reference to the route of the Triangular Trade, suggesting that the production will depict the triumphant Liverpool slave merchant returning home after a successful trip to Guinea, during which he captured slaves from under the nose of a Dutch slave trader. For her benefit in 1784, Elizabeth Kemble wrote a musical entertainment entitled *The Elopement; or, The Liverpool Welcome*, in which the main character, Mr. Commerce, was “a merchant of Liverpool” (“Theatre Royal Playbill Collection” Vol.2). These regional productions were clearly designed to appeal to Liverpool’s inhabitants and foster local pride as similar pieces - such as *Harlequin Rambler; or, Magic and Mirth* with “a striking view of Mr Fisher’s yard, with a sixty-four gun ship on the stocks, ready for launching” (*Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser* 13 Aug 1787) – appeared frequently throughout the decade.

Liverpool’s decision to promote such locally inspired maritime afterpieces to complete their theatrical programme week after week suggests that there was now a growing sense of a distinct Liverpool theatre. If we briefly consider the neighbouring Theatre Royal Manchester at this point, we can ascertain how these Liverpool productions matched up to those produced in its neighbouring commercial centre. In the early 1780s the Manchester theatrical season ran approximately from late

December to March / April and, akin to Liverpool, the playbills printed in *The Manchester Mercury* during these years provide information on the specific productions staged, as well as occasional glimpses of the content and staging of the pieces. What is particularly striking about the afterpieces from the early 1780s is the small number of productions with a maritime or nautical theme. During the 1781-2 season Charles Dibdin the Elder's *The Waterman; or, The First of August* was produced just once, while the popular and enduring pantomime *Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday* appears to have featured twice on the season programme. Instead, a new pantomime entertainment first produced on 22 January 1782 provides a glimpse of the local industrial interests of the manufacturing town. Entitled *The Magician of the Rocks; or, Harlequin's Ramble*, the playbill details some of the specific scenes featured in the production, including "A Manchester Ware-Room, and Dyer's Shop; The Market-Cross and Fish Stalls; and a View of Liverpool" (*The Manchester Mercury* 22 Jan 1782). This brief snapshot of the scenic focus of the production clearly focuses on the dominant local textile industry, whilst also paying homage to Liverpool as the trading centre through which the town received its raw materials. Four years later *The Manchester Mercury* reported on the local significance of a recent epilogue written "by a Gentleman of Manchester" which, "the *Mercury* assured its readers, had 'a claim to public attention as it conveys a striking picture of our manufactures, and a handsome eulogium on the town and trade of Manchester'" (Hodkinson & Pogson 120). For Manchester, the maritime industry was vitally important as a means for production but, as an inland commercial town, manufacturing and industry dominated the local landscape.

An analysis of the playbills from the 1782-3 season also reveals a different strand of local pride dramatised on the Manchester stage. On 24 March 1783, the Theatre Royal produced the topical and nationally popular afterpiece, *The Siege of Gibraltar*, depicting the three year battle to defend the territory from the Spanish and French during the American Revolution. The key point about this production, the playbill suggests, is the relevance of the piece for the residents of Manchester. The current manager, Mr Banks, issued the following notice:

The Friends and relations of the Manchester Volunteers will, therefore, have an opportunity of viewing art of the impregnable Fort of Gibraltar, with the British Fleet riding triumphant in the bay; from whence they may form some idea of the fatigues and dangers their friends had undergone during the late siege, and return home full of wonder and surprize [*sic*] at the many dangers they have escaped; and that the brave seventy-second regiment is returning to Manchester, crowned with laurels (*The Manchester Mercury* 18 Mar 1783).

Two other playbills from this season reinforce the appeal of dramatising the strong local pride in the town's military presence during this period. The afterpiece, *The French Invasion; or, A Trip to Brighthelmstone* included "a review of Sir John Evergreen's new rais'd regiment" (*The Manchester Mercury* 1 Apr 1783), whilst just one week later the Theatre Royal's programme included "An Address in the Character of a Lancashire Volunteer" (*The Manchester Mercury* 8 Apr 1783). It is important to emphasise that pieces such as these were by no means produced on a regular basis and, indeed, were relatively infrequent, but they do provide a useful insight into the character and civic identity of Liverpool's closest contemporary provincial town. The differing priorities and sources of local pride in the two towns are plainly identified through the focus of the afterpieces designed to appeal to the residents of the town.

However despite Liverpool's preference for maritime pieces that favoured the local merchant, the character of the Liverpool slave merchant was not always portrayed so warmly to Georgian theatre audiences across the rest of Britain. Thomas Southerne's seventeenth-century adaptation of Aphra Behn's slave narrative, *Oroonoko*, was regularly produced on the London and provincial stage and offered an unfavourable portrayal of the representative slave merchant, Captain Driver:

Marry come up here, who are you, I trow? You begin to think yourself a captain, forsooth, because we call you so. You forget yourself as fast as you can, but I remember you; I know you for a pitiful, paltry fellow, as you are, an upstart to prosperity, one that is but just come

acquainted with cleanliness and that never saw five shillings of your own without deserving to be hanged for 'em (1.2, 55-63).

Southerne's Captain is an arrogant, morally deficient scoundrel who has no hesitation in selling humans to fill his own pockets, freely declaring, "I have the money. Let the world speak and be damned; I care not" (1.2, 230-1). Whilst a modern day audience would flinch at this declaration, for much of the eighteenth century the sale of human beings from Africa to America in return for goods and financial gain was an integral feature of British port life. However by the 1770s society's views on the ethics of the slave trade had started to change and it is interesting, although perhaps not surprising, that Southerne's *Oroonoko* was banned from production on the Liverpool stage "as reflecting too much on those Liverpool merchants who were engaged in the Slave Trade" and who were, of course, prominent members of the Theatre Royal's audience (Broadbent 72). Despite his assertion, we cannot be sure how Broadbent knew the reason behind the play's ban as there is no evidence remaining documenting this decision. It is not clear whether the Lord Chamberlain vetoed potential Liverpool productions, or whether it was the town council's own decision, but Elizabeth Inchbald suggests the latter by the admonishing tone of her entry for *Oroonoko* in *British Theatre; or a collection of plays with biographical and critical remarks by Mrs Inchbald* (1808): "The tragedy of 'Oroonoko' is never acted in Liverpool, for the very reason why it ought to be acted there oftener than at any other place – The merchants of that great city acquire their riches by the slave trade" (Novak & Rhodes "Introduction" xxix). Inchbald's comment supports Broadbent's theory and it does not appear that the play was ever advertised for performance at the Liverpool Theatre Royal throughout the eighteenth century. The earliest reference I can find to a Liverpool production is 24 October 1834, although the playbill for this date claims that it was produced "for the first time these seventeen years" (*Theatre Royal Playbill Collection* Vol. 12) suggesting that it had appeared earlier at least once before in the nineteenth century. However it was certainly not produced regularly, even by the 1830s.

Despite being banned in Liverpool, Southerne's tragedy would still have had a profound effect on the rest of the theatre-going nation. Its continued dramatic appeal meant that it tapped into the consciousness of an increasingly anti-slavery nation. J.L. Hodgkinson and Rex Pogson state that Southerne's *Oroonoko* was performed in Manchester for the first time on 28 November 1787 and repeated two months later due to popular demand. In their study, *The Early Manchester Theatre*, they observe that "much interest was worked up for the production" and the productions were accompanied by a petition against the slave trade, available to be signed at various locations (predominantly inns) across the town (123). However, according to the playbills printed in *The Manchester Mercury*, the play had actually already been performed earlier on in the decade "for the first time in twelve years" on 7 April 1783 and was described as "one of the best tragedies in the English language" in the accompanying editorial (1 Apr 1783). This production does not seem to have been accompanied by any local abolition movement but the decision to produce the play early in the decade further highlighted the difference in commercial and cultural interest between these two North West centres. In 1787 the Anti-Slavery Society was founded, arousing public interest through its fierce campaigns against the human cruelty of the profitable Atlantic trade: "There was, quite simply, an extraordinary flowering of cheap abolitionist (and radical) literature which fed a growing appetite among armies of British readers for the literature of reform" (Walvin 98). In her study of racism on the Victorian stage Hazel Waters states simply that "slavery's destruction was a work of untiring persistence at a multitude of levels, from the ladies committees for abolition to the impassioned, valiant resistance of the enslaved themselves" (6). In this heated climate, Liverpool came swiftly under attack for its dominant role in the slave trade.

As the nation's most prolific and successful slave port, Liverpool was subjected to fierce criticism and faced threats "not just to its economic base but to its cultural identity" (Wilson 28). In her thesis on the impact of the slave trade on Liverpool's eighteenth-century society, Jane Longmore highlights an incident that seems to have occurred towards the end of the 1770s (231). The well-known actor George Frederick Cooke was appearing on stage at the Theatre Royal and was

reportedly hissed at by the audience for being drunk. Despite being a successful touring provincial actor at this point, he was also renowned for being an unreliable alcoholic. Following his future transfer to the Covent Garden stage in 1800, his drunken behaviour increased to the extent that when he was unable to perform on 11 May 1801 it was, for the first time, “recorded publicly that his drunkenness prevented his performance” (Wilmeth 2). On this earlier occasion in Liverpool he is reported to have replied to the unhappy audience: “There is not a brick in your dirty town but what is cemented by the blood of a negro” (231). As briefly referred to earlier, John Philip Kemble had also reportedly told the dissatisfied Liverpool public in 1778 that they were all like Captain Driver in *Oroonoko*. Although an element of Cooke’s aggressive retort can be put down to his inebriated state, both outbursts demonstrate the vehemence of feeling against Liverpool because of its association with slavery.

In practice the campaigns of the Anti-Slavery Society had little effect on Liverpool’s eighteenth-century maritime commerce, with slave-trade profits actually appearing to have increased post-1787 (Wilson 29). Although the long-standing trade in raw materials from Lancashire and Cheshire were staples of the economy, the slave trade was vital in generating further employment for thousands of craftsmen, sailors and tradesmen and any future threat to these workers needed to be combated straight away (Longmore “Civic Liverpool 1660-1800” 243). As such, Liverpool submitted twelve petitions to parliament in May 1788 with each appeal arguing for the importance of the slave trade on different commercial interests (Longmore “Civic Liverpool 1660-1800”, 243). Their petitions were written in response to a proposed parliamentary bill that aimed to restrict the number of slaves taken from Africa to the British colonies in the West Indies (Wu 54). However their efforts were in vain as the bill was passed the same year, producing a passionate literary response from the dramatist and poet, Hannah More. Anticipating the passage of the proposed bill, More wrote “Slavery: A Poem” (1788) which “articulates the author’s impatience with the caution of the proposed measures, arguing instead for complete abolition” (Wu 54). When we think of how the nation was beginning to view Liverpool and its inhabitants, the

references More makes to *Oroonoko* are particularly interesting. She writes, “Oh plaintive Southerne, whose impassioned strain / So oft has waked my languid muse in vein!” (ll.37-38). More uses the dramatic portrayal of Oroonoko’s experience to point out that this fictional image represents thousands of African realities:

Whene’er to Africa’s shores I turn my eyes,
Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;
I see, by more than fancy’s mirror shown,
The burning village and the blazing town,
See the dire victim torn from social life,
The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife!
She, wretch forlorn, is dragged by hostile hands,
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands! (ll. 95-102)

Her use of emotive language and distressing imagery effectively depicts the horrors brought about by men such as Liverpool’s slave merchants.

In contrast, Liverpool’s literary response to the 1788 bill came in the dramatic form of two new pieces performed for the first time on 30 December 1789. The afterpiece on this evening, performed with the permission of the Lord Chamberlain, was entitled *The Genius of Liverpool*. Written by an unknown “Mr Harpley”, the cast list included Stephen Kemble as “The Genius”, a Mr Banks as “Neptune” and Elizabeth Kemble as “Commerce”, and ended with the song “The Value of Llewene; or Success to Trade” (*Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser* 28 Dec 1789). Although we now know little else about the production, these details suggest that the short play paid homage to the town’s successful maritime trading. Importantly, it followed a new musical one-act piece which publicly articulated Liverpool’s pride in the place slavery had in its economic achievements. It was originally called *The Benevolent Planters; or, Slavery But A Name* and the title alone suggests it defended the behaviour of merchants and plantation owners towards their slaves. Yet the title was reduced to just *The Benevolent Planters* by the Lord Chamberlain and printed as thus in 1789,

suggesting that the second part of the title went against the increasingly vocal abolition movement in its apparent defence of the slave trade. Indeed when it was first produced at the Theatre Royal Haymarket on 5 August 1789, under the title *The Friends; or, The Benevolent Planters*, the abolitionary sentiment of the play was amplified with an “Address to the Humane Society, on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, in the Character of a Negro, by Mr. Kemble” (*Diary or Woodfall’s Register* 1 Aug 1789). Significantly, however, just four months later Liverpool advertised and performed the play on its own and with its original full title.

This short play (written by Thomas Bellamy and put forward for licensing by George Colman the Elder) seems to support the character of Liverpool’s slave merchants despite its abolitionist intent. The decision to produce the play in the absence of any other slavery-focused pieces was therefore a public statement of pride and support of the local trade. It is a fairly clichéd story about a wealthy African sold into slavery who is fortunate enough to come under a kind master and his equally compassionate fellow companions. They organise an archery competition during which he is reunited with his lost love and thus everyone is happy. Although not the most original dramatic plot, the language and images used within the play offer a different take on the dramatic depiction of the slave trader. Initially, the language used in the prologue bears a striking similarity to the descriptions of the cruel conditions for captured slaves in both *Oroonoko* and ‘Slavery: A Poem’. Oran, the central character, describes his cruel and barbaric experiences of being captured and sold into slavery:

But ah! this happiness was not to last,
Clouds, now, the brightness of my fate o’ercast;
For the white savage fierce upon me sprung,
Wrath in his eye and fury on his tongue,
And dragg’d me to a loathsome vessel near,
Dragg’d me from every thing I hold most dear,
And plung’d me in the horrors of despair! (“Prologue” 13-19)

However the horrific language used at the beginning of the opening prologue is then offset by his journey into the household of “a kinder master” who “made me soon forget I was a slave” (“Prologue” 27-8). Although this juxtaposition suggests that there can be two very different kinds of slave treatment, the remainder of the prologue features a discussion on “an hallow’d band” who:

Impell’d by soft humanity’s kind laws,
Take up with fervent zeal the Negro’s cause,
And at this very moment, anxious try,
To stop the widespread woes of slavery (“Prologue” 31-4)

We do not know how this clear reference to the efforts of the abolitionary movement was received by Liverpool’s audiences but, considering that the majority of the town’s population was not pro-abolition pre-1800 this part of the script would surely have raised a few eyebrows amongst the merchants present. Especially, as the prologue ends with a fervent plea to “Prosper the great design – thy children free / From the oppressor’s hand, and give them liberty!” (64-5). However, the body of the main play does not dwell on the efforts of this movement but instead considers the positive effects of the humane treatment of slaves – perhaps, therefore, the prologue was missed out, or even re-written for Liverpool audiences. Unfortunately no reference is made anywhere as to the content of the prologue as performed at this point.

However the first scene moves on to focus on a considerably more positive image of the slave trader and centres around a discussion on the position of slaves by three slave owners aptly named Heartfree, Steady & Goodwin. Steady introduces Heartfree as “this English friend, who, some time since, came to settle among us, in order that he might exhibit to his brother Planters, the happy effects of humanity, in the treatment of those who, in the course of human chance, are destined to the bonds of slavery” (1, 6-11). This positive depiction of the British slave master offers a fresh and friendly image in times of growing unease with the moral implications of the trade. The slave masters’ debate does not argue for abolition but instead reads like a campaign tract for the humane treatment of slaves. Heartfree declares at one point: “The grateful Africans have hearts as

large as ours, and shame on the degrading lash, when it can be spared – Reasonable obedience is what we expect, and let those who look for more, feel and severely feel the sting of disappointment” (1, 57-61). The use of the phrase “reasonable obedience” supports the idea of humane slave treatment, as opposed to complete abolition, and is reinforced throughout the remainder of the play. During the ensuing archery competition, the staging and language of the scene serve to demonstrate a romantic and idealised notion of the slave-master relationship, introduced and encouraged by the British trader. The stage directions tell us that the competition takes place on “an open plain”, with the three slave masters literally elevated - “seated on decorated chairs” - and removed - “at some distance” - from their slaves. According to Heartfree, he, Steady and Goodwin “have reaped the benefit of your honest labours, in full goblets drink to your happiness” (3, 4-6). The hard, honest work of the slaves, Heartfree suggests, produces contentment and happiness for both master and slave alike. Heartfree furthers this argument with the proposal that, under the right man, the relationship between slave and master rests on friendship, as much as a commercial bond. Both he and Oran refer to each other as friend throughout the play but, during the climax of the play, Heartfree offers a seemingly contradictory outlook on their relationship as he encourages his slave to honour his wishes in the competition: “Though your beloved Selima is torn from your widowed arms, yet it is a duty you owe yourself, as a man, an obligation due to me, as your friend, to take to your bosom one whom I have provided for you” (3, 13-17). Whilst we, as a modern audience, question the idea of a friendship, or paternalism, where one governs and controls the other under the bonds of slavery, this idealistic relationship clearly produced a pleasing, positive image of the potential Liverpool slave master. Indeed, before Selima commences her final song, the script ends with its original subtitle, as Oran declares (originally printed in capital letters), “slavery is but a name” (3, 97).

Liverpool’s Theatre Royal therefore chose not to bow to the fierce condemnation over its economic foundations, or indeed to ignore them outright, but instead defended itself with deliberate theatrical displays of proud compassion and a superior approach to trading compared to

their European contemporaries. Indeed *The Benevolent Planters* appeared regularly on the Theatre Royal's programme throughout 1790 after its local premiere at the end of the previous year.

Liverpool had never shied away from displaying its nautical pride and superiority on stage and, as we have seen, *The Genius of Liverpool* and *The Benevolent Planters* followed on from a series of maritime-focused afterpieces that formed the backbone to the majority of the theatre's programmes throughout the 1780s.

However the national reputation of the town remained under fire and for an urban society so proud of its successful, wealthy image, this was an important issue to be addressed. In her study of William Roscoe, Arline Wilson suggests that the growing sense of unease over the town's national image was a major factor in the cultural renaissance of the town in the early 1800s. She cites the changes to Dr William Moss's later editions of his guidebook as an example of this cultural push: "In the *Liverpool Guide* of 1796 [...] William Moss had few qualms about justifying the trade, yet by 1799 the *Guide* had discovered that the trade was conducted mainly by outsiders, and Moss took care to emphasise that only a few merchants were involved" (Wilson 29). To the modern reader this immediately suggests that a defensive approach was taken by a council aware that visitors could well be put off by the questionable influence of slavery throughout the town. It is also true that there was a sudden growth of cultural and religious institutions during this period that now prospered where many had floundered before them through lack of support or enthusiasm. Jon Stobart directly links the renewed cultural interest to Liverpool's negative press, noting that "the establishment appears to have been ever more willing to work with members of the Roscoe circle in reforming Liverpool's cultural identity and in projecting a more positive image to the rest of the country" ("Culture versus Commerce" 480). 1797 saw the establishment of the Athenaeum, a site that included a newsroom as well as a library, and was followed swiftly by the similarly-devoted Lyceum in 1802 (Longmore "Civic Liverpool 1660-1800", 143). William Roscoe's idea for a Botanic Garden was also approved by the corporation and became a reality in 1803. The town's cultural

rebirth also extended to include the renovation and launch of a new, luxurious Theatre Royal in 1803.

On one hand the town was still fiercely proud of its dominant slave-trade economy and the fact that trade increased at the turn of the century indicates that this commercially minded and fiercely independent society was still doing its utmost to prosper across the Atlantic. However Jane Longmore firmly quashes the idea that the town's changing attitude towards the end of the century was simply a "conscious attempt by a slave-trading community to atone for its engagement in the traffic of human souls", arguing that this approach is to pigeon-hole eighteenth-century Liverpool as a one-dimensional port ("Cemented by the Blood of a Negro?" 229-30). Yet, as we have established, Liverpool civic pride still sought a national forum and to be portrayed as immoral and inhumane when residents desired to show off their affluence and keep up with their contemporaries was therefore worrying. A concerted effort to promote the idea of the well-rounded nature of the town through new, culturally progressive institutions allowed Liverpool to once again demonstrate its civic pride to the nation in the face of adversity.

Cultural Apathy and Theatrical Decline

The end of the 1770s saw the residents of Liverpool, for better or worse, keen to involve themselves in civic administration and to ensure that the town was seen to be socially and culturally thriving. However Jon Stobart notes that the town's reputation struggled and the last twenty years of the eighteenth century have subsequently gained a reputation for being a "cultural desert" (477). To a certain extent there is some truth in this generalised description. If we take the short-term survival of the town's literary and art societies at face value, it is clear that organisations dedicated to cultural promotion struggled to gain support and achieve longevity during the latter years of the century. The Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society formed in 1779 but had disbanded by 1783, whilst their northern contemporary, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, was successfully launched in 1781 and became "the prototype for similar middle-class societies

throughout the provinces” (Wilson 26). In fact, it still holds meetings and events to this day.¹² Liverpool’s second attempt at an independent Literary Society began in 1784 with meetings “in members’ houses for discussions of literary and scientific matters – a practice which was ended around 1793 in the atmosphere of suspicion engendered by the French Revolution” (Stobart 475). The Liverpool Society of Artists was founded in 1769 as a North West version of the London-based society which was designed to provide a location for contemporary artists to display their work. Liverpool’s version quickly folded but was reformed in 1773 only to once again disband at the start of the American War of Independence in 1775. The Society’s third attempt was slightly more successful, with two exhibitions held in the 1780s “before its activities were again suspended by war” (Stobart 475). On this evidence alone Liverpool appeared to have failed in keeping up with the cultural advancements of its urban contemporaries in the South *and* the North.

As the town’s cultural institutions struggled to survive, developments at Liverpool’s Theatre Royal towards the end of the century seemed to signal that it too could be heading the same way. In 1786 attempts were made by one Mr Williams to establish a Liverpool Theatrical Fund in connection with the Theatre Royal. This was the first attempt to launch such an institution outside London and Bath and it took its model from the established Covent Garden and Drury Lane funds for the relief of old actors (Broadbent 80). But this attempt to combine charity with the Arts and to secure future support for Liverpool’s relatively new theatrical institution fell on deaf ears as the scheme failed and no more attempts were made until 1818. With little financial support forthcoming, it perhaps comes as no surprise to learn that after Joseph Younger’s death in September 1784, his partner George Mattocks faced substantial fiscal criticism and difficulties. Following Younger’s death he decided to renew his lease on the Manchester Theatre Royal after a hiatus of three years and now faced the challenging task of running both theatres on his own. On 1 January 1787 *Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser* published a letter from the actress Mrs Banks (formerly married to one of Liverpool’s

¹² See www.manlitphil.co.uk for further information on the current activities of the society.

regular actors, Mr Kniveton) accusing him of delaying settling expenses for her late husband's wardrobe properties, which were in use at the Manchester theatre. She accuses him of having no reason for not settling the debt and announces, "your character as a man in business, I have ever found to be PROUD, OVERBEARING, and UNCHARITABLE" (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* 1 Jan 1787). Mattocks had clearly overstretched himself and his bankruptcy was announced one month later in February 1787 (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* 26 Feb 1787). The *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* had advertised the auction of his properties at the theatre, including wardrobe, scenery and machinery, as well as the availability of the lease of the theatre and adjoining house, just a few weeks earlier (2 Feb 1787).

However, despite numerous challenges facing the theatre during the middle of the decade, the Theatre Royal was attracting well-known names to its stage, filling the auditorium night after night with the lure of London's theatrical stars. In June 1783, Younger announced the two-day engagement of the now celebrated Sarah Siddons before she travelled to the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin. Siddons had not performed in Liverpool since the 1778 riots, when she was treated with disdain and indifference by the town's audience. However in October 1782 Siddons had made a triumphant return to the Drury Lane stage and quickly became the most celebrated actress of her time. Just months after being appointed reader to the Royal Princesses by the Queen's demand, Siddons travelled north to Liverpool to fulfil her short engagement. Newspaper records of ticket sales at the theatre show Liverpool's turnaround of opinion about the actress now that she was a theatrical star:

In a few hours after Mrs Siddons's arrival was announced, every seat in the boxes was engaged for both nights. Great numbers of strangers came from the adjacent parts to see her, but many of them were not able to get to either hear or see, the theatre being so extremely crowded. Large sums were offered for seats but there were none to be had (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* 19 Jun 1783).

Two years later, the newspaper makes reference to another three-day engagement of the actress which had packed out the auditorium once again. The editorial is quick to praise her celebrated acting skills and stage presence, which had been extensively written on by the capital's critics: "What a beautiful prospect the audience afforded to a speculative mind, were they viewed as she proceeded to the deepest and most interesting parts of her acting" (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* 2 Jun 1785). Ironically, after the protest towards this same actress just seven years before, Liverpool's audiences were clearly satisfied with the calibre of performer now appearing on stage at the Theatre Royal and could not now complain that they were being cheated out of the very best of the London theatrical scene. John Philip Kemble also returned to the Theatre Royal in 1784, opening the season as Hamlet, with his sister in law, Elizabeth Kemble, playing Ophelia. Kemble had made his London debut at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden the previous year and Younger was quick to capitalise on his earlier career links with the actor by engaging him for the season. Kemble's links with the region went further than his career as he had been born locally in the small Lancashire market town of Prescot. Due to the peripatetic nature of a strolling actor's family he did not spend much time in the area as a child, with all twelve children of Roger and Sarah Kemble born in different towns (Baker 2). Although his return to the Liverpool stage marked the beginning of a continued connection with the town (in 1789 he came back again to co-manage the Theatre Royal with Francis Aickin until 1796), Herschel Baker suggests that Kemble had no greater affinity with the port due to being "trundled about England with his father's troop, growing up to know the precarious and volatile existence that attended all strollers" (2). The second London actor to return to his birthplace during this decade was William T. Lewis. He was advertised as headlining the company in the first production of the 1788 season, George Farquhar's comedy *The Beaux Stratagem* (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* 16 Jun 1788). Lewis was now the Deputy Manager and actor at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden but originally hailed from Ormskirk, a small market town just outside Liverpool. Like Kemble, he too returned to manage the Theatre Royal with Thomas Knight from 1802 until his death in 1811 (*Appendix 4*).

Despite the procurement of these well-known London performers, the Theatre Royal's administrative struggles began to show front of house. According to the *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* the theatre re-opened in June 1787 under the sole management of Francis Aickin. On the first night of the season he delivered the opening prologue which began by echoing George Colman's 1772 prologue, praising commerce and the fortunes it had bestowed upon the town. Seemingly aware that he had a tough crowd to please, he then moved on to making a promise to the people of Liverpool that he would strive to meet their theatrical needs and wishes to the best of his ability:

For ME, call'd hither by your friendly voice,

Conscious how much I'm honour'd in your choice, -

Feeling the gratitude that's justly due,

I purport one sole object to pursue –

Your pleasure: - should I fail, impute it still

To want of faculties, but not of will (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* 25 Jun 1787).

Aickin ran the theatre with John Philip Kemble from 1789 onwards and then returned to sole management from 1792 to 1801.

Notwithstanding Aickin's best efforts, the effects of years of managerial and financial instability became evident in the lowering of standards exhibited in the theatre. According to various contemporary newspaper reports, the theatre had lost much of its luxurious appearance and grandeur by the end of the 1790s. What had once been built to emulate London's grand theatrical venues had now turned shabby and grubby, as this report in October 1799 edition of the *Monthly Mirror* was quick to point out:

The theatre is in a shameful condition; the box-lobbies disgracefully filthy; the almost subterranean avenues to the pit are choked with "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours"; the coverings of the seats miserably old and tattered; and the house is throughout so detestably

dirty, neglected and forlorn, that the audiences are necessarily thinner than if they were accommodated in a tolerably decent matter (Vol.8, 244-5).

Such an attack on the standard of the theatre was not a new criticism; only months before *The Monthly Mirror* had focused its attention on the state of the set and costumes declaring, “when the curtain rises, nothing is to be seen but nature disfigured by art, and character disguised in tarnished tatters of the penurious manager’s wardrobe” (Vol.8, 56). This public reference to the theatre’s dwindling finances and lack of resources further undermined the cultural state of the town in the eyes of the nation. Even the author of the *Liverpool Guide*, William Moss, finds fault with the performance standard of the productions in this pro-Liverpool publication, claiming that due to an increase of provincial Theatre Royals, the actors Liverpool attracts “are mostly turned strollers” (125).

As production standards lowered so too did the behaviour of the audience. In the October 1799 *Monthly Mirror* report, the writer does not hold back in his description of the standard of audiences at Liverpool’s Theatre Royal: “More turbulent, indecent, and tasteless audiences, than have been met here, have seldom, I believe, assembled within the precincts of any theatre, amphitheatre, barn, booth, or stable” (Vol.8, 245). This damning report represents the nadir of nearly twenty years of worsening reports of the town’s society. In 1780 a new interlude called “Derby Wakes” was introduced to the programme featuring a representation of the bull-baiting entertainment that was popular in the West Derby area of Liverpool. Broadbent recounts the critically publicised turn of events in the audience during the performance:

On one occasion, a party of sailors went to West Derby and brought the bull to Liverpool, resolved to conclude the frolic by showing him the play, and actually dragged him by means of rope tied to his horns into the theatre, and introduced his head into one of the centre boxes; and then, as he had seen (to use their own expression) the play, they led him out (74).

This example of outlandish behaviour from a group of sailors (who were highly likely to have been a transient group with no fixed abode within the port) reflected the poor reputation and general

decline of Liverpool's public behaviour during the 1790s. Just over ten years later, *The History of Liverpool* noted that the "refinement of manners, which has ever been considered the best proof of civilization, had made a considerable progress in Liverpool; yet the behaviour of the common people was, in numerous instances, highly censurable" (192). The review goes on to give examples of such behaviour (mostly carried out, it claims, by the young men of the town), including the practice of frequent nocturnal riots, the circulation of handbills "in which young ladies were offered for sale", and the so-called "witlings" who would pick on and ridicule an individual in the public house "for the amusement of the rest of the company" (192). There was no disagreement as to the poor state of the town, with several contemporary sources all acknowledging the decline in civilised conduct around the streets and public buildings of the port.

An additional line on the end of a playbill in August 1791 confirmed that the behaviour of audience members in the gallery had deteriorated substantially to the extent that Aickin was forced to warn them: "A Caution – To prevent the irregularity of persons descending from the Gallery to the Boxes, and the ill consequences that might ensue from any future attempts of the kind – Notice is hereby Given that Tenter Hooks are fixed in all the pillars" (*Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 15 Aug 1791). Three years later the theatre produced a playbill with the following footnote:

Mr Munden respectfully informs his friends and the public, that the greatest care will be taken, that the performance announced this evening will rise precisely at seven o'clock. Though the entertainments may appear long, they are so arranged in regard to dressing, Acts occupy only the usual time for a night's performance, no delay whatever will take place between the Acts, and the whole Mr Munden flatters himself will be over in a reasonable time (*Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligence* 1 Sept 1794).¹³

¹³ It is not clear why Joseph Munden is quoted as the author of this addition to the playbill as, although he was engaged at the theatre during the summer of 1794, he does not seem to have acted as manager at any point during this time. Only Francis Aickin is referred to as manager in newspaper reports and by Broadbent in his annals. This summer season is also skipped over in Munden's own memoirs, as he jumps from one London

The fact that these statements were included on the playbills seems to indicate that the standard of audience behaviour was rapidly decreasing, with the management failing to keep them in check. Covent Garden actor Joseph Munden is clearly addressing, and attempting to reduce, the growth of disruptive and unruly behaviour in the pit and gallery, or, what Broadbent calls the “unruliness of a certain section of the frequenters of the Royal” (87), which had begun to impact upon the quality and fluidity of evening performances. An editorial piece in *Gore’s General Advertiser* bemoaned the diminished standards in its local theatre but, despite the appeals of the playbills, believes that Aickin was not doing enough to censure it:

We cannot help expressing our astonishment that no steps are taken to curb the disorderly proceedings which every night take place in the Gallery, but particularly in the *side slips*, from which the people in the Pit are pelted during the whole of the performance, and their lives put in danger by drunken fellows traversing round on the outside of the iron rails. A man repeatedly attempted last night, to throw one of the chandeliers into the Pit, and was suffered singly [*sic*] to continue to brave and insult the whole house (24 Sept 1795).

The editorial ends with the unsanitary and squalid image of many of the boxes having to be evacuated “in consequence of the streams which descended from above”, whilst many audience members in the pit “had their cloths soiled in the same abominable manner” (24 Sept 1795).

Even the highly anticipated appearances by Sarah Siddons do not seem to have quelled the unruly gallery members. As we have seen, by the mid-1780s Liverpool audiences were so eager to see this now London-approved actress “that many injuries, both of body and dress, were sustained, so great was the pressures of the crowd to get admittance into the play-house” (Moss 125-6). Her engagement in 1797 included a performance of *Jane Shore*, “which had sent London audiences into fits of sobbing and hysterics” and was therefore expected to have the same effect at Liverpool (Kennard 151). Yet her appearance at the Theatre Royal failed to tame the boisterous individuals in

season (1773-4) to the next (1774-5). It therefore seems more likely that, as a star engagement, his name was used in an attempt to attract public attention and respect.

the gallery who decided to indulge themselves in loud and mocking cross-dialogue from each side of the gallery, ridiculing the rich merchants and their families seated in the surrounding boxes (Broadbent 89). In his biography of Sarah Siddons, A. Kennard recounts the purported reaction of the actress to the volume and longevity of their outbursts: “She went on the stage; said aloud, ‘It is useless to act’, crossed her arms, and merely murmured the speeches; and it is a fact that, on the first night one of Mrs. Siddons’s masterpieces was acted in Liverpool, she went through the entire performance in dumb show” (151-2).

However Liverpool was not alone in the decreasing quality of audience behaviour by the last decade of the century. Putting the port within a wider provincial context we are able to ascertain that other major theatrical centres suffered from similarly negative reports. Interestingly, local concerns about the standards of theatre in neighbouring Manchester did not come from the national press, but from some of the town’s audience members themselves. In March 1800, *The Monthly Mirror* noted that the theatre had been “very thinly attended this season” due to the town’s “dissatisfaction with the company” and poor standards of acting, scenery and costume (Vol.9, 184). The main consequence of this was an “outbreak of pamphleteering” around the town as a means of expressing local frustration (Hodgkinson & Pogson 155). The same month the pamphlet, “A Peep into the Theatre Royal”, appeared in local circulation, which attacked the managers “on the score of parsimony and disrespect to the town” and was deemed “vulgar and scurrilous” enough to warrant discussion in *The Monthly Mirror* (Vol.9, 184). Under the subtitle, “The Manchester Dispute”, the editorial goes on to claim that the pamphlet proceeds to abuse the performers “in terms unexampled for grossness and indecency” (Vol.9, 184). One month later, a local resident wrote to the *Monthly Mirror* to contextualise the pamphlet and articulate the concerns over the standards of performance at the Manchester theatre, although he also admits that the text was “well characterised by the epithets, ‘vulgar and scurrilous’” (Vol.9, 246). There is no reference in either *The Monthly Mirror* or *The Manchester Mercury* to any physical violence or rioting from the Manchester public during this time but some of the town had instead clearly decided that boycotting

the theatre and producing negative and damning pamphlets was an effective alternative means of protest. However Liverpool's audiences were certainly not unique in the more violent practice of hurling objects around the auditorium, and not necessarily from the cheapest seats in the gallery, as one particular incident at the Edinburgh Theatre Royal proves. In August 1797 an article in the *Oracle and Public Advertiser* reported that some days earlier a large stone decanter had been thrown down from one of the higher boxes, seriously injuring a gentleman at the front of the pit: "A very violent tumult took place, and the most anxious desire was shown throughout the audience to discover the inhuman perpetrator of this vile outrage" (9 Aug 1797). Although the theatre's current manager, John Philip Kemble, offered a reward of ten guineas and the culprit was eventually discovered, the report concludes noting that the programme continued under a "general gloom" (*Oracle and Public Advertiser* 9 Aug 1797). Kathleen Barker's study of Bristol's Theatre Royal during this period also provides a useful comparison of audience behaviour in a maritime town heavily affected by the Napoleonic Wars. She notes that the dominant presence of the militia and navy during this decade often provided a swell in audience figures at the Theatre Royal but, "while traditionally soldiers and sailors were keen theatre patrons, their behaviour, even that of the officers, was not always ideal" (Barker *The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 61). In December 1793 the newspaper, *World (1787)*, reported a duel in the town which resulted from a public disagreement about the performance of *God Save the King* in the town's theatre: "This was called for by Lieut. D. in the middle of the afterpiece, which Lieut. B. who sat just before him, considering as a disturbance, called him to order, and afterwards a *puppy*. His opponent, fired at this appellation, insisted that he should leave the theatre, and go with him to a coffee-house, to answer for his words" (17 Dec 1793). Kathleen Barker supports this suggestion of increased rowdiness within the auditorium, noting that "Young Bloods in the Gallery and Upper Boxes took to beating their sticks on the balustrades to express their applause" and knocking off the new gilding in the process, as well as reports of a pistol being fired in the midst of a performance (*The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 61). Liverpool was therefore not unique in the negative reports of its increasingly

rowdy audiences but they were heightened by mounting national criticism over its financial prosperity and standard of productions.

Yet is it fair, or indeed accurate, to take these negative reports at face value and concur with the popular bleak and uncultured stereotype that was pinned on to Liverpool at the end of the eighteenth century? Despite the barrage of criticism levelled at the theatre by the end of the 1790s, I believe that this was the period when the Theatre Royal structured its maritime focus and substantiated the role of a distinct Liverpool theatre. Liverpool's Theatre Royal built on national trends to further develop its own distinct brand of cultural affluence as the productions echoed concerns that affected the nation as a whole but were particularly significant for the town. The onset of the Napoleonic Wars profoundly affected both the civic and cultural life of this strategically important North West port. Following three years of rebellion France abolished its monarchy in 1792 and declared itself a Republic. Such unprecedented political action shocked the rest of Europe and fears increased following the subsequent execution of Louis XVI in January 1793. The abolition of a ruling monarchy indicated an extreme radicalism that threatened to spread across the continent as France invaded Prussia in January 1793, followed quickly a declaration of war against Britain the following month. Britain now faced "the most serious challenge to her social and political structure since the Glorious Revolution" as the nation contended with potential invasion and military exhaustion, as well as new reformist ideologies circulating dangerously close and threatening the social cohesion of the nation (O'Gorman 233).

The onset of a war so close to home posed particular worries for Liverpool on two fronts. As a maritime trading post, the beginning of a naval-based war could cause considerable economic disruption to its prosperous triangular trade. The wars caused a decrease in shipping activity in European waters and the decade therefore resulted in a period of "depressed trading conditions brought about by the Napoleonic Wars" (Wilson *William Roscoe* 13). Aside from commercial considerations there was a further threat to Liverpool's future. Whilst its accessible Atlantic coastal

location was fundamental to the town's success, this also left it ideally placed as a target for foreign invasion. As T.C.W. Blanning notes, this war depended on naval warfare and "it was in the Atlantic [...] that the war against Great Britain would be won or lost" (200). Liverpool's vulnerable position was then further increased by the alliance of the French army with the Society of United Irishmen, an active group of Protestant Irish rebels seeking a break away from ruling England (O'Gorman 319). Ireland, which had recently represented a positive trading base for Liverpool, was now a potential launching pad for French invasion of the North West of England.

In the midst of these serious economic and civic concerns a new prelude was introduced at the Theatre Royal, entitled "Effusions of Loyalty; or, The Glorious First of June" (23 June 1794), which signalled the beginning of a fresh maritime theme to the supplementary pieces that accompanied the main central drama on the programme. The central character is described representatively as "an English Sailor", played here by Joseph Munden¹⁴. The playbill for the evening includes this new prelude "in which will be introduced the favourite songs of God Save The King, Britons Strike Home, and Rule Britannia" (*Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligence* 23 Jun 1794). The production referred to the recent climactic five-day battle between General Howe's British fleet and a French fleet attempting to safeguard a convoy of ships carrying grain from America back to France. A dozen French ships were destroyed or captured along with ten per cent of their manpower, signalling that France proved unable to succeed against Britain on the open sea (Blanning 202). Such a success boosted national enthusiasm and celebrations were rife across the country. Re-enactments of naval battles and British victories became common fare on playbills across the country. Gillian Russell points out that minor pieces, or afterpieces, such as these are where "we must look in order to explore the explicit representation of the events of the French wars in the

¹⁴ Munden actually seems to have made his first appearance on stage at the Liverpool theatre in 1776. In the biography of his father, Thomas Shepherd Munden records that, although the details surrounding the beginning of his career are not clear-cut, he travelled to Liverpool in 1776 aged eighteen years old and got a position in the Town Clerk's Office: "It was at Liverpool that he met with Shuter, and experienced his kindly attentions. The demon of theatrical mania took possession of his soul, and he is said to have played sundry characters, of small repute, for eighteen-pence per night" (*Memoirs of Joseph Shepherd Munden, Comedian* 9).

British theatre" (*The Theatres of War* 59-60). This production was performed for the first time in Liverpool and it demonstrated the town's theatrical contribution to the fierce national patriotism - "however superficially irrelevant the national conviction of Britain's superiority at sea" (Bratton "Introduction" 4) - as well as a mixture of relief and pride that Britain had proved itself so able in naval warfare and thus, crucially for local residents, in defending this North West trading port. The central spectacle of the production revolved around a mechanical centrepiece which transformed the stage in to the much beloved sea (Russell 60). The first production recorded in London to honour General Howe's success, "A Loyal Effusion", had been presented only twelve days earlier on Wednesday 11 June (*Oracle and Public Advertiser* 13 Jun 1794). Even in times of international conflict, Liverpool was still eager to show itself to be keeping up with the nation's capital. The link between Liverpool and London wartime theatre became most obvious in July 1794 when Liverpool produced a special benefit night, the profits of which went to the "fund for the relief of the widows and orphans of the brave men who fell in the late Glorious action under Earl Howe" (*Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligence* 21 Jul 1794). One week earlier London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane had given the first theatre benefit evening for the same cause and the programme included a prologue, "The Glorious First of June", written by Joseph Richardson and delivered by John Philip Kemble. This poignant piece highlighted the strength of British pride and national solidarity in honouring those who died:

Ye gallant spirits, who to heaven are fled,
Now rank'd, now honour'd with the glorious dead,
If of your former being aught survive,
And memory holds her dear prerogative,
How will you heighten'd natures joy to see
Old England safe – Old England safe and free

(*Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligence* 14 Jul 1794).

Liverpool echoed the capital by repeating the prologue during their own benefit night one week later delivered by Henry Siddons, the nineteen-year-old son of Sarah Siddons.

Of course Liverpool was not unique in its dedication to producing war-themed afterpieces at the theatre during these uncertain years. As we have seen, London led the way in regularly composing and introducing topical and patriotic representations, addresses and re-enactments that were continually rehashed and refreshed across the country. If we consider Bristol once more as a significant maritime location we know that, as well as the increased number of soldiers within the auditorium, “the repertory was modified to suit the mood of the times” (Barker *The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 62). Barker highlights a couple of new favourably received afterpieces appearing at the theatre as evidence of this, including *Sprigs of Laurel*, *Bantry Bay*, and *The Mouth of the Nile* (62). However, significantly, she also stated that due to the nearby encampments and the dominant military presence in the area, a significant proportion of the featured afterpieces during the second half of the 1790s focused on military achievements as well as the ongoing directions of the “ever-changing regiments near the city” (61): “One could indeed trace military movements in the West by the playbills of the theatres” (*The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 62).

It is therefore important to highlight that Liverpool’s contribution to this theatrical trend is predominantly focused on the Navy, rather than the Military, and the maritime achievements of the country’s sailors. The port’s dedication to a maritime-themed programme during the mid-nineties becomes self-evident when scrolling through the 1793-5 editions of *Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligence* (formerly *Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Chronicle*). The playbills are full of interludes, farces, musical entertainment and scenic representations pertaining to the French wars, as well as the patriotic image of the British sailor (*Appendix 5*). The Tar hero had become a fashionable figure in the late eighteenth century through the songs of Charles Dibdin the Elder and he continued to be the “hero of the naval wars of the period” through to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 (Bratton “British Heroism and Melodrama” 43). In September 1794 the

theatre advertised the musical interlude, “British Gratitude, and Hibernian Friendship; or, An Escape from France”, which we are told was “performed several nights last season, at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, with considerable applause” (*Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 1 Sept 1794). Musical interludes and nautical entertainment such as “a Pantomimic piece in one act, called The Shipwreck; or, French Ingratitude”, which concluded with a round of “Rule Britannia and God Save the King” (*Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 17 Aug 1795), a new one-act musical production of *The Sailor’s Prize; or, Safe in Harbour* (*Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 21 Aug 1797), and the one-act operatic piece “The Point at Herqui; or, British Bravery Triumphant, founded on the recent and glorious achievement at the above French fort, by Sir Sydney Smith” (*Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 22 Aug 1796), were examples of local favourites rounding off the evening’s entertainment. Broadbent also notes that “Napoleon’s threatened invasion of England in 1798 was responsible for the production at the theatre on September 12 of a one-act musical piece, called *The Raft; or, Both Sides of the Water*, ‘with a representation of a French raft’” (96). Two years earlier, the theatre produced the musical maritime afterpiece, *The Divertissement*, featuring a variety of imitations and songs including “The Liverpool Tar” and “A Sailor’s Life is a Life of Woe” (*Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 29 Aug 1796). The popularity of such performances is significant amongst Liverpool’s maritime-focused audiences and Russell points out that many “would have joined in the singing [...] thereby uniting actors and audience in a celebration of patriotic values” (*The Theatres of War* 65). The playbill printed in *Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* on 5 September 1794 tells us that a representation of *Britain’s Glory; or, A Trip to Portsmouth* is to “conclude with a Grand Naval Processions, consisting of Officers, Sailors, Ship-Carpenters, Rope-Makers, Caulkers, and the Marine Society, &c. interspersed with Flags Emblematical Trophies and The Arms of Liverpool” (1 Sept 1794): a dramatic demonstration of local patriotism and pride in the practical role Liverpool played in the Napoleonic Wars.

Through the Theatre Royal's programmes we can recognise the overwhelming sense of energy, time and effort devoted to the French wars by Liverpool's residents. Broadbent tells us that Liverpool's merchants were so keen to ward off potential French invasion that they were prepared to physically defend the port themselves. As such, he tells us, "they accordingly practised gunnery at the fort, until they could work, serve, and manage the guns as well as the most proficient" (89). This local enthusiasm was spurred on in 1797 by the most worrying threat that Liverpool had yet faced. Following their defeat in June 1794, the French decided to change tactics and attempted "to invade Britain by the back door, through Ireland" (Blanning 203). Three attempts were made in total but the first in 1796 posed the greatest threat. The French had joined up with the Society of United Irishmen and their leader Theobald Wolfe Tone and between them they planned to land a French fleet at Bantry Bay, a fishing port in the south west of Ireland. However due to a combination of bad weather and misinterpreted signals the French never managed to set foot on British soil. But they did get frighteningly close as a diary entry of Wolfe Tone's demonstrates: "we have been now six days in Bantry Bay, within five hundred yards of the shore, without being able to effectuate a landing" (*The Autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone* 203). This direct attempt made by the French to invade a British port further emphasised to Liverpool's residents the dangers of a coastal location. Two effects of this immediate concern were felt in the town's Theatre Royal. The first was that, in keeping with previous programme content, the playbills in March 1797 featured a spectacle entitled "Cork in Uproar", a representation of the panic caused by France's attempted invasion (Broadbent 89). The second was to provide audience dissenters with a reason to disrupt an evening performance. I referred earlier to the extensive gallery noise that ruined an anticipated performance by Sarah Siddons and this disruption was down to the gallery audience's mockery of the arduous efforts of the merchants to defend the town: "The house was crowded, and the 'galleryites' seeing the principal merchants with their families present, thought it a delightful opportunity of indulging their wit respecting the 'soldiering'" (Broadbent 89). In his account of the evening, Kennard includes an account from former actress Harriet Beauclerk (née Mellon) that the

rowdy members of the gallery “formed two bands, one on each side of the gallery, and, from the commencement of the play to the end, kept up a cross-dialogue of impertinence, about ‘charging guns with brown sugar and coconuts [*sic*]’ and ‘small arms with cinnamon powder and nutmegs’” (151). The increasingly negative and rowdy behaviour of the Liverpool Theatre Royal audiences can therefore be seen as a social demonstration of the regional stress of possible wartime invasion, combined with the political and public disagreements that had come to plague this anxious port-town.

Yet despite Liverpool’s internal struggles, there is substantial evidence that the town did not lose the independent community spirit that had spurred on its economic prosperity and cultural ambitions throughout the eighteenth century. Two key events in the Theatre Royal support this claim. The first occurs in 1794, scarcely four months after the theatre had celebrated the ‘Glorious First of June’. On 3 October a new one-act piece was introduced into the programme, entitled *The Liverpool Prize; or, An Offering to Britannia*. From the title alone, it is clear that this production was inspired by a feeling of civic pride and the accompanying narrative underlines this, describing it as “a grand procession of all the nations of the world, the Genius of Liverpool in a Triumphant Car, attended by Loyalty, Peace, Commerce, and Plenty” (*Billinge’s Liverpool Advertiser* 29 Sept 1794). This theatrical piece was plainly intended as a lavish visual representation of Liverpool’s confidence in its own worth. Whilst recognising that its international trading position posed a potential threat to its stability, the town remained proud of its importance, both on a national and world-wide scale. Liverpool is thus portrayed as Britain’s global representative, triumphantly leading the way towards peace and prosperity. The production actively scorns the damaging and arrogant attempts of the French to take over Europe, as well as reminding the rest of Britain that Liverpool is a source of vital importance and pride to the nation. Only two months earlier, John Bannister had paid tribute to the strategic and commercial importance of the town in an address spoken on his first appearance at the Liverpool theatre:

Is it a dream? or do I still appear

Before a London audience glittering here!
What gay, what splendid capital is this?
Does Britain boast a new metropolis?
Of old, while Europe, powerful, rich and great,
Reap'd the full honours of superior fate,
Her daring sons, beyond the Atlantic hide,
I imagin'd first new worlds, and then describ'd;
New splendours rous'd her from supine repose,
New scenes of rivalry and glory rose: -
London, itself, a world in later days,
Thus wakes from dreams of uncontested praise;
And views in Liverpool's ascending name,
A rival sphere of science, wealth and fame,
Sees liberal commerce thither waft her stores,
Sees sudden navies rose upon her shores;
Sees on the decks their gallant crews appear
In valour nurtur'd, and to freedom dear;
Who shall to England's brows new wreaths supply,
And lift some future Howe to victory.

(Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer 11 August 1794)

The opening lines of the address clearly aim to appeal to the proud nature of the port as Bannister strokes their ego and hopes to endear himself to this northern "capital" which, he claims, challenges the dominance of London on several cultural, commercial and economic levels. Many of the sentiments alluding to Liverpool's great commercial rise are similar to those expressed in the prologues we considered twenty years earlier, but now the town also has another vital maritime role as a key port for the country's heroic navy.

The other theatrical event to demonstrate civic solidarity occurred after the second death known to have happened upon the Theatre Royal's stage. On 2 August 1798, John Palmer died whilst performing the title role in Benjamin Thompson's *The Stranger* (1798), a translation of the German play, *Menschenhass und Reue* (trans. Misanthropy and Repentance; 1790), by August von Kotzebue. Palmer had recently lost his wife, followed shortly by one of his younger sons, and had struggled for several years with bad health and threats of bankruptcy. It is perhaps interesting that he died in Liverpool after delivering the line, "there is another and a better world" (Moss 124), words that could be viewed as ironic in the context of the abolition movement and contemporary criticism levied at the town. However what is important to note here is that following Palmer's sudden death, Liverpool rallied round to support his eight orphaned children, "who in a few months had lost father, mother, brother, and uncle" (Broadbent 94). The theatre held a benefit evening and William Roscoe wrote the monody for the occasion (as spoken by Mr Holman), a copy of which was reproduced in *Gore's General Advertiser* a couple of days later:

-Here on this very spot, to every eye confest,

Inrob'd with terrors, stood the kingly guest.

-Here, on this spot, Death wav'd th'unerring dart,

And struck his noblest prize – An Honest Heart! (qtd. in Broadbent 94)¹⁵

This excerpt demonstrates the honour and respects paid by the residents of Liverpool to a long-standing favourite of the town who had given his final months to the Liverpool stage.

Looking Towards a New Century

Colin G. Pooley describes Liverpool in 1800 as "an attractive destination" with "a distinctive occupational, social and cultural structure" that was engendered by its huge success as an

¹⁵ Unfortunately this edition of the newspaper no longer exists and, as it does not appear to have been printed anywhere else, we are here reliant upon Broadbent for an accurate reproduction of Roscoe's monody.

international port (175). This snapshot picture of the town at the turn of the century epitomises the unique character and quality of the area that is passed over by critics who labelled it void of cultural worth. At the end of the eighteenth century, Liverpool's commercial interests were still the dominant force in the town and although attempts had been made to instigate institutions of high literary and artistic culture akin to those in London and other contemporary towns, it was not yet the right time. Instead the town flourished in its efforts to promote organisations that relied heavily on the dominant and profitable maritime interests of its residents:

The identity of Liverpool's emergent cultural institutions is determined in part by its prosperous commercial nature [...] The impetus to institutionalize also seems to be produced out of the belief that disseminating the benefits of the arts to as wide a public as possible will be "productive" both aesthetically and economically (Whale 96).

Of course it is undeniable that Liverpool was not short of social problems in the years leading up to the nineteenth century and it would be unwise to overlook or dismiss the struggles faced by the town council in overcoming a fiscal downturn and appeasing local residents. But if we take into consideration the poor economic and international climate, as well as factoring in the social issues arising from a town emerging from a period of dramatic growth and fiscal expansion, Liverpool's situation by the end of the eighteenth century does not seem as negative as critics have been eager to claim. The shifting position of the Theatre Royal is a cultural reminder of this. The shabby and neglected condition of the theatre echoed the economic struggles faced by Liverpool, and indeed the nation, during a period of expensive naval warfare. Yet these restrictions did not dampen civic pride and the theatre went on to produce highly popular local and national productions which catered for the audience's regional interests and lifted the spirits and confidence of its residents.

By 1800 the foreign threat had eased as France lost a series of battles with Spain and the Netherlands and was persuaded to sign the Treaty of Amiens 1801, heralding a temporary truce with Britain (O'Gorman 236). With the prospect of future stability, plans were made to re-launch

Liverpool's Theatre Royal as a more fitting symbol of civic and cultural pride. In 1800 the desire to have "a new and more commodious theatre in the town" had been raised and building work commenced in December 1802 (Broadbent 104). This new building was a symbol for the flourishing community spirit and pride of the town at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For unlike the old theatre, which had been built on a foundation of merchant subscriptions, the new Theatre Royal represented a cross-section of the people of Liverpool. The council decided on raising the money for its construction via a series of benefit evenings over two years, the profits of which went towards a new theatre and not an individual actor as was the norm. It was thus the town's residents, gallery dwellers and wealthy box spectators alike, who successfully worked together to launch Liverpool's theatre into the nineteenth century.

Chapter Two: Revival, Growth and Tension at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

Liverpool's Theatre Royal re-opened on 6 June 1803 to great anticipation under the management of Thomas Knight and W.T. Lewis. The new managers showed a return to the competitive pride of old in their promise to the town's inhabitants of a grand, opulent and elegantly refurbished theatre that would rival the country's best. A report in the July 1803 edition of *The Monthly Mirror* stated it to be "at once the most elegant, commodious, compact, and chastely proportioned building for the purpose of theatrical exhibition in the United Kingdom", whilst the managers themselves promised the town's inhabitants that "they have the honour to assure the Town that in the Direction of it, no exertion shall be wanting to support its consequence, and to give general satisfaction" (Vol.15, 403). Their promise seems to have been effective as *The Monthly Mirror* noted the early success of the theatre, praising in particular the efforts of Thomas Knight in his efforts to re-launch the theatre:

The liberal proprietors and managers of this delightful theatre are reaping a golden harvest. Knight has been very successful during the absence of his friend and partner Lewis, who is just arrived, and the town seems so much delighted with the whole company, and the various bills of fare, that no doubt seems to be entertained as to the ultimate success and eminent advantage of the concern (Vol.15, 402).

The new theatre was built on the back of a resurgence in community spirit, with the money for its refurbishment raised through a series of benefit evenings and public donations. This communal support explains the local pride in their new theatrical venue but the additional line written by Lewis and Knight on the end of their public notice (asserting that "no exertion shall be wanting") also highlights that they were aware of the need to plough all their energy and resources into sustaining this public support in order to avoid the type of criticisms levied against the original Theatre Royal. This chapter aims to explore how Liverpool came to consider itself a force in the national cultural landscape once more and identifies to what extent the productions and events at the Theatre Royal symbolised the town's growing self-confidence in its own civic identity at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Designed by Liverpool architect John Foster, who was best known for his position as dock and corporate surveyor, the Theatre Royal was built in stone with a semi-circular front and decorated with the King's Arms (Broadbent 112). Inside, the auditorium was changed to the more fashionable horseshoe shape with a grandly decorated proscenium arch that, according to a report in *The Monthly Mirror* in August 1803, was complemented by elegant interior design throughout the rest of the building:

The fronts of the boxes are painted with a sort of lattice work silvered, and medallions beautifully executed. The supporters of the boxes are light, well-portioned, cast-iron pillars, gilded. There are four and twenty of the handsomest lustres we ever saw; twelve of which, somewhat larger than the others, are suspended at equal distance round the lower tier; eight round the second tier; and four above those, round the third or highest tier (Vol.16, 65).

The report is not without any criticism however as it notes rather wistfully that "we could wish the proscenium had been less richly ornamented, for, however beautifully executed, it does not entirely harmonize with the light, elegant decorations of the other parts of the house" (Vol.16, 65). But despite this potential overly extravagant expression of the town's prosperity, positive reports of the theatre's successful opening season continued. From a fiscal point of view, a paragraph in *The Morning Post* declared that the summer season had been "tolerably productive" and cited profits from the benefit evenings as evidence of this, with London favourites Julia Glover taking nearly 350 pounds and John Emery bringing in over 300 pounds (15 Sept 1803). Despite the ticket prices being raised by sixpence during the summer season (boxes: 4s 6d; upper boxes: 4s; pit: 3s; gallery 1s 6d) the August 1803 edition of *The Monthly Mirror* reported that although "seldom crowded, it has been uniformly well attended" (Vol.16, 66) and Knight and Lewis had the confidence to re-introduce a winter season, beginning immediately at the end of the summer, and thus opening the theatre for ten months straight. Although it took three years for the theatre to begin to make a continuous profit (*The Morning Chronicle* 28 Aug 1806), it seemed to be bringing in enough to stay afloat during these opening seasons. There were also no reports of any local protest against the raised prices.

In addition to their apparent financial stability during the theatre's opening year, reviews of audience standards and behaviour differed dramatically from those featured in the national press at the end of the previous century. Just a few weeks after opening, *The Morning Post* noted the current engagement of Thomas Cooper, an English actor who had migrated to the American stage. Cooper was born in England and began his theatrical career with Stephen Kemble's company in Edinburgh before moving to America in 1796 where he would achieve substantial critical and popular success (Maginnes 71-5). From 1802 to 1804 he briefly returned to the English stage, only to return to New York shortly after (Maginnes 73). His engagement in Liverpool seems to have lasted just a few weeks but the note in *The Morning Post* suggests the provincial importance of the apparently rejuvenated town: "Cooper is performing on the Liverpool stage with most extraordinary success; and the people of that town are esteemed among the best judges out of London" (23 July 1803). Such a turnaround of opinion on the state of Liverpool's audiences seems extraordinarily quick given the censure received by the theatre at the end of the eighteenth century. This sense of growing national approval indicates that the port's cultural status was on the rise.

The Influence of William Roscoe – Commercial and Cultural Harmony

A key factor in exploring Liverpool's renewed cultural vigour was the work of William Roscoe at the turn of the century. Some sense of his influence and impact on the town is vital to understanding the cultural identity of Liverpool at the beginning of the nineteenth century and, in turn, the role of the Theatre Royal within it. Often identified as Liverpool's "cultural icon and architect" (Wilson "The Florence of the North" 36), Roscoe's cultural achievements and vision underpinned, in my view, the confident re-emergence of the Theatre Royal. In 1796 he published a biography of Lorenzo de' Medici, the de facto ruler of the Florence Republic during the Italian Renaissance era. In this detailed work Roscoe proudly declares his fascination with the "ardour and example of Lorenzo", stating that under his rule Florence was "the empire of science and true taste" (xxii). He saw inspiration for the future of his hometown in the fifteenth-century Republic, admiring the

“apotheosis of the union between culture and commerce” (Wilson “The Florence of the North” 36). His writing highlights his belief in the happy and successful union of business and culture as he intimates the lessons that can be learnt from following Lorenzo’s governing acumen. The Italian ruler was, like Roscoe, a poet and artist also. His cultural endeavours saw the considerable expansion of the Medici Library (commonly known as the famous Laurentian Library from the sixteenth century onwards), whilst his business sense maintained successful trade links with the Ottoman Empire (although Roscoe chooses to gloss over Medici’s questionable autocratic style of governance). However it is fair to say that the state of Florence flourished under his rule and it is his successful establishment of cultural institutions and intellectual stimulants, whilst not neglecting commerce and trade, that Roscoe admires: “the multiplicity of his public concerns did not prevent Lorenzo from attending to his domestic affairs, and taking necessary precautions for continuing with advantage those branches of commerce which had proved so lucrative to his ancestors” (Roscoe *The Life of Lorenzo de Medici* 80).

Roscoe was heavily involved in the foundation of the Athenaeum in Church Street in 1797, which became “Liverpool’s most enduring cultural institution” (Wilson *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* 72).¹⁶ The newsroom opened in January 1799, swiftly followed by the Library in July. The same year Roscoe became Vice-President of the institution, a role he continued in for two years, thereafter becoming President from 1803-1804 and an active committee member. Writing in 1928, Robert Mackenna argued that the Athenaeum supplied the demand from Liverpool’s wealthier inhabitants for the latest news and information from the capital: “It met, and met adequately, a long recognised public need. It catered excellently for the urgent demand for newspapers. It supplied eighteen copies of nine different London daily papers, and thirty-three other newspapers, magazines and reviews were subscribed for” (8). The institution was an acknowledged success and details of

¹⁶ The first meeting to discuss initial ideas for the building took place in November 1797 at the Theatre Tavern in Williamson Square – a public house presumably next to, or very close to, the Theatre Royal. Could this discussion have ended with a subsequent trip to the theatre?

its achievements travelled across the globe. The Boston Athenaeum was established in 1807 and it took its cultural influences from this English North West port, previously only internationally associated with trade and money:

The City of Learning had now reached that point of wealth, at which societies, which have been hitherto merely mercenary and commercial, begin to turn their attention to learning and the Fine Arts, that is they perceive that something more than great riches is necessary to make a place worthy of being visited, and interesting enough to be admired (Story 186).

The strength of this global impact supports Wilson's argument that the Athenaeum "helped to establish Liverpool as a cultural role model" (*William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* 73). However Roscoe did not finish his cultural reinvention there. His practical influence continued to extend further at the turn of the century with the launch of the Botanic Gardens in 1802. Once again his design followed the Italian example but in this instance Liverpool was also catching up with its respected provincial contemporaries. Oxford laid out its Botanic Gardens as early as 1621, closely followed by Edinburgh (1667), Chelsea (1673) and Kew (1759) (Wilson *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* 74). However it is at this point that Roscoe came in to his element and where his work initiated an ideological change, as well as a physical one. He realised the need for these new institutions to engage the merchant residents of Liverpool on a cultural stage as well as providing a forum for social ingratiation. To this end the garden appealed to the commercial and cultural aspirations of the mercantile elite: "The Garden would be a place of beauty and a source of 'elegant amusement', but it could also, through botanical experiments, contribute to advances in medicine, agriculture and manufacturing" (Wilson *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* 75). The Gardens thus provided a location for professional advancement, whilst wealthy subscribers and their families could parade through the grounds for their contemporaries to admire. Furthermore Wilson records that even grander visitors graced the gardens with their presence, including the Duke of Clarence and the Prince of Wales (*William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* 79). The impact of the gardens, combined with the grand new Athenaeum and the less-exclusive but still admirable Lyceum library in

Bold Street, enabled the affluent residents of the town to rediscover an enjoyable way to embrace culture and commerce on common public ground.

Importantly, Liverpool's self-imposed cultural reinvention attracted wider attention throughout the nation. Roscoe's intellectual publications and urban achievements "brought reappraisal of Liverpool's image and kindled interest in the cultural identity of the town" (Wilson "The Florence of the North" 37). Before considering how this change in national opinion had an effect on the theatrical output of the town, it is worth firstly looking at Liverpool's economic and social position at the dawn of the nineteenth century. By 1801 the population of the borough of Liverpool stood at 77,653, making it a "substantial global city" (Pooley 171). Despite the increase in population, Liverpool remained a reasonably compact town with the urban area stretching only 3 kilometres along the River Mersey and just 2 kilometres inland (Pooley 176). According to the 1801 census, there were 13,690 dwellings, meaning that there was, on average, a mean density of 6.6 persons per house, allowing for areas of obvious variation (Pooley 176). As we have seen, the end of the eighteenth century saw the town's wealthier inhabitants move away from the dockside to the newly-built squares and grand streets further inland. The turn of the century saw the formation of distinct developed areas that shaped the social identity of the town's centre. The area surrounding the Town Hall and Exchange had a predominantly high-status population with "few cellar dwellings or men employed in labouring occupations, and population densities were mostly low" (Pooley 176). Similarly the edge of town, including the higher ground towards Everton, tended towards higher status families also. However, as before, the dockside and commercial centre were still characterised by higher occupancy levels and a labouring population (Pooley 176). The lure of profitable economic and social prospects encouraged an inflow of migrants but also created a unique, transient urban identity. The success of the town's port meant that travellers, sailors and merchants were constantly entering and leaving the town. Additionally the expanding labour market provided a growing need for casual or low-skilled workers: "Liverpool also attracted speculative migrants who might tramp from place to place looking for work together with some

vagrants and vagabonds” (Pooley 194). As such, the very nature of the town was of a fluid, ever-expanding and, importantly, ever-changing urban space. Yet despite the ebb and flow of its inhabitants, the town’s geographical and political structure appeared to have, at last, found its feet.

Colin Pooley argues that the increased population and influx of migrants entering the town for economic or social opportunities “helped to shape the distinctive occupational, social and cultural structure of the city at the start of the nineteenth century” (175). This statement is certainly supported when we think of how the town’s cultural institutions reflected its civic identity. As I have shown, the human make-up of the town at this point in its history was defined by its maritime position but Liverpool also strived to separate itself from the rest of the North in economic terms. M.J. Power succinctly and accurately states the difference between Liverpool and the rest of the North, arguing that “as England industrialized, however, Liverpool de-industrialized” (28). Despite the dawn of a new century, Liverpool retained the self-imposed sense of exceptionalism and separation that had characterised its position in the late eighteenth century. The town’s elite deliberately chose to focus on the commercial output of the port and its connected trade, rather than follow their contemporaries into industry and manufacturing. This, of course, is not surprising considering the town’s recent phenomenal economic growth. Their decision is particularly evident when we compare the direction of Liverpool compared to its nearest northern contemporary, Manchester. By the turn of the century the cotton trade had developed firm roots in Lancashire, spurred on by the introduction of steam power. Whilst both Liverpool and Manchester had crucial roles in the industry, their positions were substantially different. The trade formed an integral part of the former’s maritime commerce whilst the latter focused on its industrial needs. Steam-powered factories were able to spring up in dense urban areas, thereafter shaping the layout and focus of Manchester, as well as its physical appearance: “Factories sprang up in not a few of the principal thoroughfares: perhaps it would be more correct to say that the building of factories often led to the formation of new streets” (Grindon 113). This grim description sits in stark contrast to

architectural descriptions of its northern neighbour. Where Manchester was densely packed, smoke filled and grey, the governing Liverpool Corporation instead encouraged space and elegance:

Dedicated to commerce rather than manufacturing, it was free from utilitarian mill buildings and the smoke and class that went with them. Its new residential quarter was well-planned, punctuated by classical churches and public buildings, and in its old, congested centre it was beginning to carve out spacious new thoroughfares (Sharples 17).

Arline Wilson argues that Liverpool's decision to associate the town's wealth with commerce rather than manufacturing was a conscious effort to remove itself further away from Manchester and its northern industrial identity, "whilst turning an envious eye towards the metropolis" ("The Florence of the North" 34). Her suggestion that the town harboured a desire to be like London, and yet removed from it at the same time, suggests that Liverpool still retained a unique split identity that kept it removed from its neighbours: "As a great commercial entrepot, Liverpool, although in the industrial North, was not of it, thus rendering it atypical in accounts challenging the image of a philistine northern bourgeoisie" (Wilson "The Florence of the North" 34). The town's influential inhabitants were keen to remove themselves from images of their industrial, factory-led neighbour. William Roscoe's inaugural address at the opening of the Royal Institution in November 1817 "offered heart-warming legitimisation for Liverpool gentlemen, and was a welcome contrast with the image of the 'Manchester Men'" (Wilson "The Florence of the North" 41). Liverpool, he implied, was culturally and commercially elite and could not be compared to contemporary northern 'working' towns.

The harmonious image put forward by Roscoe of commerce and culture working hand-in-hand is echoed in Washington Irving's rapturous descriptions of his first visit to Liverpool from America at the beginning of the century. Published in 1819, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* offers a fresh perspective on the town. Irving's authorial pseudonym voice recognises the practicalities of balancing "literature and the elegant arts" with "the coarser plants of daily

necessity” but he argues that the town has managed this better than most thanks to the “genius” of William Roscoe (31). Irving is first introduced to Roscoe during a visit to the Athenaeum:

He had a noble Roman Style of countenance; a head that would have pleased a painter; and though some slight furrows on his brow showed that wasting thought had been busy there, yet his eye still beamed with the fire of a poetic soul. There was something in his whole appearance that indicated a being of a different order from the bustling race around him (27).

Whilst Irving’s language is sensational in its style, the reverence he shows to this Liverpool resident is astounding. A little later in his description, he goes as far as comparing Roscoe to Pompey’s column at Alexandria, “towering alone in classic dignity” (38). His fame and literary standing had clearly been fairly established across the ocean and Irving usefully highlights the influence he believes that Roscoe, a great cultural enthusiast, has had on his hometown:

Born in a place apparently ungenial to the growth of literary talent; in the very market place of trade; without fortune, family connections, or patronage; self prompted, self sustained, and almost self taught, he has conquered every obstacle, achieved his way to eminence, and, having become one of the ornaments of the nation, has turned the whole force of his talents and influence to advance and embellish his native town (29).

However, whilst Roscoe did indeed play a central role in elevating Liverpool’s cultural reputation, he alone was not responsible for the rejuvenation of the whole town at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Rather it is my opinion that Roscoe was the public figurehead, or the celebrated reminder to the rest of the town to pursue its cultural endeavours with renewed vigour. Roscoe showed them how commerce and culture could work successfully together in a thriving urban environment.

One of the proudest expressions of cultural and economic harmony can be seen if we return to look at the re-opening of the Theatre Royal in 1803. The grand new building opened to considerable praise on 6 June 1803. The town displayed its pride in its theatrical institution onstage through rich ornamentation, complemented by a hearty verbal declaration of civic superiority. On the opening night Knight delivered a spirited address to the audience. The address was written by

London-born actor Thomas John Dibdin. The illegitimate son of Charles Dibdin and actress-dancer Harriet Smith, as well as the godson of David Garrick, Dibdin was born into a theatrical family of distinct reputation. After an extensive apprenticeship and gradual salaried engagements, it was not until Dibdin joined the Liverpool theatre in 1791 that he successfully earned the desirable Theatre Royal appointment (Dibdin 110). The North West had played an important role in his acting career and he was thus perfectly placed to sing the praises of the Liverpool Theatre Royal. Dibdin's address was printed in full in the August 1803 edition of *The Monthly Mirror* and it is worth examining the language of this speech in some detail as it offers a key dramatic expression of the town's cultural reinvention:

Well – our tackle's all ready – our hands are all staunch,
And a glorious sight of ye come to the launch!
We've built, as you see, a snug, tight pleasure boat,
And we hope that your honours will keep it afloat.
Each *cabin's* convenient, at least so we plann'd,
We've snug berths *below*, and our *tops* are well mann'd;
Our timbers are taught – all our canvas is new,
From London *first-rates* we've selected our crew.
And each on this *deck* comes with free inclination,
To rise in the service by your approbation,
At least we'll endeavour, in good or bad weather,
To keep all our passengers happy together;
Tho' with other provisions you find your own table,
We'll keep you in *spirits*, as long as we're able.
We've *artillery* too, care and folly to shoot,
And are arm'd, as these gentlemen tell ye, *en flute*, (*The Orchestra*)
We've great guns of tragedy, loaded so well,

If they do but go *off*, they'll be certain to *tell*,
 While with small shot of farce, and comedy swivels,
 We've sworn to burn, sink, and destroy the blue devils;
 But aim where we will, we shall ever desire,
 From your hands a broadside to second our fire.
 Should you ask with what freightage our vessel is stor'd,
 What cargo, what riches, we carry on board,
 Look round, you'll see all Briton's value on earth,
 True freedom, good nature, wit, beauty, and worth,
 With such landing as this, while our voyage we measure,
 Our anchor is Hope, and our compass – your pleasure: (*Going, returns.*)
 Yet hold – ere I go, you may think it but right,
 To know under what sort of colours we fight,
 Our vessel is royal – the standard your view,
 Which ne'er can be pulled down – while supported by *you*. (Vol.15, 403-404)

Dibdin's address is the most explicit acknowledgement of the successful civic partnership of commerce and culture that we have just seen in the work and aims of William Roscoe. Knight delivered the speech dressed as the familiar character of a sailor and the language directly compares the refurbished Theatre Royal to a ship, or "a snug, tight pleasure-boat", designed to profit its audience in entertainment and lavish spectacle. He alludes to each part of the theatre as sections of the ship – "Each *cabin's* convenient, at least so we'd plann'd / We've snug births *below*, and our *tops* are well mann'd" – and the italics provide an indication of the deliberate puns written to entertain and amuse those in each part of the auditorium. The first line, referring to the "cabin" would undoubtedly have been addressed to the richer people in the boxes, whilst those in the pit and gallery would have recognised the reference to themselves in the "births below" and the "tops". The article in *The Monthly Mirror* tells us that Knight's entrance was "greeted with enthusiastic

applause” and it seems reasonable to assume that the spectators would have cheered the acknowledgements of their presence (Vol.16, 403). Most of the audience would have been involved in the maritime trade in one form or another and it is therefore fitting that they are directly referred to in such nautical terms. Knight carried on the allusions as he proceeded to turn his attention to the people onstage. The pride Liverpool held in its sea-faring trade is transferred to pride in its theatrical standards as Knight boasted of providing the best actors available. However, fittingly, they become the crew of this theatrical ship: “From London *first-rates* we’ve selected our crew. / And each on *this* deck comes, with free inclination, / To rise in the service, by your approbation”. Despite, or perhaps because of, the town’s rising confidence, the theatre is keen to reassure its inhabitants that their dramatic standards are just as high as those employed in London and, thus, the London actors engaged for the season are willing and able to entertain and also to be scrutinized by the discerning Liverpool public. The audience is made up of the passengers, arriving to attend the grand launch of its new theatrical institution and to be reminded that they are the backbone of this grand institution. The concluding lines of the address remind the audience of the honour of having a theatre under royal patent (comparing the crest of the King’s arms to a ship flag) and emphasise the local support that is necessary to maintain their position: “Our vessel is royal – the standard you view, / Which can ne’er be pull’d down – whilst supported by you”.

Dibdin’s address also pays attention to another intrinsic aspect of Liverpool’s maritime identity at the turn of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, the port had a central role in the naval endeavours of the country during its wars with France in the 1790s and this was to continue post-1800. After a short-lived declaration of peace in 1801, war resumed in 1803 and the nation worried over the threat of invasion led by Napoleon Bonaparte. Dibdin acknowledges the importance of Liverpool’s coastal position in a humorous and entertaining manner, designed to stir the patriotic fibre of every audience member. His words have a dual meaning as he describes the pride the town has in both its excellence across the sea trade and its superior, well-built ships, as well as its ideally placed position in wartime. Thus, the theatre is producing “great guns of tragedy”

and a “small short of farce”, whilst the orchestra and their instruments are also compared to the navy and its war machinery, armed and ready: “We’ve *artillery* too, care and folly to shoot, / And are arm’d, as these gentlemen tell you, *influte (the Orchestra)*” (*The Monthly Mirror* Vol.15, 403-4). Again, the use of italics for emphasis and the stage direction at the end of the line – seemingly directing the wind section to give a blast on their instruments at the appropriate moment – remind us that this is written to be both proudly moving and entertaining. It invites audience response, resonating with the political climate of the time. As Knight delivered his enthusiastic address, the country was in the midst of “nothing less than a successful appeal to the nation in arms, with the result of that during 1803 over 800,000 men, more than one in five of the male population of military age, was in armed service” (Hilton 102). This was not an imaginative “we”; it was a frightening reality for many of the population. This section of the address reminds us that while Liverpool is proud of its own achievements and valuable position in the French wars, the speech is also contributing to the wave of national patriotism and honour felt throughout the country and its theatres. In his seminal volume, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, Boyd Hilton points out that between August and December 1803 “theatre goers could see *The Maid of Bristol, Henry V, Edward the Black Prince, Sheridan’s Pizarro* (starring Kemble and Siddons), *The English Fleet in 1342, Britons Strike Home, The Surrender of Calais, The Camp*, and a score of similarly tonic dramas” (104). Here Dibdin also voices his pride in being British, urging his audience to “look round, you’ll see all Briton’s value on earth, / True freedom, good nature, wit, beauty, and worth” (*The Monthly Mirror* Vol.15, 404). His patriotic rhetoric was a common literary style and echoed the “greatest martial fervour” seen during this period (Hilton 103).

However, bearing in mind the foundation of Liverpool’s economy and the weight of abolitionary criticism that had previously been levied against it, surely to publicly proclaim “true freedom” and “worth” onstage at the Theatre Royal smacks highly of hypocrisy? The town had always defended slavery as its major source of income both publicly and, as discussed in the previous chapter, through private petitions to parliament. Were the merchants and gentlemen of

Liverpool now trying to distance themselves from their slavery roots? My belief is that they were not but that they had now realised how to balance their commercial gains with their national image. The Triangular Trade continued to take up a large percentage of the port's shipping activity in the early years of the nineteenth century until its abolition in 1807. Although the last British slaver ship left the port in July of that year, "Liverpool continued to develop the trading connections which had been established by the slave trade, both in Africa and the Americas" ("Liverpool and the slave trade" *International Slavery Museum*). When the '1807 Orders in Council' banned trade with all of the French Empire, the town council – "a corporation of merchants which acted with an almost aggressive commercial optimism" – lobbied vehemently against it, despite its patriotic, French-hating public face (Power 26). Trade and its financial rewards were still therefore of the utmost importance to Liverpool but, equally, the town recognised the lay of the land and was motivated by the changing ideas on the slave trade. At the turn of the century "the town found itself subjected to public opprobrium in Parliament branded as the 'metropolis of slavery', with visitors expressing a similar moral distaste" (Wilson "The Florence of the North" 35). John Belchem identifies the need for Liverpool's "gentlemen" to make an ideological backtrack, suggesting that they deliberately distanced themselves morally from the slave trade: "Henceforth, the register of Liverpool enterprise was no longer the slave trade, but the remarkable rapidity and success with which it adapted to abolition, opening new markets and trade to Africa and elsewhere" (*Merseypride* 10). Especially painful for Liverpool was the loud criticism and commentary from Manchester, a neighbouring urban centre which Liverpool was keen to distance itself from. There was a need for Liverpool's prominent merchants to both defend and also redefine themselves and it is here that Roscoe, as "their cultural icon and architect" (Wilson "The Florence of the North" 36), played a vital civic role.

On a smaller scale, the town's cultural institutions followed Roscoe's lead by promoting a rich and balanced urban image. Dibdin's passionate opening night address was supported by newspaper reports from the management and critics alike. Managers Knight and Lewis promised the Liverpool public that "for elegance and accommodation, and for the *true purposes* of a Theatre,

that of Liverpool is not surpassed by any in the Kingdom” (Broadbent 110). However the comfort and accommodation they promised also extended in an unexpected direction. According to a report in the August 1803 *Monthly Mirror* “a prize [...] (French)” was brought in to Liverpool with nearly thirty men and women on board (Vol.16, 65). The report claims that Knight and Lewis offered all those taken prisoner free tickets to the theatre, “humanely wishing to soften the rigours of captivity [...] which they with joy accepted; and they nightly attend, escorted in parties of ten or a dozen” (Vol.16, 65). This article offers us a pertinent example of the deliberate efforts made by the town to redefine itself as a cultured and humanitarian community, far removed from the harsh images of the slave merchants portrayed in Thomas Southerne’s drama of the previous century. In the theatre’s productions we also find reports of elegance and fashionable culture amongst the maritime inhabitants of the town. On 12 September 1803 the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* published an article which reported that a special production of *Macbeth* had taken place in Liverpool on the Saturday before, performed by Officers from the Navy, Army and Gentleman of the town in aid of the Patriotic Fund at Lloyd’s of London. Lloyd’s was, and still is, an insurance company that specialised in the marine business, focusing particularly at this time on the insurance of slave-trading ships. However despite this connection, the patriotic fund was clearly established with the protection of Britain’s war ships in mind and the newspaper report makes no mention of any slavery connections, instead noting that “the performance was attended by a brilliant crowd of fashion, beauty, and elegance” (*Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* 12 Sept 1803). A community which had once been branded as commercially ruthless and inhumane now seemed to be respected both culturally and socially.

Onstage and Offstage Drama at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

In 1804 the country experienced the beginnings of what has been popularly referred to as ‘Bettymania’ and the newly revived Liverpool theatre played its part in the current national craze. Furthermore, the appearance of William Henry West Betty at the North West theatre had an

important impact on its local and national reputation. Theatre audiences across the country were desperate to see the revered performances of a young boy and both Theatres Royal Covent Garden and Drury Lane paid huge amounts to engage him during the 1804-1805 season: "Sheridan found crowds literally fighting to get their seats to see, believe it or not, a thirteen-year-old child called Master Betty playing major Shakespearean roles" (Dobbs 129). Betty's first appearance on stage at the Manchester Theatre Royal in November 1804 had produced a run on tickets as "people who ought to have known better lost their heads about him and made outrageous claims" (Hodgkinson & Pogson 166), while William Lowndes notes that the audience "bordered on hysteria" during Betty's first engagement at Bath as Orestes in *The Distressed Mother* in 1806 (38).

Two months before his capital début in 1804, Betty was engaged for approximately a week at the Liverpool Theatre Royal in October "by command of his Royal Highness Prince William of Gloucester", where "he continues to give the greatest satisfaction to the most crowded houses" (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmorland, &c.*, 20 Oct 1804). Although this grand patronage sounds reputable and well-founded, the twenty-seven year-old future Duke of Gloucester was commonly known as Silly Billy, pompous and comical in both his appearance and pursuits. During this period Prince William was residing in a villa just outside of Liverpool, having taken up the position of Commander in Chief of the North West. Betty and the Prince actually appear to have met for the first time at the beginning of the child-actor's engagement in Liverpool when, according to his memoirs, "he had the honour to enjoy the particular notice and protection" of the Prince (Merritt 50). As a result, the Prince publicly supported Betty's tour of the provincial theatres and commanded what roles he would perform in which place, as is clear from newspaper reviews of the actor's time in Liverpool: "He was also to perform *Richard the Third*, by command of Prince William of Gloucester; after that his Royal Highness commanded the tragedy of *Douglas* in which the little *Roscious* was also to perform" (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* 20 Oct 1804). According to Betty's own, rather biased, memoirs, his royal patron was eager to express his "admiration of the young gentleman's uncommon talents, and his anxious wish that every means

might be employed to bring such rare abilities to their full maturity” (Merritt 51). Despite the Prince’s exaggerated public persona, his promotion of the child-actor, combined with Betty’s own youthful charm, produced the most desirable theatre ticket in the country.

From a purely fiscal point of view, the main advantage of William Betty’s engagement at the Theatre Royal was a financial one. Three performances alone brought £900 into the theatre, a third of which was given to Betty as his share of the profit (*Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* 22 Oct 1804). Other newspapers produced similar reports with *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* stating that the theatre took over three hundred pounds for one night in late October and further estimating that Betty “will have acquired near twelve thousand pounds in the course of the present year” (3 Nov 1804). *The Theatric Tourist* stated that his engagement “drew fourteen or fifteen houses of nearly 300l. each night; the last of which was more crowded than the first. He cleared 1520l.” (Winston 53), whilst Betty’s memoirs support this claim, declaring that he received “the enormous sum of fifteen hundred and twenty pounds” as his share of the profits from his first fifteen night engagement at Liverpool (Merritt 49). Clearly the financial reward was profitable for both theatre and performer alike.

However equally important was the impact of Betty’s engagement on the mentality of Liverpool’s theatre-goers. The newspaper reports subtly remind their readers that they have the privilege of seeing the lauded performer on stage at their Theatre Royal *before* he treads the boards on both the London stages. Such a coup produced full houses and increased theatrical enthusiasm throughout Liverpool during Betty’s engagement, as this newspaper report notes: “The house was crowded, if possible, more than ever; nor was this wonderful youth less rapturously received” (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* 3 Nov 1804). Betty’s memoirs expand further on the reaction of the town to his engagement, claiming that “all his former successes at other places, however brilliant and unprecedented, were here completely eclipsed” (Merritt 47). This account of his engagement goes on to dramatically state that as soon as the box office opened in the morning,

“the pressure to procure places was so excessive , that many gentlemen had their clothes torn in pieces; their hats and shoes carried away in the crowd, and themselves, sometimes, severely bruised, and almost suffocated in the attempt” (Merritt 48). While this account of public hysteria ties in with the reports of frenzied behaviour in other provincial towns, it is worth noting that these memoirs were printed in November 1804 in Liverpool, “in great haste, from an eagerness to gratify the increasing curiosity of the Public on this interesting subject” (7), and written by J. Merritt, a Liverpool resident. Thus when Merritt states how Liverpool’s inhabitants are “particularly attached to dramatic amusements” (47) and the “house is also considerably more spacious than any other in the Empire” (48), we must remember to take these bold assertions lightly. However his account of the incredible popularity and local appeal of Betty in the town is borne out not only by a contemporary report in *The Theatric Tourist*, which agrees that “the success that young Betty experienced at this place, exceeded credibility” (Winston 53), but also by T. Troughton in *The History of Liverpool*, who confirms Merritt’s account of audience behaviour: “the populace thronged to the theatre, and so great was the difficulty of admittance, that several persons had their cloaths [sic] torn, and their hats and shoes lost in the struggle to behold this infantine phenomenon” (243).¹⁷ Managers Knight and Lewis managed to re-engage the young actor from May to June 1805 and he continued to produce financial and artistic success.

Betty’s appearance boosted the town’s engagement with its theatre, encouraging residents to value the establishment and simultaneously putting the theatre back on the national radar. The London newspaper, *The Morning Chronicle*, reported on the achievements of the theatre in an article entitled “The Mirror of Fashion”. It stated that “the Liverpool Theatre is very successful this season, and has been more so since the departure of little Betty” (18 Jul 1805). By 1806 the same newspaper noted that for the first time since its reopening in 1803, the Theatre Royal had finally

¹⁷ As *The History of Liverpool* was locally attributed to and known as *Troughton’s History of Liverpool*, although it was not published under his name, I will henceforth refer to Troughton as the probable author of this text to avoid confusion and continued clarification.

started to make a continuous profit and prove itself financially viable, thanks to the improved management of Knight and Lewis and the increased support of the town's residents: "In the first instance their calculations, as well as those of the Proprietors of that concern, were much too sanguine; and for the first years, they were considerably *minus*. The scene, however, is changed, and the prospect is no longer unpleasing" (*The Morning Chronicle* 28 Aug 1806). Liverpool appeared to have finally gained the respect of its contemporaries in the capital, establishing itself as a valuable cultural location.

However, hand in hand with the national revival of interest in Liverpool's Theatre Royal since its re-emergence in 1803 came a renewed interest in the scandals and offstage drama of the town. Just as sensational as the "star" actors or theatrical premieres were the unexpected theatrical crises that highlighted the national profile of the theatre. An interesting example of this can be found in a report in *The Morning Post* in June 1804. Entitled "Accident at the Liverpool Theatre", the article provides a blow-by-blow account of a potentially fatal onstage injury during a production of Edward Young's *The Revenge: A Tragedy*. In the final scene, the character of Alonzo is supposed to pretend to stab himself with a dagger but the report reveals that, due to a mix-up, the actor managed to stab himself for real. Horrific as this must have been, what is particularly interesting here is the newspaper's style of reporting the incident. It reports dramatically that "as he lay upon the stage, he called softly for help, saying, 'I am wounded. It is a real dagger' [...] He lost a great deal of blood. It flowed over the stage." (*The Morning Post* 27 Jun 1804). The account is sensationally written, favouring detailed onomatopoeic descriptions of a bloody scene designed to fascinate its reader. It also highlights the change in position of the theatre audience during this commotion. In one swift moment the line between spectator and participant is crossed as members of the audience "flew to the stage to gratify their curiosity" (*The Morning Post* 27 Jun 1804). They become part of the drama, albeit unscripted, as the difference between onstage and off becomes blurred. A similar, although less gruesome, example of the growing impact of the audience on theatrical practices occurred in Liverpool two years later. The actor, George Frederick Cooke, was appearing at the Theatre Royal in

the role of Richard III when he missed his footing and fell over at the feet of the actress playing Lady Anne Neville and was unable to carry on in the role that evening. The newspapers made much of this incident, using similarly sensationalised language as had been reported two years previously. *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* declared that “Mr Cooke was so overcome with the beauty of Lady Anne” that he stumbled to the floor (6 Sept 1806), whilst *The Morning Chronicle* sensationalised his fall further, calling it “Cooke’s spirited prostration in Richard, at the feet of Lady Anne” (9 Sept 1806). The use of italics in both articles suggest that, although this melodramatic style of reporting had become the *de rigour* style of the day, the critics are also mocking Cooke’s behaviour without referring directly to his renowned alcoholism, which was well known throughout the nation’s theatres. However Cooke’s behaviour during the following evening’s performance reminds us of the influence an audience now had on the action onstage. *The Morning Chronicle* reports that, fully aware of possible audience mutiny, Cooke “came forward with an air of contrition, and apologised with so much address, that instead of marks of disapprobation, he was rewarded with loud applause” (9 Sept 1806). Cooke was all too aware of the potential effects of audience discontent; an issue that exceeded anyone’s expectations in London in 1809, swiftly followed by Liverpool itself in 1810.

September 1809 saw the Theatre Royal Covent Garden re-open following its destruction in a fire the previous year. However on the opening night riots broke out that carried on for the next three months and became the most notorious riots in British theatre history. A sense of the motives behind the London riots is crucial when exploring their impact on the Liverpool riots the following year. Traditionally known as the Old Price (O.P.) Riots, the unrest in 1809 was triggered by an increase in ticket prices due to the high costs of rebuilding and furnishing one of London’s grandest theatres. The prices, which had not changed for years, now crept up from six to seven shillings for the boxes and three shillings and six pence to four shillings for a seat in the pit (the gallery prices remained the same). On the opening night “spectators seated in the pit, sporadically joined by those in the dress boxes and gallery, exercised what they considered their ancient right to express

approbation and disapprobation in the theatre” (Hadley 38). Rattles, catcalls and yells disrupted the theatre’s productions for the next sixty-seven nights. Hadley argues that the riots were never just about ticket prices, since the increase was not as huge as it might have been and certainly not for those who could afford to sit in the pit or boxes. After all, the managers wisely left gallery ticket prices as they were. Instead, she argues, the riots were induced by a larger, composite problem (40). Since the changes in the theatre, there was an increase in the number of exclusive private boxes for season ticket holders, meaning that dress boxes above the new private ones were too high up to hear the actors properly. In addition to this there was now a blocked view for the audience up in the highest gallery seats (nicknamed the pigeon holes) due to new auditorium arches (Baer 22). The rebuilding of the theatre “was almost immediately construed as a realignment of social relationships”, with the rich elevated and shielded away from the masses (Hadley 40). Although Hadley tentatively calls this separation “the early effects of a nascent class system” (47), it must be noted that she warns against interpreting this rebellion using class labels as “it did not represent any class; it opposed an emergent idea of class” (48). In his study on *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* Marc Baer defines the argument of the rioters (and supported by *The Times*) as the defence of traditional rights and customs, “identifying an alternative moral economy” (23).

On 14 May 1810 a new season opened at the Liverpool Theatre Royal “under the most inauspicious circumstances” (Broadbent 122) as riots broke out that evening and carried on for two weeks. Broadbent noted that although the idea to riot was influenced by the O.P. Riots at Covent Garden, they were not an exact imitation (122), but how far can we trace the links between the two in terms of the actions, reasoning and background of the rioters? The first thing to note is that, while both sets of riots were affected by economic factors, the Liverpool riots sprang up over the question of Half-Price, which literally meant the introduction of reduced entry midway through the evening entertainment. Grumblings of discontent first started to be felt before one month earlier in April 1810, when *The Morning Chronicle* reported that “the frequenters of the Theatre, at Liverpool, have been attempting for some time, in vain, to prevail on the managers to admit at half price” (16

Apr 1810). The custom of half price entry had never occurred at the Liverpool theatre but it had been standard practice at the capital's theatres royal. Yet Liverpool's audiences had never objected in such an animated and violent fashion about this issue before and it therefore seems natural to conclude that the rioters were influenced to an extent by the impact of their London counterparts. Certainly newspaper reports at the time concluded that there was an element of "imitation of the O.P.'s at Covent Garden Theatre" in the actions of the Liverpool men (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* 19 May 1810). Placards bearing the initials H.P. appeared in auditorium and there were even attempts to perform an H.P. dance, although no descriptions remain as to what the dance looked like (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* 19 May 1810). Broadbent describes the performances as being interrupted "by using flappers, horns, whistles, and other cacophonous instruments", with the rioters going on to smash all the theatre's windows (122). This assertion is supported by contemporary newspaper reports which noted how "cat-calls, trumpets, horns, rattles &c. were heard in every direction; not a syllable of the performance could reach the ears of the audience" (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* 19 May 1810). The O.P. rioter also made full use of placards and banners, whilst Kemble's public defence, "arguing that prices had not risen since the early eighteenth century, and that in the past decade profits had been less than 6 per cent", was shouted down and drowned out by horns, rattles, sticks, bells and bugles (Baer 27). In his detailed analysis of the riots Marc Baer also described the introduction of the O.P. dance on the fifth night of rioting which, he has deduced, largely consisted of yelling O.P. and banging down as hard as possible (28). A correspondent to *The Morning Post* sent his account of the Liverpool riots to the capital, believing them to be "a kind of O.P. Riot" and describing a more violent turn of events as "several things were flung on the stage, among which was a penny-piece, which struck Mr. Musgrave on the face, and caused it to bleed profusely" (18 May 1810). The report goes on to highlight further violent and aggressive behaviour outside the theatre as the rioters took to expressing their dissatisfaction by physically attacking the theatre's facade: "The mob on the outside of the theatre pelted stones and bricks at the windows, and entirely destroyed them. A

great number of stones went through the Coffee-room window, one of which broke a large looking-glass" (*The Morning Post* 18 May 1810).

On the surface the actions of the Liverpool rioters bear a striking similarity to those seen at Covent Garden Theatre Royal. However it would be an over-simplification to merely define the riots as an exact imitation of those in the capital. The Liverpool protestors were undoubtedly inspired by the actions of their contemporaries in London but they did not have the same impact on the town or the theatre itself. In the first place, the Liverpool riots were quickly quashed within the fortnight and charges were filed against the principal rioters within days of the riots taking place. There does not seem to have been any other reasoning behind the riots apart from the sudden desire for half price entry to the theatre; the quick suppression and absence of any sustained follow up suggests that they do not seem to have been supported by the majority of the town. On the other hand Baer's analysis of the London riots reveals that the issues behind the protests evolved continuously as they went in to four months of rioting. He notes that the introduction of the private boxes proved to be a source of ongoing protest but this was spurred on firstly by the engagement of Italian opera singer Madame Cataloni at seventy five pounds per night, then by John Philip Kemble's decision to hire boxers to defend the auditorium against the rioters, and finally by the arrest of radical barrister Henry Clifford by the theatre's doorkeeper, James Brandon (33). Whilst Knight and Lewis were able to quash the riots without giving in to the relatively simple demand for half-price entry, Kemble was forced to capitulate and agree to a ceasefire in legal action against the rioters, the reduction of private boxes and the dismissal of James Brandon (Baer 35).

A further useful comparison can be made when we consider who Liverpool's protesters were and how their social and economic backgrounds compared to the rioters who managed to disrupt the London theatre scene to such an extent. If we look again at the article in *The Morning Post*, the piece places great emphasis on the social standing of those involved in the Liverpool riots, suggesting that they were from the lower echelons of society:

The disturbance was chiefly created by shop-men, porters &c. the respectable part of the inhabitants being quite averse to half price being taken; the admission to the Boxes is but 4s, to the Pit, 3s, and to the Gallery, 1s [...] Notwithstanding I paid very minute attention to the H.P.'s, I could not discover a single Gentleman among them (18 May 1810).

Though it is important not to impose modern class terminology on to the early nineteenth century, it is clear that these riots were viewed as disreputable, common and not a 'gentlemanly' activity. This report is keen to point out that the rioters formed only a small, unruly section of the inhabitants, choosing not to end on a sour note but focusing instead on the lavish appearance of the theatre: "the house has been newly painted, and looks very handsome" (18 May 1810). On the surface, therefore, Liverpool's rioters did not come from the town's better society and are therefore dismissed by this national newspaper. Yet was this actually the case? Barely a week after the riots began, the attorney general moved to file a case against several of the principal residents involved "for a riot and conspiracy to compel the Managers of the Liverpool Theatre to take Half Price" (*The Morning Post* 22 May 1810). The newspaper reports on the trials and subsequent imprisonment of the defendants reveal their names and professions and tell us a limited but crucial amount about their social and economic position within the town. The first point to note is that, although all were charged with conspiracy and rioting, as time went on more names of the accused were added to the case. In other words, after the leading rioters were arrested during the beginning of the protests, others quickly moved in to their place and were arrested and charged just as quickly. We know that they were dealt with rapidly and severely as the charges came to court in the same two weeks that the riots took place (14 May to around 2 June), with no further arrests or reports of violence following this time. The second key point is that this list of principal rioters is by no means exhaustive or complete as it relies on what the newspaper articles chose to report and, indeed, their accuracy. However it gives us a useful indication of the type and background of the men involved.

Name	Employment	Details of the charges brought against them
Matthew Carter	Merchant *	The first to produce the HP badge “which was soon mounted in all parts of the House” *
Abraham Lennon	Timber Merchant *	“Who blew a horn” **
Thomas Turner	Merchant’s Clerk *	“Who brought three whistles, and after distributing them to as many persons in the pit, gave his pupils a lesson on the instrument” **
William Myers	Broker’s Clerk *	---
Barton Wilson	Coach Maker *	---
T. Molyneux	Merchant’s Clerk*	---
Charles Rawlinson	Attorney*	“Who blew a boatswain’s call repeatedly, and with great effect, in the gallery” **
John Webster	Broker’s Clerk**	---
Edward Nelson	---	---
Robert Eccles	Book-Keeper †	“Groaning, hissing, whistling catcalls, and making other noises to disturb the performances” + Distributing protest songs ‡
John Green	Music Seller †	“Ordering a handbill to be printed (calling on the people of Liverpool to resist the demand of the Managers [to cease rioting]), and then distributing it through the town” ‡

Details of the accused rioters in Liverpool, May-June 1810

* *The Morning Post* 22 May 1810

***The Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser* 29 May 1810

† *The York Herald* 2 June 1810

‡ *The Lancaster Gazette* 9 June 1810

As can be seen from the table above, all of the listed rioters prosecuted in Liverpool (excluding the one occupation unknown) fall in to the categories Marc Baer labels as “clerks and tradesmen” and “business, professional” in his analysis of the London OP rioters arrested during September to December 1809 (142). His categorisation of the rioters showed that the highest percentage came from these categories with 39 individuals or 26.4% percent of the total (excluding occupation unknown) identified as clerks or tradesmen, and 41 or 27.7% under business or professional (Baer 142). Although the numbers in Liverpool are on a smaller scale and do not reflect the status of all those participating in the riots but not arrested, the figures still offer a

representative microcosm of these provincial rioters. Of course the issue of categorising individuals in this manner is not without its problems as there was no distinct line between different social groups. Baer points out that the group of clerks and tradesmen held a status that was “between labourers and the upper reaches of the middling classes, and who were thought to be deferential” (143). He argues that it is probably most accurate to treat the majority of this group, and the ambiguous “gentlemen” as all roughly middling in the social order, “which means that at least half of the OPs were of a higher social status than wage-earners such as journeymen, apprentices, servants and labourers who formed the bulk of earlier London crowds” (Baer 143). Given the similar economic and social classifications identified among Liverpool’s rioters in 1810, it is useful to follow Baer’s model here and assume that the majority of the HP rioters also came from this broadly middling social order, rather than from the town’s poorer residents. So while the newspaper report in *The Morning Post* dismissed the idea that the Liverpool rioters came from any kind of gentlemanly background, the data taken from the arrested men suggests that the social and economic situations of the principal rioters were by no means as lowly as the report tries to make out.

Throughout the next month, the newspapers repeatedly reported on the details of the court cases brought against the specific rioters, resulting in the imprisonment, for varying lengths of time, of all the defendants. All of the accused were found innocent of conspiracy but guilty of rioting. The strong language and argument used by the prosecution, as well as the Judge’s condemnation of the accused, was reproduced almost word for word in print in the nation’s major newspapers: “He severely censured those who had been instrumental in deluding the unwary, describing them as men, who, under the pretence of liberty, were in disposition the veriest [*sic*] tyrants” (*Jackson’s Oxford Journal* 22 Sept 1810). The law came down heavily upon these men in an apparently successful attempt to quash any idea of future riots.

The 1810 riots tell us a great deal about the position of Liverpool’s Theatre Royal within the town and how it reflected national theatrical trends. While the H.P. riots were specific to Liverpool

and the short-lived demands of a disorderly group of individuals, they were undoubtedly connected to a bigger social issue that began in London and quickly spread across the nation. Liverpool's residents once again desired to have what the capital had and had certainly been influenced by the major disruptions at Covent Garden. The theatrical activities in London were reported around the country in a disreputable light and contemporary reports highlighted the capital's influence on the town: "placards were posted about the streets of Liverpool inviting the friends of half price to assemble and be firm, and that they should certainly carry their point, and stating that they had as much right to a half-price as the people of London" (*The Morning Post* 22 May 1810). With the commencement of the O.P. Riots, the role of the theatre auditorium had changed. This was in part due to a shift in audience demographic thanks to the gradual enlargement of London's patent theatres and larger urban populations (Hadley 35). Elaine Hadley cites the change in composition of the pit as an example. In the eighteenth century the pit was often the place of the critics, deemed to be the voices of "public taste", but by 1809 it was "charged with being the site from which bellowed the 'discordant' mob" (Hadley 42). The auditorium thus became a political and social forum in which those who could not vote in a parliamentary election could make their opinions known.

A pertinent example of this was the increased appearance of theatrical street ballads sung outside and inside the auditorium. Street ballads were a familiar phenomenon throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and followed the fortunes of popular culture and society. They flourished particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century as publishers produced huge numbers of large, cheap single sheets sold in the capital and also in several provincial towns, including Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow (Robinson 19). In her collection *Theatrical Street Ballads: Some Nineteenth-Century Street Ballads about the Theatre*, J.W. Robinson includes a popular air sung nightly in the Theatre Royal Covent Garden during the O.P. Riots. Entitled "National Air. Humbly Submitted to the Placarding Committee" and sung to the tune of the National Anthem, it features a well-known character called John Bull, who appeared frequently in ballads and caricatures as the symbol of the common man, representing "the British public opposed

to tyranny and high-handedness” (Robinson 42). The third verse of the ballad directly addresses the increased separation of the wealthy patrons from the rest of the theatre:

No PRIVATE BOXES let
Intriguing Ladies get;
Thy Right, JOHN BULL.
From little PIGEON HOLES,
Defend us Jolly Souls,
And we will Sing *by Goles*,
God Save JOHN BULL. (Robinson 42)

The disgust at the difference in social positioning is highlighted through the capitalized phrases comparing the ornate, expensive and perfectly positioned boxes to the limited, pigeonhole view available from the gallery.

With similar rabble-rousing intentions, a comparable ballad was printed, distributed and sung during the H.P. Riots in Liverpool one year later. The last stanza of the untitled ballad was used as evidence of criminal incitement during the subsequent trials and *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* published the offending verse, although admitting that it was “as nearly as we could collect it” (9 Jun 1810). Like its predecessor from the capital, the anonymous author calls to the John Bulls of his town to rise up against perceived social barriers and force the introduction of half-price entrance in to the theatre:

Now sound your Bugle horns, my lads,
Your catcalls whistle all,
And boldly for your British rights,
Like noble Britons call,
Ring out, ye trumpets, blow horns, blow,
And soon the Manager must go;

Sound all your lungs for Britain's laws,

For half-price and the good old cause (*The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* 9 Jun 1810)

John Bull is transformed in to the average Liverpool "lad" and the repetition of the idea of British rights deliberately taps in to the patriotic spirit that we have seen expressed at the Theatre Royal during this time. The Liverpool ballad is less eloquent than its predecessor but the energy and sense of urgency remains the same. It can also be seen as a further reminder of the proud nature of the town manifested in a criminal act by a civic minority.

However, despite the obvious intention to incite and provoke unrest, the Liverpool ballad does not seem to have had any further effect on resident theatregoers following the arrest of the prominent rioters. The few in question were duly and quickly reprimanded and there was no hint of further unrest from the majority of the town's inhabitants. There were no further demonstrations of violence and, in fact, as Michael Power points out "in spite of rapid growth, the growing gulf between middle and working classes and the insecurities of life in a major port, tension seldom broke into open conflict during this period" (35). For the most part Liverpool's residents remained immensely proud of their Theatre Royal. Although the desire for economic fairness and equality with the theatrical conventions of the capital still existed amongst many, civic pride and a sense of northern superiority remained the domineering sentiments in this North West port.

The depth of Liverpool's civic pride is articulated wonderfully in the lyrics of a new, home-grown comic song written and performed at the Theatre Royal two weeks before the sentences were cast on the principal instigators of the H.P. Riots. Entitled "All Alive at Liverpool", the song was written by J. Pocock and afterwards published and disseminated throughout Liverpool. Broadbent reproduces it in its entirety in his 1908 volume as a self-proclaimed "interesting ditty" and it is a pertinent example of a home-grown theatrical expression of public pleasure and pride in the local town, proclaiming at the end of most of the verses, "Oh, Liverpool's a wonderful town O!" (Broadbent 124). The narrative voice of the song describes coming in to the town as a young local

visitor with money in his pocket, riches to flaunt and deciding that Liverpool is the best place to spend it:

Being rather flush of Cash
I resolv'd to cut a dash
So I pack'd all my Riches,
Coats, Pantaloon, and Breeches
And to Liverpool, e'gad
I set off with Mam and Dad
To see all the Lions in the Town O! (Broadbent 124).

Throughout the course of the song, he extols all the commercial and cultural wonders on offer – including the range of newspapers at the Athenaeum, the docks and a light-hearted self-reference to the Theatre Royal:

For further merriment
To the Play-House next I went
'Twas Joe Munden's Benefit
So I squeezed into the Pit
And there so long he sung out
I thought he'd wear his tongue out
And 'twas all about the Liverpool Lions O! (Broadbent 124-5).

While this is all entertaining and would certainly have amused Liverpool's buoyant inhabitants, the second verse of the song is particularly important when looking at the development of civic confidence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Pocock's jubilant verse depicts Liverpool as the successful child of a proud mother nation, despite the imagined effect on the town of the recent abolition of the slave trade:

Then thro' the Streets we range
And we see the Grand Exchange

Where Britannia's looking down

So delighted on the Town (Broadbent 124).

Indeed the song makes no reference to the recent changes in law and defies anyone to presume that Liverpool is suffering because of abolition. It proclaims that, far from declining, the town is continuing to flourish and reaping considerable financial gain from its trading exploits:

There you'll see – frank and free

Trade and Commerce – not gone from us

Merchants trading – Bills of Lading

Sugar, Cotton – Fairly gotten

Spite of Boney – Bags of Money! (Broadbent 125)

This Liverpoolian voice seems to accept the nautical restrictions placed on the town, acknowledging that trade continues apace but that now it is “fairly gotten” and above the nation's criticism. He also includes a defiant reference to Napoleon's attempts to injure the country from maritime warfare, insisting that this North West port is rolling in its riches and trading assets, as well increasingly diverse gastronomic delights thanks to its exotic trading links:

Then on Turtle would you dine

With a glass of good old Wine

You'll get the very best in the Globe O! (Broadbent 125)

Pocock's song suggests that Liverpool now had the confidence and ability to revise its practices and ideologies in order to change with the times. This flourishing maritime town was not about to lose the proud, rich identity that it had forged for itself over the last one hundred years: “Success to the Town and its Trade O!” (Broadbent 126). John Belchem's work on the history of Liverpool's identity supports this sentiment as he considers the attitude of the town after 1807:

Henceforth, the register of Liverpool enterprise was no longer the slave trade, but the remarkable rapidity and success with which it adapted to abolition, opening lucrative new

markets and trade to Africa and elsewhere. Faced with economic adversity, Liverpool had shown itself at its best, thereafter a recurrent (and reassuring) trope in the articulation of Merseypride (“Liverpool’s story is the world’s glory” 10).

Liverpool had proved itself economically and, encouraged by a renewed cultural vigour, now offered itself as a shining example of intellectual and enlightened northern thinking.

The Explosion of the Critical Voice

In 1805 *The Theatrical Tourist* declared that the Liverpool public, “though opulent, having acquired vast sums by trade, are not the most enlightened” (Winston 53). Despite being described as “prejudiced and tenacious” (Winston 53), the recent rise in self-confidence, or Merseypride, resulted in a fascinating period of critical outpourings from its articulate, educated inhabitants, who were eager to offer their opinions on current productions, theatrical practices and individual acting styles appearing on the nation’s stages during the early nineteenth century. While this new-found critical voice emerged from Liverpool for the first time, its tone, subject matter and style reflected the outpourings of critical writing throughout the nation.

As we have seen, Liverpool playbills during the late eighteenth century promoted new productions according to their popularity and endurance on the capital’s great stages, featuring taglines designed to validate its merits to a provincial audience: “‘Robin Hood; or, Sherwood Forest’, as it is performing at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, with universal applause” (*Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser* 23 Dec 1784). This, of course, was a promotional tactic that was used throughout all provincial and metropolitan theatres. However Roscoe’s rise to prominence as a respected figure of cultural authority, coupled with Liverpool’s continued urban success in the face of economic and moral adversity, encouraged the town not only to promote its own opinions and theatrical critiques, but also to question and even publicly contradict the fashionable view of the metropolis. In 1806 local printer, James Smith, produced the first edition of *The Liverpool Dramatic Censor; or, Theatrical Recorder*. Written by Thomas Troughton, the tone of this critical text is

immediately evident in the affected, bordering on pretentious, introduction: “Let us now turn our attention to the Liverpool Theatre, the Thespian corps of which commenced their mimetic campaign on Monday, the 2nd of June, 1806, under the banners of laughter-loving Thalia” (18). This statement immediately raises the town’s theatrical arts to a highly revered, historical practice, presided over by the Greek muse of comedy. Troughton is clearly posing himself as an aficionado of the theatre and ardently desires Liverpool’s inhabitants to experience the best possible standard of production and performance. He is quick to question existing local theatrical standards and immediately picks up on the expectations of and allowances made by the Theatre Royal’s audiences: “Liverpool has long been celebrated for the liberal encouragement given by its inhabitants to the professors of the histrionic art; but have the frequenters of the public theatre been sufficiently vigilant in their disapprobation of rant, suppression of ribaldry, and melioration of taste?” (Troughton 37-8). Troughton’s concerns suggest that, in his opinion, the town’s theatrical standards have slipped in the wake of the new century and that, as an apparently morally upstanding gentleman of the town, he feels that it is his duty to address the Theatre Royal’s failings. His worry-filled outpourings are useful for the modern researcher as he provides a first-hand, albeit highly subjective, account of not only the popular performers and productions in Liverpool during this quiet period, but also the goings-on in the auditorium of the Theatre Royal. Apart from contemporary playbills and proud (and no doubt heavily edited) newspaper reviews, there are few other accounts of the bustling, onstage and off, day-to-day realities of this early nineteenth-century theatre. Indeed one of the most fascinating elements to Troughton’s analysis of standards at the Theatre Royal is his depiction of the expectations and behaviour of the town’s enthusiastic theatre-goers. Before the publication of the *Liverpool Dramatic Censor*, activities in the auditorium were only hinted at in newspaper reports and these, normally reporting disturbance and unrest, were not designed to review audience standards.

Troughton's reports open up a running commentary on all areas of the theatre. During one review, he pauses to consider the changes in standards from the end of the eighteenth century to the present in 1806:

Now, alas! How different is the scene! The front boxes of the theatre are almost exclusively devoted to women of the town; the lobbies swarm with them; they occupy every part of the house, with the solitary exception of the side-boxes and the first circle. The rooms intended for the purposes of refreshment are like the show-rooms of a bagnio; and it is next to impossible for a virtuous woman to walk from her box to her carriage, without having her eyes offended, and her ears shocked, by the most indecent gestures, and the most obscene language (Troughton 50-1).

His image of the Liverpool theatrical scene paints a very different picture from the re-invented, elegant and culturally prosperous image of Roscoe's renaissance Liverpool. Instead Troughton presents a seedy and immoral view of the town, daintily telling his reader that the lobby of the upper boxes "is now generally occupied by the girls of the town, as a *temporary show-room* for the display of their attractions" and going on to describe them entertaining the "dissolute young men" who occupy these boxes (48-9). Although Troughton gently avoids entering into any detailed discussion of the specific goings-on, his meaning is clear. Prostitution and vice, he claims, are rife in Liverpool's Theatre Royal. However what is particularly interesting about this account is where Troughton identifies the root of this immoral influence. The dissolute Liverpool men are, he believes, "determined to *ape* the vices of their brethren in the capital" (Troughton 49-50).

Troughton's determined opinions suggest to the reader that London is no longer the idealised, positive theatrical influence on Liverpool that it was at the end of the eighteenth century. There was certainly an element of truth in this idea, as Liverpool continued to assert its cultural independence, but Troughton's depictions of the activities of the town's theatre-goers also confirm to his reader that he has a very strict moral code that drives his work. In the middle of a review of the comedy *The Soldier's Daughter*, he is quick to pick up a couple of the actors for swearing too

much during the production: “this is a most censurable practice in several of our comic actors” (Troughton 34). He also takes a high moral stance when writing a review of William Shield’s light comic opera, *Rosina* (1781). During this production he records the appearance of an actress as one of the named male characters (Troughton does not identify which one). Yet the phenomenon of women cross-dressing onstage was not new. Indeed some of the greatest actresses of the eighteenth century had played highly revered male roles to great critical acclaim and this continued to increasingly ambitious heights throughout the nineteenth century. However in Troughton’s conservative opinion it was an immoral and unnecessary theatrical practice that should not appear on Liverpool’s stages: “It is a shocking outrage against delicacy and decorum, to behold a female, upon a public stage, in the habit of a man; nor can the practice of this unseemly custom, on the theatres in the metropolis, be acknowledged as a reason for its introductions here. Whatever is indecent in private life, must be improper on the stage” (Troughton 57-8). Troughton is a self-confessed moralist who feels it is his duty as an avid theatre goer “to restrain, within its own limits, the pestilential influence of this *lazar-house* of profaneness” (Troughton 262). He cites the degrading content of Bernard Mandeville’s *The Virgin Unmasked* (1709) as directly inciting immoral behaviour from an apparently respectable audience member:

A depraved coxcomb, in imitation, perhaps of Blister the apothecary, or Quaver the singing master, on the stage, was busily employed, in one of the upper front boxes, in dalliance with a girl of this town! Nay, this stupid fool, who, from his appearance, might have been taken for a man of respectability, seemed to take a pride in his gallantry, and to consider himself perfectly at liberty to behave indecently in a public theatre” (Troughton 169-70).¹⁸

¹⁸ It is interesting here that Troughton gets a little confused as to the authorship of this play, falsely stating it to have been written by Henry Fielding. Although Fielding’s work often included satirical views on the immoral weaknesses of human nature, Mandeville’s work was notorious for being explicit, provocative and often bordering on the pornographic. In 1724 he published the revolutionary essay, *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews; or, an essay upon whoring, as it is now practised in these Kingdoms*, in which he argued that regulated prostitution benefited society.

Such an investigation into the tone and style of Troughton's writing on the state of Liverpool's theatre and its audiences serves to remind us that, although his musings are the first of their kind to emerge from Liverpool, they were by no means unique during the opening years of the nineteenth century. *The Liverpool Dramatic Censor* and *The History of Liverpool* (published anonymously but locally attributed to Troughton) contributed to a newly established wave of literary and theatrical criticism regularly published in works of biography, memoir and anecdote of varying levels of respectability and intellectual standing. Jacky Bratton reminds us that the literary aims and reception of monthly and weekly published theatrical journals, such as *The Monthly Mirror*, *The Theatrical Inquisitor* and *The Theatrical Gazette*, varied amongst themselves as well as when pitted against "the weighty biographies of leading players" issued during this period from self-proclaimed serious writers such as the biographer, editor and dramatist James Boaden (*New Readings in Theatre History* 95-6). Bratton observes that "Boaden set himself up as an important writer, for serious readers in their leisure hours" (*New Readings in Theatre History* 97) and the introduction to *The Liverpool Dramatic Censor* seems to follow this authorial style. Boaden had been the editor of the newspaper *The Oracle* since 1789 and would go on to publish several weighty biographies on respected theatrical figures such as John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons in the 1820s. Although he had not yet therefore embarked upon these weighty tomes, evidence of his serious and uncompromising tone is rife throughout pieces of editorial in *The Oracle* on the latest theatrical productions in the capital. On 4 May 1799, the newspaper published the following critique of Maria Theresa de Camp's latest benefit evening at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane:

This Young Lady is deservedly a favourite Actress; but her selection for the entertainment of her Friends reflected very little honour on her taste and judgement. But perhaps, actuated by the *auri sacra fames*, she resolved to sacrifice both for one night at the Shrine of Avarice, believing that her general character as a performer would suffer no diminution. Of the *Comedy*, as it was called, - "FIRST FAULTS" - we shall content ourselves with burying it in oblivion (*The Oracle and Daily Advertiser*).

Troughton's opinions on Liverpool theatre therefore offer us an indication of his own perception of the world and the intellectual community in which he is attempting to establish himself.

Evidence of Troughton's serious intent becomes apparent when turning to examine his second subject of critique: the onstage performance. His work highlights the continued arrival of productions, theatrical practices and actors that had been greeted with considerable popularity and enthusiasm in London and had now travelled up North. However the approval of the capital's audiences was not sufficient for Troughton. Two years after the child actor William Betty first appeared onstage at Liverpool's Theatre Royal, he recorded his views on the performance of an eight or nine-year-old "*comic Roscius*" in John O'Keefe's popular play *The Agreeable Surprise* (1781). It is likely that the young actor Troughton refers to here is not Betty, as although he was still touring extensively throughout the provinces during his breaks from the patent theatres, he was by this time fifteen years old. As we have seen, "Bettymania" had spawned a considerable popular following in Liverpool, but Troughton's opinions on these apparent young prodigies were not as appreciative. He offered a damning critique of the boy's questionable acting skills:

This *comic Roscius*, disguised with a monstrous powdered wig, which hid part of his face, and with his hands concealed, gave a strong idea that a baboon had been introduced on the stage, as a mimic of Lingo; nay, some persons in the boxes exclaimed, "He is like a monkey". When he began to speak, the weakness of his voice, the odd phiz, and ludicrous gestures, reminded us of the tricks of a lively monkey (Troughton 98-9).

Troughton's words not only criticise the child in question but articulate his strength of feeling on the place of child actors on the stage in the first place. If this was not enough, he emphasises how ardently he believes this trend to be a theatrical nightmare by declaring that "this innovation is almost as dangerous to the histrionic art, as the usurpation of Bonaparte is to royalty" (Troughton 104) – a strong and unforgiving choice of words in light of the national climate during this period. Troughton repeats this fervent belief in the danger of such popular trends four years later in *The History of Liverpool*. Looking back at the period of Bettymania he identified the craze as a kind of

social disease that quickly spreads through towns, gripping its residents with a passionate but short-lived fever: “Such are the consequences of the expectation of ignorance, and such the epidemic frenzy which sometimes infects whole communities” (*The History of Liverpool* 243).

Troughton was not alone in his views on this nationwide craze and his strongly chosen words were echoed in the opinions of others, including the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell. Writing in 1834, he echoed Troughton’s aversion to Betty’s popularity and his amazement at the effect held by the child actor on the nation: “The popularity of that baby-faced boy, who possessed not even the elements of a good actor, was a hallucination in the public mind, and a disgrace to our theatre history [...] Actors and actresses of merit were obliged to appear on the stage with this minion, and even to affect the general taste for him, in order to avoid giving offence” (Campbell 227). Throughout his writing, Troughton also places repeated emphasis on the idea of good taste and the harmful influence of the “tasteless”: “let the reign of true taste then be once more established” (128). He pins the popularity of the craze for child actors, or “this modern depravation of taste”, down to “the gratification of the tasteless and ignorant multitude” (Troughton 101). This was a topic frequently echoed in *The Oracle*, with reviews often bemoaning the proclaimed absurdity of current public taste:

The Dramatic Composition of *St. David’s Day* has little or no recommendation to the refined or judicious critic; and were we to adopt the common and stake excuse that “the Author has attained the object of his wishes by rendering the whole a Vehicle for the Music”, we should sacrifice our judgement at the shrine of hypocrisy, and be guilty of conniving at the corruption of the Public Taste (*The Oracle and Daily Advertiser* 26 Mar 1800).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Liverpool’s theatrical standards and cultural aspirations during the late eighteenth century were frequently criticised by the capital as pretentious attempts at good cultural taste by an inexperienced northern port that knew little better. Just over twenty years later, Liverpool’s writers began to turn the tables on its toughest critics and also question the

cultural tastes of the capital. Of course we must not take Troughton's opinions and stories as proof of an all-encompassing community mindset, but the inclusion of opposing comments from two of Liverpool's readers suggests that, although his uncompromising reviews were too strict for some, his views on the town's theatre resonated with others. "To the Dramatic Censor", an anonymous poem included without comment in the *Dramatic Censor* by Troughton, gently reprimands him for his harsh tone:

But thy compassion, let, oh, let me claim,
For modest dullness that expects not fame;
Let not thy wrath the meek offender feel,
Nor "Break a butterfly upon the wheel" (Troughton 212).

However the following inclusion of a letter from a correspondent named "Stadamartred", dated 21 June 1806, supports his use of such frank and critical language:

Having been much gratified by the perusal of your excellent work, for which the whole town is indebted to you, and wishing as far as in my power, to contribute to the success of the performance, and the amusement of my fellow townsmen, I take the liberty of sending you a few remarks on the play of Thursday evening last (Troughton 225-6).

Perhaps the earliest indication of this new-found local critical confidence can be seen if we dwell on Troughton's ground-breaking Liverpool text for just a few moments more. In his first review of the opening production of the 1806 season, the Irish dramatist Andrew Cherry's comedy *The Soldier's Daughter* (1804), Troughton boldly labels the plot "inartificial and uninteresting" (21). He then goes on to articulate his analysis of the popularity of bad theatre:

The temporary popularity of this comedy, in the metropolis, was in consequence of the general disposition of the public, which is always rather inclined to receive gratification than discover error. People go to a public theatre to be amused, not to criticise; and it must be a wretched production indeed which will not afford them some pleasure, when well represented, as the *Soldier's Daughter* undoubtedly was in London (Troughton 30-1).

Troughton acknowledges here the necessary entertainment value inherent in the very act of going to the theatre, noting that most audience members are rather more open-minded and forgiving than himself. Yet there is also an air of condescension and superiority as he implicitly raises himself above the “general disposition of the public”, in both Liverpool and London alike, to a detached, elevated position. He, the author suggests, can see through the popular hype and fashionable entertainment favoured by the “people” to discern true theatrical quality.

However, while we have established that Troughton set himself up as a serious theatrical critic there is considerable evidence that this confidence and critical style was gradually taken up in the writings of other Liverpool reviewers. Local and national archives, as well as contemporary newspapers suggest that the residents of Liverpool did not jump on the critical bandwagon straightaway, but if we look at contemporary archival resources just ten years later, a sudden flurry of local theatrical journalism exploded on to the national landscape. The main reason for the gap in time is simply the lack of available theatrical publications and print resources through which local critics could propagate their opinions. In 1812 the London-based *Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror* was launched, by which time Liverpool’s reviewers had the confidence and the medium through which to copy the enthusiastic theatre critics in the capital and keep up with the national trend for asserting their own provincial opinions in print. Volume 9 of the journal in July 1816 included a letter written by the anonymous “J.M.”, who promises to send regular accounts of the Liverpool Theatre Royal “to tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” (79). His account brims with pride at the standards of performance and is clearly confident in independently vouching for, and critiquing, his local theatre to rest of the nation: “The Theatre is well attended, and in my opinion, still deserves the name of the second theatrical town in the kingdom” (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Jul 1816, 80). A report the following August expanded on the mysterious J.M.’s promise of regular critical reports with a focused critique of the quality of acting at the Theatre Royal, analysing local and national performers alike. Liverpool’s regular favourites, such as well-known provincial actor John Vandenhoff, did not escape the town’s new honest critical voice: “In Mr. Vandenhoff we

are thought to possess a sterling tragic actor. His *Shylock*, *Sir Giles Overreach*, *Richard the Third*, and *Stukely*, are marked with distinguished excellence. He has lately attempted light comedy, but without a shadow of success" (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Aug 1817, 156-7). Liverpool's reviewers began to follow the national trend for frank and candid theatrical reports and were not afraid to turn their gaze on to their own locale in order to push their actors and managers to the highest theatrical level. Their writers turned into tough critics and with this development came a change in the tone of the editorial.

A more dynamic and self-assured style of journalism also crept in to the local newspapers as writers questioned productions and genre style, as well as specific performances. In August 1818, a stage adaptation of *Rob Roy* came to Liverpool for the first time and inspired the following review:

The task of converting a novel into a play seems to require a peculiar talent, since it is an attempt in which several eminent writers have repeatedly failed [...] The leading incidents of *Rob Roy* are very happily condensed and worked into a fable of dramatic unity with very skilful contrivance. In the last act, however, the interest is suffered to languish very unseasonably, and some dialogues are introduced which are much too significant when the catastrophe is approaching" (*Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer* 3 Aug 1818).

This editorial reminds us again that a vocal section of Liverpool society not only had the confidence to voice their opinions on their own local performances and productions, but felt assured and informed enough to carry out a literary analysis of new drama produced in the capital and performed to extensive audiences throughout the nation. The review also gives an idea of the forceful and uncompromising linguistic style that was familiar across the national press and was now beginning to enter the Liverpool conscience. However phrases such as, "suffered to languish very unseasonably" seem mild when compared with the brutal and uncompromising language used by some of the region's eager reporters. A review in the *Theatrical Inquisitor* of John Vandenhoff's performances at the Liverpool Theatre Royal also included a critique of his fellow actors. The writer does not pause to soften his tone or his choice of language but instead relays a harsh and

unforgiving report of a series of performers that was published to the nation at large: “Mr. Andrews, who would be a singer, Messrs. Lombe, McGibbon, and Westmacott, are too despicable for description, and baffle conjecture as to the causes of their continued engagement” (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Aug 1817, 157). This is then followed by another unfavourable comment on popular actors in the metropolis: “Booth and Mrs. Glover have been here [...] The lady, as usual, disgusted us with her tragic assumptions” (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Aug 1817, 157). Julia Glover had, in fact, been a regular and well-respected actress at both London’s Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres for over eighteen years and had regularly appeared on the Liverpool stage. One year later, an anonymous “P.W.” wrote what he claimed was “a just and impartial account” in the *Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror* as he had not found an account as yet of Liverpool’s Theatre Royal (Oct 1818, 189). In this report he also gives an account of the actors currently in residence at the theatre and follows the linguistic style of previous critics: “[Mr. Tayleure] certainly possesses some capability, but he is far too much given to grimace and buffoonery [...] He is most at home in broad farcical characters and country bumpkins, where no feeling is requisite” (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Oct 1818, 190). As suggested by other local reviewers, he confirms that Liverpool’s audiences have high dramatic expectations and demand quality from their performers. Actors, “P.W.” implies, have to work hard and prove themselves to gain local theatrical approval: “Mr. Andrews has been on this stage some year, but has not made any great progress in the good opinion of the town” (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Oct 1818, 191). Drawing these reviews together, it becomes evident that Liverpool’s educated critics were not prepared to accept the validity of popular and respected performers on the approval of the capital alone. They too were now ready and able to scrutinize and dissect everything that appeared before them on the Theatre Royal stage.

In the midst of this upsurge of local critical thinking came a fascinating text published in Liverpool in 1811. Entitled *Critical Observations on Mr. Kemble’s Performances at the Theatre Royal, Liverpool*, the extensive text focuses entirely on Charles Kemble’s portrayals of various characters, predominantly the great Shakespearian roles, during his engagement at the theatre. What makes

this critical text so intriguing is the origins of its author. Originally published under the name of the anonymous 'A.B.G*****', it has now been established in the records of the British Library that this apparently modest author was in fact Augustus Bozzi Granville (1783-1872), a physician and Italian patriot with English heritage, who is historically most famous for carrying out the first autopsy on an ancient Egyptian mummy. However it is the choice of language and critical style that he engages his reader in which makes this book unique. The text begins with a justification of his publication which echoes many of Troughton's sentiments in 1806. He is determined that he will not rely on London's judgements of Kemble's talent nor bow down to "a degree of exquisite excellence, which, when attained, may be supposed to shelter the *Performer* from the attacks of criticism; a point of so great an elevation; that when standing on it, this same performer might so irradiate as to *dazzle* and render speechless the critics" (Granville 3). As we have seen with Liverpool's critics, Granville claims that he also wants to provide an honest and unbiased account of theatrical standards. But he then goes further with the declaration that "when the first performance of Mr. Kemble was announced at our Theatre, I determined to repair thither, unprepared by prejudices or by expectations: but firmly resolved to make use of the paltry portion of understanding I possess, in judging of that Actors much extolled deserts" (Granville 3). With a curious mixture of professed humility and intellectual arrogance, Granville has immediately found an affinity with his contemporary Liverpool thinkers, emphasised by the subtle but clear reference to "our Theatre".

Granville came to England in 1811 as an injured surgeon in the British Navy and it was during this time that he published his first English writings, of which this text seems to have been one (Moscucci). In her biography of Granville, Ornella Moscucci describes him as a "lively conversationalist [...] and a prolific writer, whose interests spanned the sciences, history, politics, and the arts" ("Granville, Augustus Bozzi"). In Liverpool's writers, he seemed to have found an intellectual kinship as he chose to write and publish a critique of Kemble that deliberately set out to ignore the popular and fashionable views of London. Granville echoes the growing uncompromising critical style of his northern counterparts and, indeed, critics across the nation with a studied, in-

depth analysis of all aspects of Kemble's performances in Liverpool. His first review of Kemble's portrayal of Hamlet immediately alerts his reader that he will settle for no less than theatrical perfection. After acknowledging the demands of the role and the fact that Kemble gave "a masterly performance", he is still not quite satisfied in his critique: "and yet, methinks, I could discern in *it* certain parts, which, like a few deformities in a general assemblage of beauties, or unskilful shades in a fine picture, caused us to feel the want of *something*, or told us of some superfluity, even while we were pleased" (Granville 5). He then goes on to examine, or perhaps more accurately pick apart, Kemble's performance scene by scene and almost line by line. Granville's choice of language when displeased also bears a striking resemblance to the frank and unforgiving reports written by theatrical reviewers during this period:

I cannot as yet recover from the amazement I was thrown into seeing Mr. Kemble in King Richard, at his ever assuming that character [...] Surely Mr. K. cannot presume to think that we have so greatly mistaken this arduous character, till he condescended to illumine our *dull minds*, that he has undertaken to give it in a manner so dissimilar from that which has been so well received since the days of its author!" (27).

Granville's reference to "our *dull minds*" scorns the assumed superiority of the capital over the provinces and asserts Liverpool's desire to generate its own ideas and opinions on dramatic quality.

However the focused analysis of performance standards and styles was not a new literary phenomenon, but had been subject to growing scrutiny throughout the later eighteenth century. A number of texts had been produced in England throughout the previous century that sought to break down and theorise acting techniques as early as Aaron Hill's *The Art of Acting* (1746). In the years following the turn of the nineteenth century, publications such as Henry Siddons's *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (1822) further encouraged both actors and audience members to fully interpret every slight gesture, facial movement and vocal emphasis presented in the theatre. Kathleen Barker notes that the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century saw one of the most prolific periods of local theatrical journalism, "for the reviews are perceptive, well-argued,

and full of minute descriptions of business and interpretation of lines" (*The Theatre Royal Bristol 1766-1966*, 75). Just as the real line between stage and audience became blurred in a variety of physical and tangible ways, the reaction of the audience to a production emerged as important as the piece itself. This new realisation of the influence of theatrical perception makes it, Jim Davis argues, "one of the most complex and challenging dimensions of theatre in this period" ("Spectatorship" 67). However the ideological change in actor-audience relations now showed itself in a more practical way through the launch of accessible and pertinent theatrical magazines and journals. As we have seen, many of the first regular reviews coming from Liverpool appeared in the *Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror* which published biographies of well-known actors, reviews of productions and theatrical institutions in the capital and, as can be seen with specific regard to Liverpool, intermittent references to provincial theatre. This influential literary magazine set the standard for national critique, disseminating popular, educated responses to the theatre on a regular monthly basis. But the early nineteenth century rise in print culture mean that such publications were no longer limited to the metropolis.

As David Worrall points out in *Theatric Revolution*, "conditions in provincial England were very similar to the metropolitan picture, with ample evidence of thriving print cultures attached to local theatres" (15). In 1803 a journal was published in Manchester entitled *Townsmen...Addressed to the Inhabitants of Manchester on Theatricals* (renamed *The Thespian Review; an Examination of the Merits and Demerits of the Performers on the Manchester Stage, Pro & Con.* in 1806). This was followed by two further local analytical pamphlets, *The Theatrical Inquisitor; or, An Enquiry into what Two Worthy Managers have promised, and what was performed* (1804) and *A Little Amusement for the Gentlemen of Monmouth-street, Rosemary Lane, and the Neighbourhood; Vulgarly Called Cannon-st. and M'Donald's-lane. With observations on Clerical, Military, Mercantile, & Theatrical Characters* (1804). Worrall cites these two northern publications as an example of "the ability of the theatre and the theatrical print culture to reflect local squabbles over personality and literary aspiration and thereby to lend a variety of civic cohesion" (16).

There is no evidence that Liverpool produced similarly focused pamphlets as early as this but, in May 1821, Liverpool launched its own dramatic journal, familiarly entitled *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator*. This new publication provided the town with a fresh, local medium through which to air its critiques, reviews and opinions on both local and national performers. The town did not now have to rely on brief inclusions in the national press, which had disappointed ardent local reviewers in the past: "Sir, - I have for some months past been in expectation of finding in your interesting publication an account of this theatre, but having been disappointed, I now take the liberty of transmitting you a just and impartial account" (*Theatrical Inquisitor* Oct 1818, 189). The launch of its own literary journal was further proof of Liverpool's growing self-confidence and belief in the value and worth of its dramatic opinions.

Yet *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* does not set out to prove the town's theatrical merits or boast about the status of its Theatre Royal, as well it could have done. After all, as Iona Italia notes, literary journals and magazines at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century relied heavily on reader contributions which were often of "dubious origin and sometimes of venerable antiquity" (22). As she reminds us: "journalistic work will survive because of its author's wit and eloquence, despite the triviality of his or her medium" (22). However, as we have seen in the letters written to the national magazine, Liverpool's critics continued their quest to provide frank reports on the condition and theatrical standards of the town's Theatre Royal. The opening remarks of the first issue stress that, although the editors are aware that their views will not necessarily be to everyone's taste, they are determined to produce an impartial account of their local theatre:

The Editors of the *Theatrical Investigator* do not deem it necessary to make a long apology on commencing the present publication, when it is so well known that a *Theatrical Criticism* has long been a desideratum in this town: and though they are not vain enough to suppose themselves capable of directing the public taste, they, nevertheless, are willing to hope, that their labours will not be altogether useless or uninteresting. – They pledge themselves to attend strictly to

their duty, and are determined that their work shall possess at least the merit of *impartiality* (*The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* 1).

In the third edition of the daily penny newspaper, the local authors followed up this promise of impartiality with a disparaging attack on the physical conditions of the theatre, reproaching the managers for its poor state following the death of one of the managers, Thomas Knight. The report claims that the managers had not beautified or even cleaned the theatre and that the scenery and costumes were in a very poor condition: “We should not wonder at such a circumstance occurring in a barn; but what apology can we make for such a thing being reduced to a matter of course in a Theatre Royal?” (*The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* 11). The article makes use of the strong, uncompromising language that we have come to expect from Liverpool’s ardent critics as the author describes the poor standards he sees on stage, in the orchestra pit and also in the auditorium, which are not suitable for the respectable, discerning audience member. Like Troughton fifteen years before, reference is made to the increasing admittance of so-called “frail fair” in to the theatre: “There is scarcely a part of the house where a tradesman can take his wife and family, without being in their vicinity – the pit in particular, which ought, of all other places, to be kept free from them, is the constant and favourite place of their resort” (*The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* 11). It is significant that this report uses the Liverpool tradesman as an example of the typical, discerning audience member. *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* was a penny newspaper and would have therefore been both affordable and accessible for the average tradesman in the port. This reference to the position of the tradesman and his family within the auditorium suggests to us that the push for theatrical improvements within the town and the drive for honest and frank reports stemmed from the educated, business and trade class of men who were fiercely proud of Liverpool’s economic and social achievements and wanted to see this continuously reflected in their local theatre.

In his volume, *Annals of the Liverpool Stage*, Broadbent reports that a comic verse appeared in July 1821 which ridiculed the performance of the afore-mentioned Julia Glover as Hamlet, “a very obese young prince” and William McGibbon as the “fat ghost” (139). The report that accompanied

the verse poked fun at the physical attributes of both performers with witty and somewhat cruel comments on the suitability of the actors to the roles. As such, he claims that McGibbons's portrayal of the ghost was described as "ponderously weighty: it moved like a well-rounded mass of sluggish matter" (Broadbent 139), whilst also noting that the verse commented on Julia Glover's size, suggesting that her movements on the stage produced reverberations in the auditorium: "Unless she means to shew that passion's rage / Cannot be well express'd, unless 'tis felt" (Broadbent 139). However further investigation once again highlights Broadbent's limitations as a reliable source. It seems that Broadbent has not only mixed two different editions of *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* together in his haste to produce this witty tale, but that he has also manufactured the above lines attributed to the comic poem. The poem (published on 31 July 1821) makes no such allusion to Glover's purported reverberations around the audience and the report printed three days earlier makes a much gentler allusion to her size: "her form, her countenance, her manner, nevertheless, are as remote from any thing we could imagine of the Young Danish Prince as possible" (*The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* 195). Where then does Broadbent get his additional lines from? It is possible that they come from another unacknowledged source and that he has offered them up together for both ease and humour, or, indeed, that he has composed the lines himself for his own amusement. Whatever the case, the lines certainly did not feature in the Liverpool journal:

The managers, their wisdom to evince,
And show how much thereof they have to boast;
Cast Hamlet – Mrs. Glover, as the Prince,
And sixteen stone McGibbon for the ghost.
When he (the Ghost) talk'd of the sulphurous flames,
To which at "morning dawn" he must retire;
Some ladies near me – I'll not mention names,
Said – "All the fat will then be in the fire!"

And when he vanished, leaving Ham alone,

The silence shew'd how little we had lost;

The laugh – that followed his latest groan –

How glad we were he had given up the ghost (*The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* 202).

The actual published poem remains an interesting example of an anonymous Liverpool writer's attempt to mimic the personal and rather ruthless style of criticism favoured in the nation's penny newspapers, albeit with dubious poetic skill.

The renewal of cultural vigour and civic pride at the beginning of the century generated an increased self-belief in the quality of the region's opinions and the standard of theatrical output Liverpool should strive towards. This is supported by two particular reports published in *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* in May and June 1821. In the second edition of the penny newspaper (30 May 1821), the editors included a lengthy piece on the recent departure of Liverpool favourite, John Vandenhoff, for the London stage. According to his son, George Vandenhoff, his father had been first engaged at Liverpool in 1815 to "lead the business" after a lengthy apprenticeship in various minor provincial theatres (31). He argues that he was so popular in the port during his long acquaintance there that he "secured their almost affectionate regard to such an extent, that it was said ironically, yet with a spice of truth, that the children there were taught to bring his name into their prayers, thus: - 'Pray, God bless my father and mother, sister and brother, and – Mr. Vandenhoff!'" (31). The article in *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* supports his local popularity but also dwells on a sense of ownership and possession as the writer begrudges the London audiences the talents of an actor so loved and nurtured by the people of Liverpool:

Whatever may be the merits of the new performers introduced to the Liverpool public this season, there is an association of feelings connected with the remembrance of an old favourite, by no means pleasing: that the talent and the genius which season after season we have seen so gradually and progressively developed, and which we have, by our plaudits, so anxiously strove to

foster and mature, should at once be taken from us – induces an irksome feeling of regret – it almost as though we had been deprived of a child to whom we had been a foster father (6-7). His departure from the Liverpool stage is then made all the more irksome by his suggested failure in London:

We are far from considering his debut as a failure, but rather that he been a victim to one of those finished specimens of avaricious duplicity, which but too frequently forms a prominent feature in the character of a Theatrical Manager [...] Mr. Vandenhoff was unquestionably well received; but, as he took the same line of characters as Mr. McCready, and it was considered that two Suns could not shine with dazzling lustre in the same system, Mr. Vandenhoff had such characters cast for him as he considered beneath his notice, and consequently he retired but we do not yet despair of seeing him fill a leading situation in a London Theatre Royal (*The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* 7-8).

Instead the editors suggest that Vandenhoff had been a casualty of the wily tactics of the capital's theatre managers and that his prodigious talents, or "dazzling lustre", were currently too much for the London stage.

Seven days later (6 June 1821), the same newspaper offered a critique of the London actress Sarah Bartley who was, at this time, approaching sixty years of age. The report acknowledges the expected humility of a provincial critic but refuses, in this case, to bow to the presumed opinion or taste of the metropolis:

As provincial critics, we suppose we must be very cautious in speaking of the merits of the London Stars, and indeed for the most part, those who visit us are performers of such acknowledged abilities, as to leave us the mere task of repeating the praises which have so often been lavished upon them [...] But when it is attempted to thrust performers upon us, however great their name, who, by age or evident natural causes are incapacitated to fill the characters they undertake, we shall not hesitate fearlessly, to canvas their failings, and expose the folly of those who influence their appearance. Of this number we must name Mrs. Bartley, whose figure,

voice, and features, render her totally incapable of sustaining the parts which have hitherto been assigned to her (25).

In subsequent editions of the newspaper, the editors of *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator* do not offer any further comment on the apparently unconvincing talents of Sarah Bartlett but choose instead to finish every review with a note of the part she played and no more. As the 1820s progressed, a subtly decreased reverence towards the London stage led Liverpool's critics to seek alternative theatrical influences and by the end of the decade the town had had found itself a new connection across the ocean: America.

Chapter Three: A Transatlantic Outlook and an International Theatre

The declaration of peace with France in 1815 marked the beginning of a new, expanded maritime outlook for Liverpool. It signalled what Graeme Milne refers to as the first significant phase to the town's maritime economy in the last two centuries: "the beginnings of a genuinely global reach" ("Maritime Liverpool" 259). As we have seen, Liverpool had developed its trading links throughout the initial years of the nineteenth century, reaching West Africa, the West Indies and North America. In addition, the 1820s and 1830s saw the development of crucial new trading links with India, China and South America (Milne "Maritime Liverpool" 259). However it was not just in trade that Liverpool now began to extend its reach. It is well known that the second half of the nineteenth century signalled the boom of long-distance sailing voyages and increasingly luxurious passenger liners departed from the heaving quaysides. New York proved to be a popular passenger destination and the early stages of its leisure appeal can be seen at the beginning of the century. The maritime connection between New York and Liverpool was particularly important for the increasing numbers of British and American actors transferring their skills across the Atlantic. This chapter will therefore examine the role of the Liverpool Theatre Royal within this new transatlantic theatrical market. I will explore how the town's theatre reflected its new maritime links and consider whether its nautical focus was unique to this rapidly developing North West port.

The 1820s saw an increased number of voyages made by Britain's actors across the Atlantic for engagements in principal American theatres, mainly on the East coast in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Equally America's ambitious performers made the opposite trip to seek success and critical acclaim on the British stage. For the most part, Liverpool was literally the first port of call for returning British and visiting Americans alike and the town's reaction to this theatrical transference offers us an important insight in to its increasingly self-assured and independent attitude during this period. For many British actors, preparing to embark upon a potentially dangerous voyage across the ocean coincided with a final national engagement at Liverpool's Theatre Royal before setting

sail. The importance of such performances occasionally induced actors to deliver a farewell address to the town's audiences and these speeches sometimes provide a useful and interesting perspective on the image of Liverpool at this time. In September 1826, William Macready (the younger) prepared to travel to New York following a period of moderate, but not particularly impressive success on the nation's provincial stages. He chose to pay homage to the Theatre Royal audience and the reputation of Liverpool in general, declaring it to be a town flourishing in wealth, opportunities and intelligence:

The parting expression of my gratitude, the homage of my feelings, cannot be offered anywhere more appropriately than here, in a town which holds so distinguished an ascendancy for wealth, numbers, and intelligence [...] Ladies and Gentlemen, it now only remains for me to express, particularly, my grateful sense of the public patronage with which I have been, on many occasions, honoured by you, and of the various proofs of individual civility and personal kindness which I have received in this town. With these grateful and endearing recollections, Ladies and Gentlemen, I leave my native country; and with the assurance that, by no distance – of place or time – can they be obliterated or weakened, I respectfully bid you – farewell (*The Kaleidoscope* 7.323, 76).

Although perhaps a little obsequious, playing to the heightened pride of the local residents, his suggestion that this final British remembrance of Liverpool's respect and civility transcends distance and time is particularly illuminating. The deliberate wording of his speech underlines the unique position held by this coastal town in relation to the rest of the country. Liverpool was a flourishing, internationally renowned port that boasted one of the most successful provincial Theatre Royals and yet Macready had also been on the receiving end of the personal touch; the individual acts of kindness and interaction from its residents that defined the town in his eyes.

One year earlier, in the summer of 1825, troubled actor Edmund Kean took a short engagement at Liverpool before his departure to America. During his engagement he took on some of the most critically acclaimed roles, including Richard III, Sir Giles Overreach, Othello, and

Macbeth. However his decision to leave Britain for a tour of America was not the positive transference that it might have been. Kean had achieved popular and critical success on the London stage after several troubled years but by the mid-1820s he had begun to alienate audiences with his drunken appearances and outlandish behaviour. His first visit to America occurred in 1820. He was the first major English actor to tour there since George Frederick Cooke ten years earlier and “his entry marked the beginning of that immigration of theatrical notables which is so much a feature of the artistic annals of the United States” (Hillebrand 200). Back in England, his questionable personal life began to have public ramifications once more as news spread of his explosive affair with Charlotte Cox, the wife of a London alderman and one of the Drury Lane committee members. On 17 January 1825 Alderman Cox sued Kean for criminal conversation with his wife after a supposed seven years of relations and national opinion rapidly turned against him, with extensive newspaper coverage: “The case excited the greatest interest; the *Times* on January 18 carried ten columns of summary out of a total of twenty” (Hillebrand 240). His subsequent appearances onstage inspired similarly agitated interest. Harold Newcomb Hillebrand notes that during his first performance at Drury Lane following the case, the noise of the audience was such that “the walls of Drury trembled” (251). A very anti-Kean report in *The Times* detailed a riot occurring at the theatre in February 1825, splitting the audience into Kean supporters and protestors: “The hooting, howling and hissing – the cries of ‘Turn him out’ ‘Kean for ever!’ ‘Off, off;’ and others which decency will not allow us to ‘set down’, were terrific. The fights were numerous [...] The noise was incessant during the first three acts; and whenever Mr. Kean appeared, it reached a deafening height” (1 Feb 1825). Out in the public eye for all to see, Kean’s outlandish behaviour and disreputable antics offended many. As Jacky Bratton notes, “Kean was a player, technically one of His Majesty’s servants, and not only were the behaviour and presumptions he now paraded in the playhouse offensive to middle-class morality, but the individual in whom these values were embodied was within its regulatory reach” (Bratton “The Celebrity of Edmund Kean” 96). By August 1825 Kean had escaped the disgruntled

British public and was once again setting sail across the ocean to take up theatrical engagements in America.

With this context in mind, it is useful to examine the difference in Kean's farewell speeches at Liverpool in 1820 and 1825 and to consider how their content and reception compared with those aimed at London audiences. On 13 October 1820 *The Liverpool Mercury* printed Kean's parting speech to this North West audience and offered an interesting take on the reasoning behind Kean's accusations against the town. His speech began seeming to promise praise and a sense of theatrical duty towards the port: "Whenever I have had the honour of appearing before a Liverpool audience, I have always been most anxious to exert myself to the utmost of my humble abilities. I hope, therefore, that, if ever I have failed in my endeavours, you will attribute my deficiencies to a want of talent, and not of assiduity" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 13 Oct 1820). However his speech then takes on a disgruntled and accusatory tone as he addresses a public whom, he believes, have not supported or encouraged his engagements:

But I should not fully do justice to my feelings, if I did not remark, most respectfully, *that in this town I have not experienced that warmth of approbation, and that alacrity of attention, with which I have been honoured in other large cities and towns of the three kingdoms.* To those, however, to whom my exertions have been acceptable, I am deeply grateful; and to those, in whose opinions I have not been so successful, I wish greater gratification and instructions from other and superior actors. As an Englishmen strongly attached to, and proud of, my country, I look forward with anxiety to that period when I shall revisit these shores; but, as a professor, I beg leave, very respectfully, to bid you farewell (*original newspaper italics* 13 Oct 1820).

In his account of Kean's farewell performance Broadbent seems to contradict Kean's accusations, recording that the actor was "loudly called for" at the end of the evening and was "received with universal cheering" (134). He takes this account of the reaction of the local audience from the report in *The Liverpool Mercury* and therefore labels Kean's subsequent speech as a "curious effusion" (Broadbent 135). However the rejoinder printed in this local newspaper is particularly

illuminating at this point. The editorial accepts Kean's accusations but offers this aloof image of the town as a practical and shrewd way of analysing those highly celebrated actors appearing on the Liverpool stage:

A considerable part of the audience warmly applauded the speech, while many persons withheld any expression upon it. There is no doubt, that the Liverpool audience is the most sparing of that encouragement which arises from judicious but liberal applause, of many in the kingdom. There is a coldness in our theatrical manners, which, whether proper or not, is oppressive to all performers who have experienced the warmth of more indulgent audiences. Kemble, and many others, remarked it: nay, more recently, Mr. Macready privately complained of it depressing his spirits, making him fear that he was not at all approved. If, therefore, Mr. Kean had alluded to it on behalf of the profession generally, it would have done great credit to his spirit and his candour; but he certainly has offended many friends of the drama, by speaking exclusively of himself, when it is well-known that he has been, next to Miss O'Neill, more praised and applauded than any of the recent candidates for public favour (*The Liverpool Mercury* 13 Oct 1820).

With its references to many others in the kingdom, or those "more indulgent audiences", this piece of editorial deliberately removes Liverpool's audiences from the popular opinion of the nation and proudly suggests that the town operated an independent chain of thought and theatrical response.

Yet Kean's parting speech here seems to declare that throughout the rest of the nation he was loved and adored by all. Certainly his farewell speech to the London audience in 1820 offers a much more effusive and thankful response to his supporters in the capital:

It is with pain I announce to you that a long period must elapse before I can again have the honour of coming before you, and when I reflect on the uncertainty of life, the sentiment will obtrude itself that this may possibly be my last appearance on these boards. (Cries "No, no! – We hope not!") I cannot but remember with gratitude that this is the spot where I first enjoyed the

welcome of public favour. I was then a wanderer, and unknown: but received here shelter, and, I may add, reputation (Hillebrand 195).

However despite reports of “loud huzzars” to this speech, Hillebrand notes that “whereas a goodly portion of London wished him at least a formal Godspeed, there were others whose feelings towards him might be digested into: ‘Go, and be damned’” (195). A piece of editorial in the *Theatrical Inquisitor* from July 1820 supports Hillebrand’s assertion of Kean’s mixed reception in the capital:

There, if fortune be propitious, may the bubble remain entire much beyond the period which our admirable Kean has at present fixed for returning; and if the vessel which carries out the arts, the ignorance and the effrontery that have given success to his career, can only be stocked with a moderate portion of the public dullness to which Mr. Kean has appealed, we will guarantee the same stupid admiration on the part of our Yankee friends, by which the idolaters of Mr. Kean in this country have been disgraced and degraded (*Theatrical Inquisitor; from July to November 1820*, 73).

Jacky Bratton notes that Kean was “the creation of middle-class critical esteem, and completely vulnerable to its withdrawal” (“The Celebrity of Edmund Kean” 91), as the onset of the 1820s proved. Despite Kean’s dislike of the proudly detached reaction from Liverpool’s audiences, he was shortly to return to their stage in a different frame of mind following his rejection from the London society he had bowed to just a couple of years earlier.

Five years later Kean’s debauched reputation had sunk to new levels following the Cox affair and the actor returned to take his leave of England at Liverpool for the second time. Harold Hillebrand cites his speech at the town’s theatre as evidence of his increasingly drunken and wounded behaviour: “He was still seething with bile, paraded his injuries before the world, treated the public of Manchester and Liverpool to impromptu harangues, lost to all sense of dignity, drunk with rage and liquor” (256). The language of this final speech at his farewell benefit evening in Liverpool certainly highlights his anger with the widespread public backlash and recrimination, yet it is also bears an obvious similarity to his farewell London speech of 1820.

I should be lost to every feeling of sensibility if I did not most respectfully thank you for this expression of kindness. At this moment when I am about to leave my country perhaps for ever – (loud cries of No! No!) – such an exhibition of your feelings is of particular value to me. Driven as I am from England by the machinations of scoundrels, by a combination of ruffians who seem determined to destroy me, I receive on the eve of my departure, the highest gratification from what I now see. No absence, no contumely, no sorrow, - none of the numerous indignities to which professional men, in all countries are obliged to submit – will ever efface from my mind the gratitude I feel to my countrymen (*Billings's Liverpool Advertiser* 30 Aug 1825).

In a rather rapid turnaround of emotions Kean now depicts Liverpool's audiences as kind and forgiving against the unsympathetic and judgmental backdrop of London society. A brief paragraph in *Berrow's Worcester Journal* also identified neighbouring Manchester audiences as being particularly hostile to the actor, noting that "an attempt was made to obtrude Kean at the Manchester Theatre last week [...] the reception Kean experienced was anything but flattering" (28 Apr 1825). In light of his previous reservations, Kean's parting words in Liverpool therefore appear to be a rather fickle move, shrewdly turning his thanks and praise to the most receptive audience of that moment. It seems fair to assume that a large part of this change in opinion is due to the fact that Kean had now removed himself from the society and theatrical world in which he faced disgrace and criticism to once again look out across the Atlantic from this North West vantage point. Despite being characterised as aloof and hard to please by Kean five years earlier, Liverpool's audiences had, as far as we can tell, continued to support the disgraced actor in his theatrical career. They had chosen not to imitate the social disgust propagated throughout the capital and neighbouring Manchester but continued to operate their own independent judgement.

Liverpool's support of Kean on the eve of his hasty departure to American shores reminds us of the town's isolated, transatlantic outlook and further investigation reveals that the port chose, at times, to support those rebuffed by the metropolis, looking across the Atlantic for inspiration and collaboration. An example of this can be seen in the town's affinity to, and defence of, the Anglo-

American actor, Thomas Cooper. He had achieved extensive success in America where, Harold Hillebrand argues, he presented the main challenge to Kean's theatrical success during his visit in 1820: "for upwards of a quarter century [Cooper] had been the leading native tragedian and had established a strong feeling, jealous of his honors, ready to fly to his defense" (201). His successful engagement at Liverpool at the turn of the nineteenth century had also seen the beginning of a lasting friendship with Charles Mathews, which led to Mathews staying initially with Cooper in Delaware on his theatrical tour of America (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews Vol.3*, 306). His last return to England in 1828 where, pointedly, he is known as and referred to as an American actor, was not a great success however and he cut it short after only a few months. The capital's critics in particular were, Liverpool's reviewers claimed, unforgiving in their reviews. Where these reviews came from, however, I cannot be sure as I can find no newspaper evidence containing any London critiques; all entries seem only to report his appearance on stage at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Yet the Liverpool magazine, *The Kaleidoscope; or Literary and Scientific Mirror*, produced an extensive editorial report on Cooper's appearance and his purportedly negative reception in London. It is very dismissive of the "cockney critics" who have condemned him and acknowledge that they want to openly "express our contempt for the majority" of them (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.408, 355). The report (also reproduced word for word in *The Liverpool Mercury*) goes on to question London's response in immediately dismissing the opinion of America and their high regard for one of their nation's favourite actors:

We will ask whether it be at all probable that an actor of such reputed eminence as Mr. Cooper, invited over to England by so competent a judge of dramatic talent as Mr. Price, can be so execrable an actor as to deserve hissing and shouting down by a London gallery? By people who are in the habit of applauding to the skies the most ridiculous and unnatural stage tricks of any actor who happens, at the time, to be the *enfant gaté* of the public? (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.408, 355)

London, the writer suggests, is fickle and undeserving of straight dramatic talent, preferring only the strangest and most bizarre novelty acts that were fast coming into fashion, over genuine (or so this author believes) talent. The report reminds its readers that Liverpool championed Cooper twenty years before and therefore feels an affinity and pride in their original support of him. The town, the article suggests, is not as fickle as their counterparts in the capital. Of course, like every region, Liverpool audiences were just as changeable in their opinion as the next town but their decision to champion Cooper and deliberately pit themselves against published opinion from London, alerts us to the port's desire to prove itself deliberately independent. The article lent further weight to their support with a reference to the Duke of Gloucester's approval of Cooper's abilities:

They who witnessed his admirable performance of *Pierre*, of *Don John*, and a variety of other characters, at the Liverpool Theatre, some years ago, will, with us, be slow to believe that he has since lost all pretensions to the public favour [...] Some of our readers will remember that Mr. Cooper's acting made so powerful an impression upon the audience at our theatre, that the Duke of Gloucester, who was at this time in Liverpool, patronized, without solicitation, the benefit of this actor, who is now to be cried down an utterly destitute of all professional merit (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.408, 356)

Although Cooper had reigned as "the first star of the American stage", his star had begun to fade by 1827 (Maginnes 5) and London's critics therefore seem to have been reflecting this general consensus of opinion.

However regardless, in many ways, of the exact level of talent or performance executed by Cooper during this British tour, what is important to us here is the reaction of Liverpool audiences and how they chose to express their dissatisfaction with the critics' response in the capital. The content of the article in *The Kaleidoscope* implicitly allies the town with America over London. The editorial is immediately followed by re-prints of American newspaper reports that question London's critique along the same lines. First is a paragraph from *The Franklin Gazette*, followed swiftly by a longer article taken from *The New York Statesman* which criticises England's presumed hostility to

incoming Americans: “Contrast the reception of Americans in England, with that of English adventurers in this country [...] Though we may not know better than the English, still we never forget what is due to a stranger” (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.408, 356). The Liverpool article further removes Liverpool society from London and, by implication, the rest of the country, by assuring Cooper of a welcome reception in this outward-looking North West port at least: “*The Kaleidoscope*, which finds its way to the principal towns in the United States, will serve to show the Americans that there is, in England, at least one person who protests against the unhandsome and uncandid treatment which Mr. Cooper lately experienced in this country” (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.408, 356). The writer chooses to end the article in *The Kaleidoscope* by dwelling on the gap, or metaphorical distance, between American and English sentiment and offers Liverpool as a friendly, welcoming resting place between ideological outposts.

The move by Liverpool’s critics to affiliate the town’s theatrical endeavours and opinions with America, instead of London, is particularly significant when we consider the wider theatrical connections across the Atlantic. Celebrated British actors continued to depart from Liverpool’s quayside to make the journey across the ocean in search of financial reward and international fame. Charles Mathews made his first journey to America in 1822 for ten months, when he enjoyed the hospitality of Thomas Cooper. He had first appeared in Liverpool in 1803 and returned in 1811 following fame and recognition on the London stage: “Indeed his matured powers were rapturously acknowledged; and in his many subsequent visits to Liverpool his popularity was to the end unimpaired” (*Mathews Memoirs of Charles Mathews Vol.2*, 120). He remained a favourite of Liverpool audiences and the town was set to play an important part in Mathews’s relationship with America over the coming years. The popularity of Mathews’s *At Homes* had steadily increased from 1817 onwards, after he was left lame from a fall from a carriage in 1814 and was unable to cope with the demands of physical comedy anymore. These entertainments proved popular with British audiences and followed a regular format “in which a monologue provided the avenue for anecdote, jest, and song that carried his audience through a series of amusing adventures and provided the

opportunity for imitations of all the human oddities encountered along the way” (Klepac “Mathews, Charles”). The monologue was then usually followed by a farce, in which Mathews portrayed a variety of different characters. The *At Homes* were performed in London from April to May each year after which Mathews and his wife, Anne, would tour the provinces for the rest of the year: “Each new entertainment was the talk of the town for months before it began, and everyone speculated on the topic of the next one-man show” (Klepac “Mathews, Charles”). Liverpool’s audiences were no exception and their coastal position meant that they were often in the privileged position to receive the first and / or last performances of Mathews before he left the country. Before he departed from the port in August 1822, *The Kaleidoscope* advertised his engagement in Liverpool for “positively two nights only, previous to his trip to America”, where he performed one of his ‘At Homes’, *The Youthful Days of Mr Mathews* (31.109, 29). Whilst his trip was not as financially profitable as he hoped, he did achieve critical and popular acclaim across the ocean and returned as the hit comedian of the period. Mathews was eager to return to his home country and he expresses this desire in a letter to his wife in April 1823: “So close to the water’s edge, and Liverpool almost in sight, being only three thousand miles, to go two hundred and forty miles away from it; and yet it is so strangely tempting!” (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews Vol.3*, 404). This extract gives us a fascinating insight into the important geographical and ideological location and outlook of Liverpool for the returning Englishman. The port’s impressive waterfront played a dual role, representing home for the weary traveller and yet also the opportunity for adventure, financial profit and, if needs be, escape for those departing from its busy quayside. Liverpool served as a gateway for theatrical enterprise, as well as commercial gain.

It was upon Mathews’s return from the United States in June 1823 that Liverpool featured strongly once more in his professional and personal landscape. After disembarking at the quayside, he found his wife waiting with news of a freshly arranged engagement for the actor. In a postscript to a letter to a friend, he described how “on my arrival, I found that Mr. Lewis and Mrs. Mathews had plotted to detain me here; and I am obliged to submit to perform three nights” (*Memoirs of*

Charles Mathews Vol.3, 414). However this was not a usual engagement as Mathews's performances at the Theatre Royal saw him reprise his Othello before a British audience for the first, and possibly only, time. Anne Mathews explained the reasons for this:

The known effects of Mr. Mathews's performance of *Othello* in America naturally gave the manager of Liverpool desire to profit in a similar manner from such extraordinary attraction. Mr. Mathews never meant to repeat the performance; but Mr. Lewis tempted – Mammon led him on – and he consented, at the end of his engagement, one *night* more to *fret in buskins*. The announcement, as was expected, drew an immense house, and his performance was revived with attention and applause, similar to what attended it in America (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews Vol.3, 415*).

The note on the playbill advertising Mathews's forthcoming appearance as Othello read as follows: "The Patrons of the Liverpool Theatre having expressed an eager desire to witness Mr. Mathews's performance in a tragic character, that gentleman has concluded an engagement, for one night only, when he will have the honour of appearing, for the first time in England, in the tragedy Othello, tomorrow" (*Liverpool Mercury* 4 July 1823). I can find no Liverpool-based reviews of this performance but a report in *The Morning Chronicle* described "this extreme novelty" as luring "a very crowded audience" to the theatre (16 July 1823). The review further states that "what is still more singular, Mathews is reported to have entered into the spirit of the jealous Moor with a justness of conception which astonished all present" (*The Morning Chronicle* 16 July 1823). Anne Mathews includes an unaccredited review of her husband's performance in the town, which stated that although "we had much rather meet him 'At Home' [...] We were pleased to observe so much attention in the audience, and the character played so totally clear of imitation" (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews Vol.3, 415*). He does not appear to have repeated the performance elsewhere and Liverpool's audiences were thus the only crowd outside of America to have experienced the celebrated comedian in such an unexpected tragic role. The town's unique, outward-looking

position was thus further accentuated by Mathews's decision to reproduce his American performance solely for the Liverpool public.

Following this trip across the Atlantic, Mathews devised *A Trip to America* and his performance of the new piece in Liverpool was theatrically important within the town. The production opened at the English Opera House in London in March 1824, reaching Liverpool's Theatre Royal early the following January. In his biography of the comedian, *Mr Mathews at Home*, Richard Klepac provides a fascinating reprint of a report of the production, together with a couple of humorous extracts, that were originally published in 1831. The report claims that Mathews "gives us a true picture of the American, highly coloured to be sure; but we are at once thoroughly acquainted with their style, demeanour, and oddities" (Klepac *Mr Mathews at Home* 99). It provides examples of the variety of quirky characters assumed by Mathews, including Raventop – "the American jester" –, a "Negro Hamlet", and the proud, satirically named American, Daniel Doolittle (Klepac *Mr Mathews at Home* 99). Tracy Davis points out that Mathews was "the first British performer to regard American people as source material, and then to represent them for British consumption; previously, the Anglo-American theatrical tradition had had one-way, westbound-only traffic" ("Acting Black, 1824" 189).

His performance of *A Trip to America* was significant in Liverpool for a couple of reasons; the first was Mathews's long-standing relationship with the town and their jubilant reception of his latest theatrical offering. It is important to note that there are no first-hand, locally written reviews in the Liverpool press of Mathews's performance, only the following notice in *The Liverpool Mercury* on the decision to reengage Mathews at the Theatre Royal for a further two nights: "We can say nothing of Mr. Mathews's trip to America, except from the report of others who were so fortunate as to obtain places, an advantage which we were unable to enjoy. The overflowing audiences on both evenings were highly delighted with the whole of Mr. Mathews's performances" (14 Jan 1825). Mathews's letter to his wife on 13 January supported this assertion of the popularity of his latest

production in the town. His letter raises Liverpool above other contemporary provincial towns in terms of financial profit for the performer (earning nearly 500l. in six nights – “Bravo! – the greatest thing I have ever done out of London” *Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian Vol.3*, 479) and also artistic appreciation:

The good people of Liverpool will amply compensate me for all the miseries I have endured. I opened here to 244l.! [*sic*] gaining clear more in one night than by my first six nights in Dublin. There has not been such a box sheet since Miss O’Neill was here as to-night. There is not *one* place to be had, in upper or lower boxes. We have had people enough turned away to fill half another plan; [...] They were joyous at Liverpool beyond all precedent; they roared; and though I had only been four hours in bed, and was four or five hours at hard work with dresses, &c. I never played in better spirits. Lots of Americans, who were as well pleased as the English; and their report is entirely favourable throughout the town (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews Vol.3*, 476-7).

The final line of this excerpt reminds us of the international composition of the port, emphasising the significance of the American presence within it. We cannot be sure how many of the audience were of American nationality, or the purpose of their visit to the town (whether business or en route to elsewhere in Britain), but their attendance reminds us that Mathews was performing his impression of the American people before an audience containing habitual travellers and migrants who had been to or come from the United States. Importantly he was also introducing a comical “negro” character on to a stage that had banned *Oroonoko* for its negative image of the Liverpool slave trader.

Due to the lack of local reviews of *A Trip to America*, we have no first-hand indication of what Liverpool’s critics thought of Mathews’s depiction of this black American Hamlet. A review of his performance in the *Glasgow Free Press* (and reproduced in *The Kaleidoscope*) highlights his portrayal of the “poor Negro” as the best part of the production, declaring: “We never saw anything so faithfully drawn before. It was the poor negro exactly” (6.297, 287). This report tells of a visit made by Mathews to a “Niggers (or Negroes’) Theatre” in New York and depicted to his audience

back in Britain (6.297, 287). Mathews recounts how a black tragedian is playing Hamlet and breaks out of character in the middle of the play's most famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be?" At the punning mention of the idea of opposition (pronounced in Mathews's character as whether to "opossum" (oppose 'em)), Mathews, playing the American actor, breaks into a song entitled "Negro Melody" which is purported to be a favourite tune of this theatre audience as it tells of the black man's natural intelligence:

Opossum up a gum tree,
Raccoon in de hollow:
No beat cunning nigger,
Though him cannot follow.
Nigger him so clever,
Him so sly and rum:
Pull him by de long tail,
Down opossum come (6.297, 287).

Mathews's performance of this song in Liverpool, together with his portrayal of a confident, witty black man, holds deep significance.

We ought, however, to take our stand upon higher ground, and say, that the performances of Mr. Mathews [...] involve high national considerations – that the mutual interests of Britain and the United States, so successfully advocated in the course of his Trip to America, as well as the pointed and powerful satire thrown out against the practice of negro slavery by the Americans, are subjects that call for serious comment (6.297, 286).

This report from Glasgow highlights the importance of Mathews's theatrical decision to include this persona in his repertoire and reproduce it in a town that had played such a key role in the slave trade twenty years previously.

However, despite this call for "serious comment" on Mathews's portrayal of the black actor, I do not believe that Matthews's performance of the "Negro Hamlet" on the Liverpool stage was

intended, or acknowledged locally, as a discourse on the town's slave trading history. Mathews had the ability to imitate all of his African-American characters without ever blacking up and this would have been the case on the Liverpool stage: "Although their personalities were distinct, they were depicted with Mathews's face – never differently made up or masked. Thus he accustomed his audience to see him as *black while viewing white* [...] When called for, he acted black and seems it, without the need to be it" (Davis "Acting Black, 1824", 176). Although perhaps awkward for a modern day reader¹⁹, Mathews achieved his dramatic impersonation of these characters through changes in physiognomy, movement and vocal imitation alone. Davis notes that his depiction of Hewlett's manners, eccentricities and dialects was akin to his other regionalised portrayals, designed to be "individuated and entertaining, but also 'fun' in common with many of Mathews's portrayals" ("Acting Black, 1824", 175). With so many differing nationalities and travellers passing through Liverpool, his performance of the black American, together with various other exaggerated international characters, entertained and delighted this multicultural seaport without deliberate political or racial intent, as the audience response suggests.

Davis believes that the African-American actor portrayed by Mathews was probably an impersonation of James Hewlett of the African Grove Theatre in New York ("Acting Black, 1824", 171) and, thanks to Mathews's letters to his wife, we do know that Hewlett came over to Britain in the wake of Mathews's sojourn in America. Anne Mathews described Hewlett as "the black Roscius of a minor theatre in New York" (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian Vol.3*, 479) and her husband explained to her in his letter how, fresh off the boat, Hewlett offered his artistic reply to Mathews's performance to the residents of Liverpool: "Mr. Hannibal Hewlet [*sic*] has been here, and gave an "At Home", and actually applied to Lewis for an engagement. He went to London, as he

¹⁹ Tracy Davis focuses particularly on the differences between contemporary and modern responses to Mathews's portrayal of the Negro Hamlet in her essay "Acting Black, 1824", noting that he has "posthumously been accused of racism" (174). Instead she stresses the importance of placing this portrayal in the context of his wider character portfolio, arguing that he was one "member of the confraternity in which Mathews entrusted his own identity" (175).

said, to challenge me, for ridiculing him in a part he never played. I cannot find anybody who saw him; but he performed here two or three nights" (*Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian Vol.3, 477*). There is no mention of the American actor's appearance in the Liverpool newspapers and he was clearly not successful in obtaining an engagement at the Theatre Royal. However he seems to have taken the opportunity to both retaliate and try his luck on the English stage in the wake of Mathews's success.

Hewlett's failure on the Liverpool stage suggests that local audiences were not interested in engaging with the politics of an unknown black performer in their local theatre. Entering into a theatrical agreement with an American black actor in the early nineteenth century would instantly engage the town in a complex debate surrounding its censured trading history and questionable national reputation. Although Liverpool's commercial identity had moved on considerably since the turn of the century, enough time had not yet elapsed for the town to offer direct cultural recognition of its mercantile past. Furthermore, the engagement of a black performer would imply an acceptance of the equality of the black actor on the white stage. While Liverpool's docks and quayside streets evidenced a variety of multicultural travellers, the black figure was still the inferior Other in this white maritime society that had traded such individuals just twenty years before. As such, a flavour of the same racism that underpinned the slave trade now operated on the Theatre Royal stage. Instead the town favoured the appearance of the celebrated Mathews, whose lure was rooted in his proven ability to convincingly portray an array of individualised and ridiculed characters from all levels and sections of society.

Nearly twenty years after the Abolition Bill of 1807 the humorous representation of an African-American character by a celebrated white actor on the local stage therefore offered an entertaining reminder of Liverpool's multicultural, transient identity but did not offer a direct commentary on the town's trading history. Yet it would of course be an oversimplification to imply that this highly contentious element of Liverpool's economy and society had completely vanished

from its cultural and civic identity. An analysis of the artistic choices of the Theatre Royal throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century offers an important insight in to Liverpool's civic outlook during this period.

Abolition and Liverpool Theatre

The opening years of the nineteenth century had proved to be ones of economic and civic upheaval for Liverpool's maritime-focused population. In 1795 the town's trading industry controlled five-eighths of the English slave trade and three-sevenths of the European trade. Yet just twelve years later the Abolition Bill was successfully passed in parliament with the voracious support of William Roscoe and other well-known local abolitionists, despite loud protests from the majority of the town's inhabitants (Trepp 265). Historian Jean Trepp records how, after Roscoe gave a speech in London on the necessity of passing the Abolition Bill, he "miscalculated the good will of Liverpool" and riots broke out upon his return as "his passage was blocked by seamen from slave vessels, armed with bludgeons" (284). However the vocal and physical protestations of the town's inhabitants did not prevent prominent Liverpool men William Rathbone and Dr Thomas Binns from becoming founder members of the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 and continuing to campaign for moral reform in Britain's busy colonies. As we have seen, Roscoe played a huge role in reinventing the town's cultural identity in the years leading up to and following 1807, seeking to turn the focus of the nation away from the negative, sullied images of chains and torture. Although historians are divided as to the impact and exact level of abolitionist activity in Liverpool pre-1807 and in the years immediately following, it is generally acknowledged that as the century moved forward into the 1820s there was a tangible increase in campaign activity (Howman 277). A large factor in this moralistic turnaround was the continued success of the port's shipping links and trade. The town's commerce did not suffer from the passage of the Abolition Bill, as might have been expected. The advancement of new trade links caused shipping tonnage through the port to double from 1815-1830 and it was to double again by 1845. In economic terms therefore it is

evident that Liverpool developed its trade identity, not only to ensure the port's continuing prosperity, but also to gradually distance itself from the continued slave trade activities of its European neighbours.

The port's change in direction of trade links had a significant effect on the cultural identity of the town. John Belchem believes that "having previously deployed corporation funds to defend the slave trade to the last in defiance of what it considered the meddlesome moralism of 'outside' abolitionist opinion, Liverpool placed itself at the very forefront of the subsequent campaign [...] to abolish slavery itself within the British colonies" ("Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool" 15). Or, to put it another way, Liverpool developed "a new concern for culture and public approval" on the back of their economic prosperity (Belchem "Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool" 15). The evidence in civic records certainly supports this statement. In 1822 The Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (The Liverpool Society) was formed, whilst 1827 saw the inauguration of the Liverpool Ladies Anti-Slavery Society (The Ladies Society); both of which campaigned to free slaves in the British colonies. Although the Ladies Society was not as large or as vocal as other urban organisations (such as Birmingham's), "it was nevertheless an active, organised body, whose members were significantly engaged in the propaganda battle" (Howman 289). Their high-profile activities included distributing anti-slavery pamphlets across the nation, as well taking part in a boycotting campaign which involved packing and sending packages of East India sugar across the ocean during the 1830s (Howman 289). Adding high-profile, local campaigners, such as Rathbone, Binns and philanthropist James Cropper to the mix, Brian Howman cautiously supports Belchem's belief in the town's moral resurgence: "Liverpool abolitionists, at least in the later campaigns, may have been more effective than previously credited, and indeed the town had taken the lead to some extent as a centre of anti-slavery propaganda activity" (278).

Yet while it is relatively straightforward to trace the development of the intellectual thinking and propagandist activity of Liverpool's dedicated campaigners, the increased abolitionist activity

and focused energies of the few did not play such a prominent role in what John Belchem identifies as the town's need for cultural approval on a practical, day-to-day level ("Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool" 15). If we now turn to consider the activity at the Liverpool Theatre Royal throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century, caution and understatement become apparent as the two key motivators behind any abolitionist theatrical productions.

In the years leading up to the 1807 Abolition Bill, and throughout the following decade, London's theatres produced various entertainments, including plays, melodramas, pantomimes, operas and musical entertainments that supported the abolitionist cause. Despite its absence in Liverpool's Theatre Royal, Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko* continued to be popularly received on the capital's stages. Hazel Waters notes in her exploration of racism on the Victorian stage that the 1812 edition of *Biographica Dramatica* reported the ongoing productions of the play, promising that it still continued to "give pleasure in the tragic parts of it to every sensible and feeling auditor; the love of Oroonoko and Imoinda being, perhaps, the tenderest and at the same time the most manly, noble, and unpolluted that we find in any of our dramatic pieces" (13). The success of *Oroonoko* and similarly revived pieces such as Edward Young's *The Revenge* (1721) – which considers the master-slave relationship from the viewpoint of the vengeful slave, Zanga, an "Othello turned Iago" (Waters 21) – encouraged the capital's dramatists to write scripts that appealed to the popular moral sentiments of the period. In 1808, George Colman the Younger's play, *The Africans*, was produced in London, whilst 1816 saw Thomas Morton's *The Slave* first performed at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden with William Macready in the title role of Gambia. When reading Morton's play after considering Southerne's work and Thomas Bellamy's *The Benevolent Planters*, it produces a more complex and dynamic portrayal of relationships on a plantation whilst simultaneously working as a piece of campaign literature for total abolition in the colonies. The central slave, Gambia, presents England as the land of the free and equal; a country that has set the example for the rest of Europe - in particular the Dutch - to follow:

England! Shall I behold thee? Talk of fabled land, or magic power! But what land, that poet ever sung, or enchanter swayed, can equal that, which, when the slave's foot touches, he becomes free – his prisoned soul starts forth, his swelling nerves burst the chain that enthrall'd him, and, in his own strength he stands, as the rock he treads on, majestic and secure. (*The Slave* 3.5)

The production of these dramas in the metropolis signalled the increasingly unashamed and upfront connection between drama and abolition propaganda in the nation's theatres.

When looking through the Liverpool Theatre Royal playbills in the early years of the nineteenth century, it becomes quickly apparent that the production content did not follow this new theatrical trend of the London theatres. *Oroonoko* was still shunned²⁰ and there is no mention of any plays, melodramas or entertainments that have any suggestion of content sympathetic to abolition. Of course this is not surprising from a port that had fought so vocally and proudly against the 1807 Act and attacked its own MP for helping to push it through. Although the town's merchants found other, increasingly lucrative and infinitely more humane trade links, it would take time for their grievances and prejudices to disappear. Whilst there are suggestions of individual campaigns and movements post-1807 as "abolitionists in the town operated in a manner specific to themselves and their locality", no combined, civic organised activity came into action until the 1820s (Howman 293). Liverpool's theatrical activities followed this local trend and were cautious in offering any regular dramatic representation of abolitionist sentiment on the town's stage.

Despite its role as a prominent ship building port during the height of the slave trade, it is interesting that Bristol's Theatre Royal still seems to have followed the dramatic trends of the capital in the years following 1807. It is unclear when *The Slave* was first produced on stage at the town's Theatre Royal but we know that it was a regular feature on playbills by the beginning of the 1820

²⁰ I can find no reference to *Oroonoko* on any Theatre Royal playbill until 24 October 1834 when it is listed as being performed for the first time in seventeen years. It seems unlikely that it was produced earlier in the nineteenth century, given the lack of other anti-slavery productions in the theatre during this period. There is no evidence in the playbills to support a production before 1834. As Southerne's play was so well-known and very publicly banned from the Liverpool stage, it seems possible that this was a subtle attempt on behalf of the theatre to suggest that it had not been so behind its contemporaries in producing this popular drama.

season and there also seems to have been no opposition to the performance of *Oroonoko* on the town's stage (*The Bristol Mercury* 22 May 1820). This could be seen as surprising when we seek to compare the maritime towns but, instead, I believe that it highlights the key differences between Liverpool and Bristol. It is important to remember that Bristol was linked with the Bath Theatre Royal from 1779, sharing a company and performing on alternate evenings for forty years. The repertoire was therefore largely the same and, due to their close proximity to the capital, tended to imitate the London theatres (Barker *The Theatre Royal Bristol 1766-1966*, 51). Additionally the port had lost a considerable amount of trade to Liverpool in the late eighteenth century and was going through a period of "local economic stagnation" before the onset of the Napoleonic Wars (Barker *The Theatre Royal Bristol 1766-1966*, 56). Although it continued to trade and fit out merchant ships in the nineteenth century, it did not achieve the global success or maritime importance of the north-west port. Instead, as I have previously noted, the Napoleonic wars provided a dominant military focus within the town and this is evidenced in the favoured repertoire at Bristol's Theatre Royal.

However Liverpool was not to shun abolitionist drama for long, tactfully acknowledging the popularity of these dramas and their role in the town's journey towards cultural recognition. The first dramatic indications we have of a growing acceptance of the abolition law in Liverpool do not come from the Theatre Royal but from other places of entertainment across the town. On 31 January 1817 an advertisement in *The Liverpool Mercury* for the concert hall included the opening quintet of *The Slave* "as now performing at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden with rapturous applause". As Morton's play had only premiered in the capital the previous year, Liverpool's musicians were quick off the mark to present what could have been seen as a contentious or provocative choice of music. However the advertisement does not comment any further, stating only that it is performed "by permission, for the first time in Liverpool" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 31 Jan 1817), and there seem to be no subsequent reports of the audience's reaction to the performance. Of course the performance of an orchestral piece of music does not have the same

impact as that of the full abolitionist drama, but this restrained advertisement signalled the future style of Liverpool's theatrical interaction with slave dramas.

Following the concert hall's first dip into the pool of propagandist entertainments, a bill for the Olympic Circus in February 1817 included a new melodrama, *Love, Hatred, and Revenge; or, British Slaves in Algiers*. No record of the content of this production remains, save a passing reference to it in *The Literary Gazette* (1817), which confirmed it as a brand new production of that year (190). It seems reasonable to assume that the title of the melodrama refers to the Bombardment of Algiers in August 1816, during which an Anglo-Dutch fleet temporarily succeeded in ending Christian slavery in Algiers (Smith 1997). From then on productions such as *The Slave's Revenge* at the Olympic Circus ("a new Melo Drama Spectacle, with appropriate Indian Dresses, Scenery, and Decoration" *The Liverpool Mercury* 3 Mar 1826); *The Indians; or, Love, Hatred, and Jealousy* at the Theatre Royal (*The Liverpool Mercury* 5 Dec 1823); and a new opera, *Native Land; or, the Return from Slavery* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 8 Sept 1826), appeared with increasing regularity. It seems, therefore, that as the town's abolitionist voices began to grow in volume, its theatrical venues echoed their cause through their choice of entertainment.

Although the productions increased, the local theatrical critics and opinionated correspondents suddenly became mute on the topic of these slavery-themed productions. Had the confident voice of the Liverpool critic worn out as the years progressed? It would seem not, as the scores of letters, reviews and comments produced from 'interested parties' on the state of the Theatre Royal were regularly published in the town's literary magazine, *The Kaleidoscope; or, Literary & Scientific Mirror* (launched in 1818 and issuing weekly publications until 1831). The magazine offered opinions from Liverpool's interested residents on favourite topics for national debate, including the continuing fashion for child performers, the increasing trends for 'popular entertainments' and the current dramatic quality of productions staged in the town. However these critics chose not to comment on this aspect of Liverpool theatre. As the town turned around and

began to take “the lead to some extent as a centre of anti-slavery propaganda activity” (Howman 278), this important cultural support was not thrust forward as might have been expected. The only reference to an acknowledgement of Liverpool’s racial outlook from its theatrical columnists was a criticism of John Vandenhoff’s portrayal of Othello in 1825. After an unforgiving review, in which the anonymous author, “Dramaticus”, declares Vandenhoff to be “sadly deficient”, the review moves on to question the makeup used to convey “the credulous but noble Moor” (*The Kaleidoscope* 5.259, 424). Surely, Dramaticus argues, Vandenhoff had forgotten “that he had to represent a Moor, and not a Negro” (*The Kaleidoscope* 5.259, 424). When considering the origins of the black figure on the English stage, Hazel Waters merges the representations of Moors (whom she describes as “black figures [...] their black skins standing in for their evil natures”) and black slave figures together, arguing that the latter developed and evolved out of depictions of the former (8).

However it is clear here that this early nineteenth-century Liverpool writer perceived a clear difference between the two human images, without explicitly acknowledging what that difference was. His indignation at the shade of Vandenhoff’s makeup highlights that whilst representation of the black “negro” figure (to use Dramaticus’s word) had become more sympathetic in recent years, he was still unhappy to see one of Shakespeare’s greatest characters portrayed thus. Recent stage conventions had seen portrayals of Othello with definite swarthy skin; Edmund Kean had recently performed the role to great success as the tawny-skinned Moor. In his 1827 acting manual, *Road to the Stage; or, the Performer’s Preceptor*, Leman Rede advised that “a tawny tinge is now the colour used for the gallant Moor, for Bajazet, and Zanga; Spanish Brown is the best preparation” (38). Dramaticus’s subtle, one-line criticism suggests that Vandenhoff had taken his makeup too far and that, for many, the black individual was still the inferior Other, emphasised on stage by the white actor in black, not just heavy, makeup.

However, for the most part, Liverpool’s critics remained silent on the presence of abolitionary sympathetic texts in the town’s theatres. It seems that there was a conscious effort to

keep debates on race and slavery removed from the cultural entertainment in the town during this period. In the 1820s the Theatre Royal began to put on Morton's *The Slave* and Colman's *The Africans*, both of which subtly supported the continuing efforts of the town's campaigners with their passionate rhetoric, but were not directly aligned with, or publicly adopted by, any local movement. The first mention of *The Slave* in Theatre Royal playbills advertised in *The Liverpool Mercury* occurs on 8 September 1826, but it does not seem to have been its first performance as it is not billed as a premier in the town. I can find no previous reference to an earlier production in local newspapers but this does not mean to say that it had not been performed in Liverpool before as lost playbills / newspapers, or cases of unreported productions, frequently occur. However what is certain is that it was quickly followed by a performance of Colman's *The Africans* in the November of the same year. According to newspaper sources, *The Africans* was revived again in the town two years later in November 1828 (*The Liverpool Mercury* 28 Nov 1828). The playbills for 1832-1834 also show that productions of *The Slave* were sustained at the Theatre Royal, with two performances in 1832, three in 1833 and one in 1834. In terms of production activity for a popular play, these sparse statistics are not the most encouraging. However the very fact that they were performed at all, and with tentatively increasing regularity towards the end of the 1820s, suggests a gradual change in Liverpool's cultural activity. The Theatre Royal's decision to produce both pieces offers a useful indication of the town's civic character at this time.

Both *The Slave* and *The Africans* stand out as particularly key dramatic pieces at the turn of the nineteenth century for one important reason. They were amongst the first extensively popular plays appearing on the British stage to portray a richly complicated web of inter-racial relationships and ideologies of loyalty, debt, gratitude, and power on foreign soil. One of the most prominent issues dealt with in both plays is the pride in the humane reputation of the British, compared to the rest of Europe. With the abolition of its slave trade, Britain was felt to be leading the way and setting a moral example to its trading neighbours. The plot of *The Slave* directly compares the humanitarian British character against that of the ruthless Dutch through the fate of its central

slaves, Gambia and Zelinda. Upon learning of his freedom at the hands of the British Captain Clifton (before he later sells himself back into slavery to the Dutch to pay off Clifton's debts), Gambia exalts the abolitionary efforts of Britain: "Generous Briton! prophetic be my tongue! when thro' thy country's zeal, the all searching sun shall dart his rays in vain, to find a slave in Afric" (*The Slave* 2.1). This praise is swiftly followed by a speech laced with Christian morals and calls for humane decency that sounds like it has come straight out of a campaign tract:

Oh, my friends! – 'tis not by the thunder of war, but by the still voice of conscience, that the liberty of mankind will be achieved – yes, slavery must fall before the Christian warrior; - the arena he combats in, is the human mind; Revelation unfolds his banner; - Truth forges his shield; - his armour is riveted by Reason, and his lance is tempered by Mercy (*The Slave* 2.1).

By allying images of the moral superiority of Britain with a passionate call for reason and Christian duty, Morton produces a thought-provoking, emotive piece of theatre that is designed to feed the national pride of its audience and encourage continued campaign activity. Morton continues this direct heartfelt appeal to the audience through Zelinda's song in Act Three, after she has been taken as a slave and potential concubine of the sleazy Dutch colonel, Lindenburg. In it, she makes an emotive and passionate plea to Britain to protect slaves against other inhumane and cruel nations:

Sons of Freedom! hear my story,
Mercy well becomes the brave,
Humanity is Britain's glory-
Pity and protect the slave!
Freeborn daughters, who possessing
Eyes that conquer, hearts that save;
Greet me with a sister's blessing,
Oh! pity and protect the Slave! (*The Slave* 3.2)

Zelinda's appeal for compassion and pity from Britain's free inhabitants reflects the tone of much of the campaign literature produced in the 1820s, but it also echoes the letters and articles written by concerned, independent thinkers.

During this decade the pages of *The Kaleidoscope* were packed full of letters to the editor on the state of the European slave trade. The language used in many of these letters bears a striking resemblance to the emotive rhetoric of Morton's play and it is easy to imagine that the production would have struck a chord with these individuals. In December 1823 a letter from the anonymous "J.N." encouraged its readership to put humanity before money and business – a bold approach in a town so previously bound up with the maritime trade:

O shame on this traffic in blood, this barter of human beings, for the deceptive enjoyments of life [...] Let not interest blind your judgement, but consider if you were placed in the situation even of these slaves most mildly treated, and would not your hard pillow often be bathed by the tears of oppression and sorrow (*The Kaleidoscope* 4.181 199).

J.N.'s pleas to his fellow men to look to their own behaviour and desires before any material greed finds reference in the 1808 production of *The Africans*. Set before the change in trading laws, Colman deliberately places matter of fact and unfeeling language in to the mouths of his English traders to highlight the inhumanity of slave trafficking. As merchants Fetterwell and Marrowbone examine the slaves put before them for sale, they compare the captives to pieces of meat hanging up in a butcher's shop:

Fetterwell: A pretty decent show.

Marrowbone: Yes, the women are tricked out as a gay as a porkshop on Saturday night; and the men seem tolerably strong (*The Africans* 2.3).

In case audiences miss this flippant remark, we are told by his companion for added emphasis that Marrowbone was "once a carcass butcher in Clare-Market, but an estate dropping to him in the West India Islands, he now barterers for blacks, instead of bargaining for bullocks" (*The Africans* 2.3).

For these men, as for many Liverpool merchants who had gone before them, slaves are no more than livestock to be sold at market for the best possible price.

Due to the critics' silence, we have no way of gauging their reactions to the deliberately provocative language and imagery of their own shameful trade history within these particular plays. However their appearance on the Theatre Royal stage did come at a time of heightened abolitionary action in the town. Concerned local organisations now preached eloquent warnings to those who continued to make their money through slavery. An issue of *The Kaleidoscope* in July 1822 included an excerpt from an address given by the Liverpool Society of Friends. In it, the speaker issued a "Christian warning" to all involved in the trade:

Although we view your actions with indignation and abhorrence, you are the objects of our tender pity. As we are believers in a future state of rewards and punishments, we would warn you in a Christian love, of the awful termination of that course of wickedness which you are pursuing [...] What then will be the portion of those who have meted out cruelty, distress, and sorrow to the innocent and unprotected? (3.108, 18)

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, counted well-known local abolitionist James Cropper amongst its members and had continued to actively condemn the trade in Liverpool before the 1807 bill as well as after. However their speeches and Christian rhetoric began to find more column inches as the 1820s progressed. Their messages also found resonance in the theatre as both Colman and Morton took the distressing image of the poor, innocent slave to heart, pushing it to the forefront of both *The Slave* and *The Africans*. In the former, the manipulative Dutch Colonel Lindenburg uses exaggerated proprietary language to emphasise the defenceless position of slaves. He takes intense joy in describing them as "the creatures of my will – the drudges of my wants – the minions of my pleasures!" (*The Slave* 2.5). The image of the innocent slave entrapped in a downtrodden miserable life by no fault of his / her own is also emphatically expressed by Morton in *The Africans*, to the point where he seems, at times, to be beating his audience over the head with demands for pity and moral

sympathy. Early on in Act One, brothers Madiboo and Selico muse on the position of the free African ahead of Selico's impending marriage:

Ay, to be sure! The priest will have his game,
And that will make him happy; Selico
Will have Berissa, that will make them happy;
And Torribal stays here to come with you,
So you two will be happy, - Oh, there never
Were such a set of happy, happy people,
As shall be to-day, in Africa! (*The Africans* 1.1)

The repeated image of the 'happy African' here is by no means subtle, but it serves to remind us of the dramatic purpose and intent of these plays. They are tapping into the British consciousness at the beginning of the nineteenth century and bolstering the pride and sense of moral superiority felt throughout the nation following 1807. Britain had led the way in ending the slave trade and now wanted to encourage its European neighbours to do the same. The port of Liverpool was in a particularly good position to observe and comment on the actions of other foreign traders, thanks to its expanding maritime trade links. An article in *The Kaleidoscope* in 1830 celebrated the nation's abolitionary stance and the role it played in campaigning for humane treatment for the 'happy African', but it also voiced concern that other countries were not following Britain's lead:

With deepest feelings of regret, mingled with shame and indignation, we are compelled, by unquestionable testimony, to admit that the abolition of the slave trade by the British, honourable as the sacrifice was to the national character, has failed to accomplish all the good contemplated by the promoters of that great measure [...] The great European powers, as they are styled, will not cordially co-operate with the British in their efforts to extirpate this most atrocious traffic in the blood and sinews of their fellow creatures (3.109, 28).

If only, this Liverpool author wishes, the rest of Europe could be as honourable and as benevolent as Britain – "Freedom's Isle" (*The Slave* 3.5).

This romantic image of Britain as a magical land where all are free and equal has a particularly interesting resonance when we consider the landscape of post-abolition Liverpool. Liverpool had striven to reinvent itself as culturally affluent in the early decades of the nineteenth century and the 1820s–1830s continued to signal an era of remodelling and rebranding for the town. John Belchem argues that the town’s eventual acceptance of the Abolition Bill saw Liverpool take on “a new mood and character, symbolized by an increased cosmopolitan presence” (“Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool” 13). Thanks to the expansion of the port’s maritime trade, the waterfront became a fascinating multi-ethnicity contact zone or, “a diaspora space” with increasing numbers of foreign sailors exploring the town whilst docked at port, including African-American sailors descended from slave trade victims (Belchem & MacRaild 316). However Belchem and MacRaild are swift to point out that the “cosmopolitanism” used in conjunction with Liverpool at this period should not be mistaken for the same cosmopolitan society associated with “the self-regarding tolerance and internationalist notions of ‘polite’ (or Frenchified)” society elsewhere (320). Nor, however, do they observe it as a romantic and liberated ideal. Instead Belchem and MacRaild argue that Liverpool demonstrated an unconscious fervour to identify and define individual ethnic groups in society (which, ironically, set the wheels in motion for troubled race relations in the future): “For the most part cosmopolitanism was no more than specious rhetorical assertion, relating to global connections through Empire trade and to a great mixing of people, regardless of accompanying tensions” (320). Indeed these historians go as far as to say that, by 1830, “travellers to the port were already expecting to find a mixing of exotic persons on the wharfs and piers” (Belchem & MacRaild 316). With this in mind, it is easy to imagine that the sometimes humorous, and often coarse, depictions of racial differences in both *The Slave* and *The African* would have found an interested audience in Liverpool.

Sutta: Oh, the jet feather’d raven, how lovely it look, ah!

When he spread him black wing to fly over the brook, ah!

[...]

Mug: Oh, the white swan he swims in the Thames mightly smugly,
But he hides his black legs 'cause they look so d---d ugly.

[...]

Sutta: But I be Afric---I be Afric:

Blacky man he be my delight, ah!

[...]

Mug: And I'm a Cockney---I'm a Cockney:

I love black when I can't get white, ah! (*The Africans* 1.2).

Morton's lyrics highlight the underlying racial tensions in Britain, and particularly present in Liverpool despite its "sailortown culture" (Belchem & MacRaild 317), during this period. Whilst the port may have had a distinctly "cosmopolitan" feel, and local abolition campaigners were fighting hard to provide freedom and equality for the African slave, the social and physical positioning of black men and women in Liverpool society, and British society as a whole, was a very delicate area.

Stars, Standards and Selling Out

The lack of commentary on the gradual appearance of slavery-themed productions at the Theatre Royal did not mean, however, that Liverpool's critics had softened in their opinions or productivity. More than ever, Liverpool's critics wished to support and sustain their own local actors and productions of choice before submitting to the popular tastes of London and allowing them to dominate their playbills. Their increasingly confident and independent critiques had liberally peppered the local newspapers and journals during the formative years of the nineteenth century. These reviews continued into the 1820s and, as the reaction of Liverpool critics to London's response to Thomas Cooper's performance demonstrated, their focus had shifted towards questioning the capital's tastes and opinions. Fortunately for the modern researcher we know that this was the case due to the fervour with which the town's articulate residents published their views in local journals and newspapers. As Victor Emeljanow notes, the substantial growth of the theatre

industry in the early nineteenth century had huge ramifications for audience expectations across the nation, as the drama and the industry as a whole became commodities open to scrutiny and review (36). For Liverpool, this meant the increased propensity to question the capital's place on its proud local stage. The large number of London "stars" coming to perform in the town, often following an extended period of promotional hype, began to grind on some of Liverpool's concerned inhabitants. An article in Liverpool magazine *The Thespian*, raised this concern in 1821:

Is it impossible for the provincial theatres to shake off some portion of their dependence upon the theatricals of the Metropolis? Is it impossible to establish an independent theatre in Liverpool, the second town of the Kingdom, such as the inhabitants might encourage as their own; in which they might be proud of the talents of a superior company and look to the occasional visits of some of the most distinguished ornaments of the London theatres, rather for a variety of excellence, than as objects for whom alone the theatre, under the present system, seems to be open and maintained? (qtd. in Emeljanow 60)

Why, this author questions, should Liverpool's own resident actors constantly be overshadowed by the advent of the nation's shining stars. The negative implications of such dependence are emphasised in another article in *The Kaleidoscope*, which again reminds us of Liverpool's determinedly independent mentality:

That we should wish to see these ycleped *luminaries* is natural enough, and it is true they sometimes shed a lustre on our stage, that warms while it dazzles; but they seldom emit such overwhelmingly resplendent beams, as to operate, when looked upon, like the piercing and scorching rays of the sun, by making us *blind* to the merits of our own performers (18, 143).

Despite having once craved the theatrical hype of the capital, the open, public dissatisfaction with London's favourite performers that we have seen previously, now came to a climax.

However the issue of engaging star performers at provincial theatres (often at increased cost and demanding terms) was not just a concern amongst Liverpool's critics. It had become a prominent bone of contention amongst many theatregoers, as Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody

point out: “the commercial success enjoyed by star performers created envy and unease as well as raising questions about the authenticity of a performer’s fame” (8). On 29 October 1825, a piece appeared in *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* on the managerial practice of shrewdly engaging metropolitan performers within the town, “for one night only”:

Lest it might have been discredited that such a munificent display of “metropolitan talent” could possibly be exhibited in a provincial town, albeit the largest provincial town in the kingdom, the worthy managers put themselves to the expense of printing advertisements and posting large bills, assuring the public that “POSITIVELY” such was the length (“by length we mean duration,”) of the sojournment in Manchester, of each of the celebrate individuals we have named. We do not dispute that those individuals are all *Stars* – and stars of a pretty considerable magnitude. But we must say (with the poet) that they have disappeared from our theatrical hemisphere, “As *shooting stars* that glance and die, Dart from the vault of the night” (29 Oct 1825).

Eight years earlier, a letter to *The Theatrical Inquisitor* in April 1817 from the aptly-signed “Anti Pleiades” also stressed the suffocating and excessive nature of the continued need for a “star”:

“*These blessed candles of the night*”, as Shakespeare has it, you advertise in your play-bills in capitals, a proceeding very grating and ungracious to the feelings of their fellow performers, and as I contend, destructive in the result to your best interests. The consequence of it is, that the public look for the particular actor, and pay no respect to the intrinsic value of the play (v.10, 273).

This letter is addressed to the proprietors of the Theatres Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden, indicating that the practice of exaggerated promotion and management focus on the star engagement of the moment was not just a provincial tactic. Although potentially profitable in the short term, the long term effects on attendance and profit at the theatre were a cause for concern: “The balance of profit by such a speculation, when compared with the average of six nights without this quackery, is now, and has almost always been, found against the treasury of the Theatres” (*The Theatrical Investigator* v.10, 273-4). Liverpool’s flurry of interest in the topic was sustained by the

continued increase of dramatic journals and home-grown editorial opportunities available in the town from the 1820s onwards.

In addition to *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator*, *The Kaleidoscope; or, Literary & Scientific Mirror* and *The Thespian* all featured regular articles and letters from concerned residents on the production and / or performer choices of the theatre's management. We cannot, of course, presume that the opinions of a few signalled the mood of the town as a whole, but the sheer number of outpourings and concurring opinions do suggest that these sentiments were increasing. A letter printed in *The Kaleidoscope* in 1824 addressed the style and nature of the engagement of these celebrated London performers, cynically questioning whether the promotional tactics advertising their appearance had actually superseded theatrical standards:

Nor is it less astounding, that gentlemen who were wont to be Mr. Such-an-one, and ladies who once made their entrances and their exits on our boards as unobserved by the audience as does Mrs. Radcliffe, should, in the short interval of a few months, be metamorphosed into personages of such momentous note, that the extreme breadth of a playbill, six inches wide, can scarcely contain their most puissant names; especially if the surname happen to be proceeded by two or three baptismal initials (5.214, 40).

The same concerns were raised three years earlier in *The Liverpool Theatrical Investigator*, indicating that this was no passing irritation amongst concerned theatregoers in the town:

The managers of the Liverpool Theatre seem to think their friends are afflicted with a *star-mania*, and that any actor who has passed the fiery ordeal of a London Theatre is sure to prove a source of attraction; we should not wonder if we hear of a Mr. Somebody, principal scene-shifter, or candle-snuffer, from the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, being announced for a "fortnight only". A scene-shifting star would indeed, be of great benefit to the Theatre, for the present operators seem to have no more idea of their business than so many mountain goats (143).

The growing trend for what we would now label as the celebrity continued to grate on some of Liverpool's fervent theatre-goers, who publicly articulated their dissatisfaction with the privileging

of the popular sensations of the day over straight theatrical talent: “Yet such is the ridiculous absurdity of these enlightened times, that it would be quite *unfashionable* to visit the theatre, unless the playbills were graced, and that too in extra large characters, with the name of some metropolitan prodigy” (*The Kaleidoscope* 18, 143). In 1824 another report appeared in *The Kaleidoscope* which bemoaned the influx of London stars and so-called prodigies on the Liverpool stage, replacing the town’s own respected actors. The language of the author, the mysterious “Council For Ten”, sarcastically labels this theatrical period “a wonderful age” which favours “Infant prodigies and Infant Lyras” over respectable adult performers (*The Kaleidoscope* 5.215, 44)²¹. Akin to much of the criticism levelled at William Betty several years earlier, the letter focuses on the engagement of popular child prodigy, Clara Fisher, and her recent appearance in the town in *The Merchant of Venice* as Shylock, aged just thirteen: “No innate excellence, no stretch of the imagination, can possibly reconcile us to the palpable absurdity of a mere child’s exemplification of the motives and feelings of the revengeful Jew” (*The Kaleidoscope* 5.215, 44).

Fisher first appeared on stage at Drury Lane at the tender age of six in the title role of Richard III in 1817, where she was an immediate success with the audiences in the metropolis (McConachie). Indeed one report from the capital declared that her performance was so astonishingly talented that “the distinctions of age and sex fall before her” (*The Examiner* 12 Aug 1821). However, unlike the popular reception to the hype of William Betty which produced packed houses twenty years before, Liverpool’s inhabitants did not now seem as keen to follow the capital’s lead. The report in *The Kaleidoscope* on Fisher’s performance as Shylock noted that the auditorium was far from full:

Whether it was that this infatuating species of magnetism proved less potent than had been contemplated, or that the unfavourable state of the weather operated to the disadvantage of the theatre, certain as it is that people remained quietly at home in lieu of having their little common

²¹ “A Council For Ten” was probably a reference to the secretive governing body in Venice from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, designed to preserve the state from corruption.

sense voluntarily outraged, and witnessing the most reputable of their country's authors shamelessly burlesqued (5.215, 44).

Liverpool's residents, it seems, were conspicuous by their absence. Considering Liverpool's increasing deference to the lure of America it is in many ways ironic that the town's critics lambasted the appearance of this child performer on their stage. Like many before her, Fisher travelled to New York to make her American stage debut in 1827, where she achieved considerable success and would remain for the rest of her life.

As I have begun to explore, concern over the level of theatrical standards at the Theatre Royal during the 1820s was a national trend that was not restricted to the worry-filled outpourings of Liverpool's concerned theatregoers. The increased commercialisation of the industry meant that theatres had to work harder than ever to lure audiences in and keep them entertained: "Reforms were in the air, and fashions were changing; it had become customary, for example, to take dinner at a later hour, and theatres were slow to adjust their 'curtain up' times accordingly. Stock companies in the provinces were being increasingly threatened by the incursion of metropolitan actors, at rates of pay that imperilled the finances of local theatres" (Lowndes 45). The desire for novelty and the remarkable had crept into theatre programmes from the beginning of the century but as the nineteenth century wore on it became a common craving across the nation: "The first half of the nineteenth century was dominated by efforts to solicit the patronage of new audiences and to identify their leisure habits in the context of an emerging industrial economy" (Emeljanow 110). Concerned critics worried about the quality of English theatre as highbrow, critically acclaimed drama was dropped in favour of "mixed" dramas, in which themes, characters and plot inspiration were gleaned from a variety of sources: "The theatre [...] was constantly changing, adapting to new social contexts, new audiences, and new cultural influences" (Booth *Theatre in the Victorian Age* 300). This potential dramatic decline is by no means a new idea in nineteenth-century theatre studies and I will explore the implications of it further in Chapter Four, but what interests me here is Liverpool's initial contribution to the discussion.

The sheer volume of letters and editorial devoted to the standard and content of productions presented at the Liverpool's Theatre Royal is evident when examining contemporary newspaper articles and regional journals. It is clearly a contentious topic but, equally, it is even more apparent that most of the opinions appear to come from the same pen names that I have begun to highlight already. This did not go unnoticed by some of *The Kaleidoscope's* interested readers and a letter to the magazine in 1827 charged the editors with providing few reports on the Theatre Royal in the first place – a charge which does not seem fair after analysing the regular level of theatrical content in all of the copies issued. But, when it did publish them, the author declares that the editors choose instead to include accounts “emanating only from the pen of an occasional correspondent, as little qualified for the office as myself, whose sentiments are either swayed by friendship, or biased by personal dislike, and whose opinions, whether just or otherwise are necessarily bereft alike of the responsibility of your name, and the influence of your authority” (8.372, 44).

One particularly prominent name that appears with increasing regularity throughout the 1820s is the opinionated “Dramaticus” who, as suggested by his chosen alias, writes lengthy letters to *The Kaleidoscope* solely on the subject of local and national theatre. In 1821 Dramaticus wrote a particularly passionate missive bemoaning the dying popularity of the legitimate drama. His letter is spurred on by the absence of “the enlightened aristocracy of Liverpool” from a production of *Hamlet*:

Whether the unprecedented pecuniary pressure of the times, - a debasing vitiated taste, concomitant of hydra and ever-carrying fashion, a modern refinement, - a listless change of national feelings, - degenerate effeminacy, - the rigid morality of a fastidious age, or an unaccountable lack of histrionic talent, have occasioned such lamentable “falling off”, I know not. (*The Kaleidoscope* 49, 391-392).

His musings on the changes in theatrical tastes and desires covers almost every potential motive for them but the overriding criticism in his letter is aimed at the questionable fashions of the period that affected the whole nation. Like London theatregoers, Liverpool's audiences no longer wanted to see

a straight Shakespeare play at the theatre. This was due, in large part, to the variety of new versions of old standards that had achieved considerable popular success across the nation's theatres. This did not mean that Shakespeare ceased to be performed at Liverpool, but new versions of his plays appeared with increasing regularity. A report sent in to *The Kaleidoscope* in 1824 included a review of a new operatic version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, much to the distaste of the anonymous reporter: "[It] has been mercilessly mutilated to an opera, to the great scandal of dramatic orthodoxy, the profit of music composers and dealers, as well as the delight, perhaps, of 'some quantity of barren spectators'" (5.219, 81). The report goes on: "We have surely operas enough without dressing up Shakespeare in the fantastic garb of Mr. Bishop, or Mr. anybody else, who chooses to enrich himself at the trifling cost of the poet's degradation" (*The Kaleidoscope* 5.219, 81). However at the same time as critiquing this style of production, Dramaticus balances his reviews with a defence of the theatre managers' decision to shake up the playbills at Liverpool.

They only cater *for* the public, and are consequently compelled to get up exhibitions suited to the public taste; not the *managers*, therefore, but the public are censurable [...] and must the doors be closed because scarcely *any body* would pass their threshold to see *The Merchant of Venice*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, or *Venice Preserv'd*, when, on the contrary, almost *every body* would attend a representation of *Henri Quatre*, *The Antiquary*, or *Ivanhoe*? (*The Kaleidoscope* 11, 88). It is not, he argues, the fault of the production team at Liverpool that these light, popular pieces were performed – after all, the theatre will only continue to thrive with a full house.

This reminder that, in practical terms, a theatre is only as successful as the size of its audience was supported by the news that a new minor theatre opened in late 1827 by permission of the Mayor. The playbill for the opening night of the Pantheon Theatre included "a new grand serio-comic melodrama" of three acts – *Ruthven, the Smuggler; or, Edgar the Outcast* – and ended with a "laughable Burletta" – *The Man and the Marquis; or, The Three Spectres of the Castle of St. Valori* (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.391, 214). The demand for novelty entertainment was immense and a prestigious Theatre Royal needed to balance the light with the serious in order to ensure continued

audiences. A glance at the playbills throughout the later 1820s supports this view. Established, critically acclaimed favourites, such as Shakespearian tragedies, Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) and *School for Scandal* (1777), as well as Richard Cumberland's comedies, continued to be performed but with less frequency than ever before. The demand for new productions dominated Liverpool's theatrical advertisements and, like the contested publicity over the latest London star appearing on the town's stage, new popular productions were extensively promoted:

The Managers have made much fuss about a new comedy ycleped "*Pride shall have a Fall*" and "the grand romance of *Blue Beard*", both of which have been immoderately puffed into notice; but neither of which, we will venture to predict, will outlive the glaring red letters that so pompously display at once the bad taste of the management, and prove that these pieces are not, in reality, attractive. If they were, in verity, popular, we should discover it without being so informed by a disfigured playbill (*The Kaleidoscope* 5.212, 20-21).

Surely, these opinionated critics argue, if these new productions hold any great theatrical merit or worth, they will stand the test of time and secure an avid audience without the extensive modern and intrusive advertising techniques.

In 1826 an anonymous author sent a witty critique of the so-called "modern drama" to *The Kaleidoscope*, accusing it of all containing the same plotlines, character types and dramatic form. To do so, the writer mocks up an "imaginary modern play" (what we would now identify as the plot of a typical early nineteenth-century melodrama), centred around a soldier bemoaning the loss of his captured sweetheart (7.319, 34). The writer declares that the roles of the soldier and his friend at the beginning of the play are basic: "They are the pioneers of the plot, and have a great deal of rubbish to clear off, before the piece can begin its march" (*The Kaleidoscope* 7.319, 34). The soldier then steps forward to "sing two verses about love and a soldier's duty; and as there is no time to be lost, the audience encore the song" (*The Kaleidoscope* 7.319, 34). To reinforce the unrealistic, superficial elements of the drama the writer then turns to the typical role of the lead female: "She declares that she can sing the tale of her woes, though she cannot speak; and the clown listens most

attentively, for he has heard hitherto only of females that speak, but cannot sing" (*The Kaleidoscope* 7.319, 35). This report clearly provides a rather cynical take on the modern dramatic entertainments flooding the nation's stages, suggesting that the predictable happy endings conform to the idea of a lack of substantial content. Here this "imaginary modern play" ends with the release of the soldier's sweetheart, a wedding and a joyful village dance: "and this, reader, is somewhat like the progress of a modern play" (*The Kaleidoscope* 7.319, 35).

However despite the continued intellectual debate throughout the nation, a key point when discussing Liverpool's opinion on the decline of theatrical quality is the acknowledgement that the average local citizen did not care about charges of lowering of dramatic quality, but wanted only to be entertained and have an enjoyable evening at their local theatre:

No subject, to which we have devoted an occasional column of the *Kaleidoscope*, has given rise to so great a diversity of opinion as the drama. One class of our readers would have us by all means appropriate half a page or a page, of each week's publication, to a commentary on what is passing on the boards of our own theatre, embracing the peculiar merits or demerits of our own *corps dramatique*; the other, and they form the great majority of our readers, find the subject, when circumscribed to local criticism, extremely dull and unsatisfying (*The Kaleidoscope* 3.108, 24).

The late 1820s saw the beginning of what Jacky Bratton defines as "a developing fragmentation of taste" that reached its height during the early 1830s (*New Readings in a Theatre History* 44). By this time it was commonplace that "for maximum profit shows with a wide appeal were often mounted, to the disgust of some critics" (Bratton *New Readings in a Theatre History* 41). In a period of increasing theatrical competition and variety, the managers at Liverpool's Theatre Royal bowed to popular demand and increased the number of melodramas, farces and billed entertainments in the programme. Louis James argues that the key to the success of melodrama in particular was the home-grown, local nature of the plot or the "unexpected authenticity of the setting" (153) and a variety of sub-genres developed including the gothic, domestic and, most significantly for Liverpool,

the nautical. Of course Liverpool was not alone in favouring such productions as hundreds of similarly themed pieces appeared throughout the nineteenth century “with soldiers, sailors or adventurers as their heroes, ending on a patriotic display of flags and canon to the tune of ‘Rule Britannia’” (Bratton “British Heroism and Melodrama” 22). However whilst the popularity of military, nautical and imperial melodramas continued across the country, Liverpool’s contribution to the national trend was of an overwhelmingly nautical nature. The maritime-themed melodramas, farces and pantomimes stood out as the preferred pieces of choice in this thriving port.

The opening night of the 1827 season at the Theatre Royal featured Edward Fitzball’s nautical melodrama, *The Pilot* (1825). Although there are several missing playbills from this year, we know that the play was regularly performed at the Liverpool theatre over the course of at least four weeks from 8 June to 7 July. It reappeared on the programme in December 1825. The playbill for the opening night provided details of the individual scenes and substance of the melodrama and offered an indication of the relevance and potential reason for its popularity in Liverpool. Scenes included a “view of the ocean off the American coast – A faithful delineation of a storm at sea! with the perilous situation of ‘The Ariel’ schooner, fully manned and rigged, expressly built for this occasion, under the direction of an experienced nautical Gentleman of Liverpool” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 8 Jun 1825). Fitzball “made great use of shipwrecks and storms, and the ‘fearful joy’ of the sea’s menace” in many of his melodramas (Bratton “British Heroism and Melodrama” 45) but the emphasis here on the skilled, knowledgeable leadership of the Liverpool captain immediately draws the focus in on the importance of the town’s nautical superiority and expertise. This theatrical reminder of Liverpool’s maritime superiority was continued throughout the rest of the decade with a stream of similarly themed melodramas, farces and nautical pantomimes across the town’s growing number of theatrical venues²². The “grand nautical melodrama” *Black Beard the Pirate* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Feb 1828) was regularly performed at both Cooke’s Royal Amphitheatre and

²² The Amphitheatre and Sans Pareil theatre both opened their doors at the end of the 1820s; I explore the full impact and significance of their appearance within the town in the following chapter.

the Sans Pareil Theatre from 1827-8, as was *The Spectre Pilot*. No descriptions of the staging accompanied the advertisement of these productions but it is highly possible that they too featured scenes of local interest and relevance. In 1827, a playbill for the Theatre Royal advertised interlude entertainments of a distinctly nautical feel, including a dance, “The Sailor’s Hornpipe, dressed in character” and the interestingly named entertainment, “The Bouton Bather’s Aquatic Misfortunes in Liverpool” (*The Kaleidoscope* 8.391, 214). The following year the theatre advertised a “new nautical drama, entitled, ‘*Nelson! Or, The Life of a Sailor*’” as the main piece of the programme on 13 June, to be followed by a comical song, “Bound ‘Prentice to a Waterman” and, once again, “A Hornpipe, in character of a British sailor” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 13 June 1828). The song “Bound ‘Prentice to a Waterman” regularly appeared on the playbills for the Theatre Royal as an entertainment filler between advertised productions. The 1774 farce *The Waterman* also appeared regularly at the Theatre Royal from 1828 to 1832 and we know that it was sometimes adapted for local interest to emphasise the town’s maritime accomplishments. On 18 July 1828 the playbill for the theatre advised that the farce would include, “incidental to the piece, a scene representing a regatta, to conclude with Rule Britannia” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jul 1828). According to the previous week’s edition of *The Liverpool Mercury*, the port had just held a grand regatta and boat race on the River Mersey to great acclaim. The addition of the obligatory rendition of “Rule Britannia” at the end of this scene therefore intentionally aligns Liverpool’s thriving maritime identity with the success and pride of the nation.

Following the Napoleonic Wars, the British Navy was one of the most admired and powerful in the world. In 1811 it contained nearly 20,000 craft, which not only secured Britain’s success at war, but also “and perhaps just as importantly, protected burgeoning trade abroad” (Davis “British Bravery, or Tars Triumphant” 127). By the 1820s pride in the nation’s maritime achievements and increasing trade links had increased and British patriotism was at an all-time high. If we look back at Liverpool’s geographical position and history, it is no surprise that the town continued to hold an invested interest in the country’s nautical achievements and, in particular, the crucial role it played

in achieving them. Nautical melodramas, plays and entertainments therefore not only highlighted the depth of patriotism bubbling in the British public but also boosted the local pride of this north-western port. As Jim Davis notes in his article “British Bravery, or Tars Triumphant: Images of the British Navy in Nautical Melodrama”, navy life became idealised in the public eye and “the popular image of the navy in the early nineteenth century was strongly enhanced by its presentation in the theatre” (122). To be a sailor, at both ends of the spectrum of command, was portrayed as a fine and noble career and this idea was emphatically encouraged or promoted on the Liverpool stage. We have seen evidence of maritime wordplay in speeches and prologues from as far back as the theatre’s opening night in 1772 and the nautical dramatic emphasis continued in to the 1820s. In 1820 John Vandenhoff delivered a farewell speech at the theatre ahead of his debut at London’s Theatre Royal Covent Garden. *The Kaleidoscope* included an excerpt of his speech in its weekly drama report, noting the enthusiastic response it solicited from the audience and italicizing the linguistic nods to Liverpool’s maritime ties for extra emphasis: “My professional duties, as a member of the Liverpool Theatre, are now drawing to a close; but if in the *tide* in which I am embarking, it should prove that I have taken it at the *flood* which *leads to fortune*, haply some current in the *voyage of my life*, may bring again the venture to your shores” (21, 168). Vandenhoff’s decision to use this specific wordplay suggests that he knew that Liverpool’s audiences felt a deep affinity with maritime content and linguistic style and, as I shall explore in the next chapter, the maritime emphasis proved to become more prominent as the years wore on.

Liverpool & Manchester: a North-West Comparison

Before moving on to consider the town’s theatrical output during the 1830s, it is important to consider whether the Liverpool Theatre Royal held a unique position within the North West with its patriotic maritime focus during this period. A brief exploration enables us to identify just how Liverpool differed in its theatrical outlook from its closest urban neighbour Manchester’s theatre in the years following the Napoleonic Wars. Like the rest of the nation, “war fever” initially took over

the Manchester Theatre Royal but, whilst Liverpool continued to retain a fascination and empathy with maritime and navy-focused pieces, Katherine Newey believes that industrial Manchester's interests took a different path: "the rapidity of change from public performances of loyalty to the crown in 1793 to public defiance of such protestations in 1819 [...] marks in Manchester's performance culture the kinds of rapid change in social and cultural relations as well as physical and economic growth" (10). To provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Liverpool and Manchester's theatres and cultural identities during this period requires a separate, extensive examination. However an analysis of the theatrical scene in Manchester during the late 1820s will hopefully provide a useful point of reference when pursuing Liverpool's dramatic interests and identity during this period.

Firstly it is important to state that there is a considerable lack of evidence on Manchester's Theatre Royal during the 1820s and a thorough analysis of the day-to-day running of the theatre therefore produces several challenges. Very few playbills now exist; the only collections are in the British Library (1793-1808) and Manchester Central Library. Manchester's collection only features one playbill from 1789 and then jumps to 1838, from whence weekly playbills have been collected until the end of 1847. There are also many missing editions of the local newspapers from this period (*The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, *The Manchester Times* and *The Manchester Mercury*). Those that are available are unreliable in their regular reports of current productions staged at the Manchester Theatre Royal, frequently eschewing this for other current news. In 1827 *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (of which there are the most available editions from 1825-9) regularly took the editorial decision to favour playbills for the New Pavilion Theatre, Spring Gardens rather than the Theatre Royal. Finally, there are no substantial publications on the early history of this North West theatre other than Hodgkinson & Pogson's *The Early Manchester Theatre 1750-1807* (1960). Five years after the publication of *The Annals of the Liverpool Stage*, Broadbent compiled the unpublished *Annals of the Manchester Stage 1735-1845*. According to his Prospectus at the beginning of the manuscript, he intended to have the

volume ready for publication for subscribers in spring 1913 but it never came to fruition. The only copy of the manuscript is now held at Manchester Central Library. His text is interesting for reference but it is even more subjective and selective than his published Liverpool volume. He is heavily reliant on actor biographies and appearances at the Manchester Theatre Royal rather than on evidence related to the organisational structure and running of the theatre. The manuscript is also heavily edited and occasionally hard to decipher. An accurate and thorough examination of the trends and interests of the Manchester theatre in the turbulent years of the 1820s is therefore challenging but the details that are available offer a useful and informative comparison to the state of Liverpool theatre at this time.

From the playbills and newspaper notices that are available, we are able to obtain a rough approximation of the favoured content and direction of the theatre's programme and compare it to the Liverpool Theatre Royal. As Newey suggested, there is some evidence that the theatre became a medium for dramatic protest and radical behaviour in the period surrounding the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. The economic and social downturn in the post-war years, and specifically in industrial Manchester, has been well documented and needs little repetition here but an incident at Manchester's Theatre Royal in January 1819 provides an alternative perspective on the level of protest and discontent felt within the town²³. A report in *The Liverpool Mercury* detailed the appearance of radical leader Henry Hunt at the Manchester theatre on 22 January 1819. He had arrived in the town to enlist northern workers and appeared at the theatre that evening with "three Manchester satellites (Mr. Joseph Johnson, brush-maker, Mr. Nich. Whitworth, corn-dealer, and Mr. Thos. Chapman, fruiterer)" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Jan 1819). The article goes on to state that the performance was continuously interrupted by calls of "Hunt and Liberty", "Rights of Man" and "No Corn Laws" from the gallery, culminating in the attack of a disgruntled audience member by one of

²³ See Boyd Hilton's comprehensive discussion of the politics and social unrest in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars in *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*; alternatively Colin Mathews's analysis of the reform years post-1815 also offers a useful background to the theatrical context under discussion here (in *The Nineteenth Century* pp.91-8).

Hunt's party (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Jan 1819). However the report also suggests that such radical dissent and protest within the theatre was not tolerated or encouraged by the majority of the audience. It describes audience members being "annoyed by the disgusting vociferations" of the protestors and, most significantly, calling for "in the way of antidote, the good old cheering anthem of 'God Save the King', which was given by the whole dramatic corps in full chorus, and joined by the audience standing up, uncovered" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Jan 1819). The anthem was repeated at the end of the first act of the farce "with greater energy, if possible, than before" and supported by the popular presence of officers of the 7th Dragoons in the boxes of the theatre (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Jan 1819). Broadbent describes this incident as "the scene of an uproar unique in [Manchester's] history", believing that Henry Hunt's presence within the town had left it "in a state of uproar and confusion all week" (383). His version of the incident describes Hunt's refusal to stand during the national anthem and the subsequent action of the aforementioned officers to drag the reformer and his companions out in to the lobby "amidst the cheers and applause of the house" (*Annals of the Manchester Stage* 384). We cannot be sure where Broadbent obtained this further information but the exact truth of the incident probably lies somewhere between the proud local newspaper and Broadbent's anecdotal text. There are no other reports of similar disturbances at the Manchester theatre in this year (although there are very few local newspapers from this turbulent time still in existence) and it does not seem that the theatre featured as a forum for reform again. This one major disturbance was not repeated and, importantly, its potential influence was not transferred across the region as no such political protest was, to the best of our knowledge, experienced in the Liverpool theatre. Although he is not the most reliable source, Broadbent makes no reference to any further political influences either on the Manchester stage or within the auditorium. Crucially, however, this incident reveals that, despite the threat of social unrest and disturbances within the industrial town, many of the Manchester public still held a deep commitment to the crown and patriotic sentiment akin to that of neighbouring Liverpool.

By the mid-1820s the number of existing playbills for the Manchester Theatre Royal increases a little in local newspaper coverage and they indicate that the patriotic, military focus was still very much present within the Manchester theatrical programme. On 1 January 1825 *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* reported the local inhabitants' reaction to the recent production of *The Battle of Waterloo*: "This splendid Military Spectacle was last night received with the most tumultuous shouts of applause, throughout its representation. No piece ever produced on this stage met with such decided success, and the curtain fell amidst the thundering cheers of a crowded house". Broadbent's Manchester thesis supports this local report, reproducing the final line of this review and noting that the well-liked piece was deliberately put on as the popular Christmas attraction from December 1824 to January 1825. Two other playbills from 1825 suggest that not only was the military emphasis still prominent in England's busy northern industrial town but also that patriotic sentiment had not declined in the years following the Peterloo Massacre. The playbill for 7 May 1825 was headed by the notice that the theatre was under the patronage of the Officers of the Royal Fusiliers (as well as the Mayor and other local gentry) and would feature the Band of the Royal Fusiliers performing "a selection of favourite overtures, marches &c. &c." (*The Manchester Courier and General Advertiser* 7 May 1825). One week earlier the Theatre Royal's playbill indicated that the theatre was under the patronage of the Royal Regiment of Scots' Greys with a band of the regiment also playing "the popular pieces of the day" (*The Manchester Courier and General Advertiser* 30 Apr 1825). The following year the newspaper advertised the favourite song "The Dashing White Soldier" to be repeated throughout performances in June "by particular desire" (*The Manchester Courier and General Advertiser* 17 Jun 1826). It was then repeated in August before a performance of "the much admired farce 'The Rival Soldiers'" (*The Manchester Courier and General Advertiser* 26 Aug 1826).

Obviously in terms of performance statistics these examples on their own do not prove that Manchester's theatrical focus was overwhelmingly military or patriotically based. However they do indicate that the cultural interests of the town had not abandoned loyalty to the crown or the pride

in its local military regiments. Manchester was not exceptional in this respect –we have seen, for example, the prominent presence of the militia and patriotic entertainment in Bristol’s patent theatre. Indeed such dramatic displays of patriotism conformed to the general taste of the period and contributed to the sheer volume of military / imperial-themed pieces. As far as we can tell from the available playbills and editorial, Manchester does not seem to have harboured a sense of uniqueness or difference in its theatrical endeavours at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The pride in the military was repeatedly reinforced on the Manchester stage and, as far as we can tell, there is little evidence of a nautical focus in the theatre’s playbills. Unlike Liverpool, there is no reference to a maritime piece at all in those playbills printed in *The Manchester Courier and General Advertiser* from 1825 onwards, until a production of Fitzball’s *The Pilot* on 3 March 1827, which does not seem to have been repeated. Indeed there is no reference to any similarity in local interests and cultural references to its neighbouring Theatre Royal throughout those playbills available in the mid-1820s. Instead, a song sung at the Manchester Theatre Royal in 1825 emphasised just how far this increasingly industrial town had moved away from Liverpool. It suggests that the proposal to build a ship canal between Manchester and Parkgate, and therefore avoid paying ship dues to Liverpool, would be deemed an excellent idea in their minds as it would snub their northern neighbours and allow them to bypass Liverpool’s maritime dominance:

Alas then for poor Liverpool, she’d surely go to pot Sir,

For want of trade her folks would starve, her Custom House would rot, Sir,

I’m wrong, they’d not exactly starve or want, for it is true, Sir,

They might come down to Manchester, and we could find them work to do, Sir (Chandler 57).

The disdain with which the industrial town appears to look down on Liverpool’s successful trading history provides a key point on which to end this concentrated exploration of the Manchester theatrical scene. A disdain which, George Chandler suggests, hints at a misguided belief that Liverpool was a rich town where no one did any actual proper work, unlike in the dirty, smoky streets of its neighbour (57).

Whilst this superficial view of Liverpool provides a hint of Manchester's disdainful attitude towards the society and economic foundations of its maritime neighbour, the nature of this contentious image perhaps finds its roots in the transient character of Liverpool. Advancements in the docklands area throughout the 1820s meant that the docks had "moulded the port [or] city frontier" by the end of the decade (Milne "Maritime Liverpool" 268). The topography of the local coastline demanded that the town's docks be built in a long line, rather than clusters and by the early 1830s they stretched almost two kilometres both ways from the business centre around the Town Hall (Milne "Maritime Liverpool" 268). Yet Liverpool's residential centre was still comparatively small for such an economically successful maritime centre. Unlike its neighbours, Liverpool was flooded with huge numbers of sailors docking for a short period of time, as well as increasing numbers of transatlantic travellers disembarking and looking to rest in the town. In his performance of "A Trip to America", Charles Mathews noted the dominant transitory atmosphere as he compared his first stay at the Waterloo Hotel in Liverpool with his subsequent quieter sojourn at the Jack Rivers' Hotel in Elizabethtown, New York: "In one, all life and bustle, ready attendance, and everything a traveller can wish for; in the other, all quietness, deliberation, and determined independence" (Klepac *Mr Mathews at Home* 102). As a result of its mercantile history and continuously expanding horizons, Liverpool was defined by the hustle and bustle of its transient identity and the Theatre Royal's programme proudly honoured and reflected the port's growing maritime identity throughout the 1820s.

Chapter Four: Competition and Responsibility in 1830s Liverpool Theatre

The rapid growth of Liverpool as a global port had significant repercussions for the local character of the town by the 1830s, as well as its cultural identity. Not only had it experienced a considerable population boom and gradual geographical expansion; it had also seen its international reputation and trade links prosper in the early years of the nineteenth century. Such change, unsurprisingly, had a profound effect on the atmosphere of the town and Liverpool's social landscape did not always reflect the town's prosperous commercial reputation. This chapter therefore seeks to explore how the town's increasingly conflicted internal and external identities were played out on the local stage. I argue that Liverpool's regional tensions and theatrical developments formed an important part of the wider national dramatic trends during this period. I look principally at the growing theatrical competition and concerns over dramatic standards that affected the nation as a whole but played a principal part in the sudden evolution of Liverpool's cultural landscape.

Before delving into the condition of the Theatre Royal during the 1830s, it is firstly necessary to have a sense of Liverpool's social makeup and geographical layout during this decade. Despite being a flourishing international port, the core of the town was still relatively small and densely populated. Its compact physical layout had a practical effect on the act of going to the theatre. The proximity of Liverpool's dramatic venues enables a close analysis of its current theatrical environment. Furthermore, it offers a sense of the relationship between the theatres and "the social and cultural landscape through which the spectators of performance" moved immediately outside of the theatre doors (Robinson 4).

On the ground level Liverpool continued to experience an element of architectural transformation as the legacy of William Roscoe lived on and the town's council strove towards what John Belchem identifies as a new "Liverpolis"; the grand, impressive appearance of many of the town's key buildings and locations ("Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool" 16). A style of "neo-Greek" architecture ("Greek refinement and scale" combined with "Roman strength and magnificence") was

favoured for important civic buildings, whilst the decade saw an increase of clubs, reading rooms and learned societies, “specifically geared to the education and recreation of young clerks” (Belchem “Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool” 16). In his travel book on the great European towns in this period, American writer Zachariah Allen noted that even the Town Hall and Exchange, the ultimate building of commerce and government for Liverpool’s business concerns, “is fitted up as if designed for festal purposes and dances, rather than for the accommodation of the citizens convened for political purposes” (30). He was not the only American visitor to Liverpool during this period to find a favourable urban landscape before him. Allen’s observation that the “houses and streets, as well as the people who throng them, bear also a remarkable resemblance in general appearance, to those of the principal cities of the United States” (26) finds a resonance three years later in the travel book, *Pencilings by the Way* (1835), written by foreign editor and correspondent for *The New York Mirror*, Nathaniel Parker Willis. During his tour of the European continent, he also finds Liverpool “singularly like New York in its general air, and quite like it in the character of its population” (43). Without going into any detailed comparison between the architectural design and urban layout of Liverpool and New York, this association with the newer, rapidly expanding North American cities rising on the global landscape emphasises the port’s transatlantic gaze, but also depicts it as a flourishing, modern town.

However an account of the town in 1832 by James McCune Smith highlighted that, while Liverpool’s scenery might resemble that of its stateside neighbours, the attitude and outlook of its inhabitants was very different. McCune Smith was the son of an ex-slave and the first African-American to get a medical degree. In 1832 he stayed in Liverpool for a few days on his way to Glasgow University, during which time he recorded in his journal that he experienced “interracial activity that would have been unthinkable in the United States at that time [...] There were no cold looks, no supercilious or sanctimonious frowns; none appeared to have reached that pitch of devotion in which creatures frown upon the works of their Creator – upon their fellow creatures, not for the hue of the soul, but of the skin” (qtd. in Belchem “Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool” 13).

Now, of course, McCune Smith's observations on the social differences between his nation and the foreign society he had just entered are not surprising given their differing attitudes towards slavery and racial treatment. Liverpool's public views on the moral strictures of slavery had drastically altered following the 1807 Slave Trade Act and 1833 marked the further abolition of slavery within all British colonies. On a local scale, these international advancements marked the further increased growth of Liverpool's overseas trade. New markets opened up, offering new opportunities for the town's merchants and encouraging incomers to the port from across the world (Chandler 61). John Belchem and Donald M. MacRaid noted that, in particular, "significant numbers of Kru (from West Africa), Lascar (from the Indian sub-continent), Chinese and other seafaring communities within and beyond the 'black Atlantic' were drawn to the port and its open 'sailortown' culture, often more than temporarily" (317). By 1832, Liverpool's population numbered approximately 230,000, doubling since the beginning of the century (Burrell & Gill 496). Due to the nature of the town, some of these proved to be transient, destined to continue their journey elsewhere, whilst many travelled in to the port to seek work in the growing shipping industry. However the increasing numbers, combined with an inadequate provision of sanitation and civic rule, did not lead to a healthy urban atmosphere. Down at the quayside, sailors were paid off from their voyage and left free to roam the port with "a combination of drink, time on their hands, and weapons" until they found another passage (Murray 85). Nicholas Murray argues that Liverpool's existing systems of law and order could not cope with the increasing population and the areas around the dock in particular were rife with drunkenness, stealing and prostitution. He includes a particularly interesting quote from an anonymous verse entitled "Liverpool, a Satire" that was published locally and may well have been performed in one of the town's theatrical venues:

Now range the docks, perambulate the quay
And all the western boundary survey –
Tumultuous uproars waken all your fears,
And blasphemy provokes your startled ears. (84)

Murray does not comment on the quality or style of this verse, but does point out that “it highlights a feature of Liverpool’s reputation in the first half of the nineteenth century that earned it the name ‘the Black Spot on the Mersey’” (84); an historically ironic label that becomes increasingly deserved when we analyse how the Theatre Royal acknowledged the deteriorating conditions of Liverpool life in the 1830s.

Charitable and Amateur Performances

The image of Liverpool as a thriving economic port with a declining social climate appears with repeated frequency from the 1830s onwards and was reflected in the theatrical output of the town. If we look at the playbills from the beginning of 1830, several charity benefit evenings were advertised at both the Theatre Royal and also the newly established Liver Theatre. Benefit evenings were a regular occurrence throughout the theatrical season, but they were normally produced to provide extra income for a member of the company or the latest star performer engaged at the theatre. However there was some history of using these performances for more public ends, notably when the Theatre Royal was rebuilt and designed before its opening in 1803. As the early years of the nineteenth century wore on, occasional evenings at the Theatre Royal for the public benefit became distinctly charitable in their nature. On 25 May 1830 *The Kaleidoscope* printed an extract from an address written and spoken by one of the company, Mr. Ellidge, at Liverpool’s Theatre Royal, “at the Benefit in aid of the Funds for establishing a permanent Night Asylum for the Houseless Poor in Liverpool” (380). Immediately the main deserver of such an establishment becomes clear as the verse depicts its first and main image of the homeless sailor, entirely dependent on the mercy of the community he finds himself in:

From the canvas, should a man appear,
Who claims from all – but most from you, a tear,
The broken sailor – he whose daring toil
Has brought us wealth from ev’ry distant soil.

Shall they, who, doom'd to linger on the wave,
Stretch'd the strong arm to conquer – or to save; -
Shall they – the brave – who whereso'er they roam
Still point to England as the sailor's home –
Be doom'd to find a shelterless retreat
From the storm's fury in the roofless street?
Or, dragged from thence, if succour they *implore*,
Find entrance only at a *Prison's* door? (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.517, 380)

This extract is particularly significant for a couple of reasons and demands further analysis in the context of Liverpool's social history. The first is the forceful reminder to the audience present of the town's pride in its shipping inheritance, as well as the local economic and social reliance upon the profits of this trade. The sailors who venture out to sea at the forefront of these voyages, the writer suggests, deserve a great deal of respect from the town. Second is the reminder of the transient nature of the sailor's life, choosing vocabulary such as "roam", "stretch'd" and "linger", and how their arrival at a port affected the landscape of that society. Third, and perhaps most important on a day-to-day level, is the emphasis on the lack of respectable, comfortable amenities available to such temporary inhabitants. Little aid is available for the average sailor with limited means. Indeed the verse suggests the lengths these men may go to – "if succour they *implore*" – only to be faced with the prison door. It seems reasonable to assume that the writer knows of, and is indeed hinting at, the type of disreputable activities that may lead to temporary imprisonment whilst in the town. The establishment of a night asylum and the offer of a reputable, comfortable and safe dwelling would encourage sailors away from any degenerate behaviour and get them off the streets, out of the public houses and away from the sordid nightlife – in theory, at least.

The charitable aims of such a mission are reinforced by the inclusion of a letter signed by "all Seafaring Men" in a prior edition of *The Kaleidoscope*. Reproduced without amendment, the men's praise of Liverpool's hospitality and kindness to the average sailor would have had a heart-warming

effect on the proud, charitable inhabitants of the town: “We being far from home or friends, and mostley [sic] being Seafaring Men, was under an obligation to leave our Ships, add [sic] no place of refuge to fly to, we found an humble Shelter in Thomas St. which we most thankfully received, and what we never Experienced in any Partt [sic] of the World before” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.512, 340). It is clear that the sailor holds a place deep in the heart of the local community and, as a result, is the first type of deserving person to be considered. Yet the introduction of a Night Asylum or, to give it its full name, “The Permanent Night Asylum for the Houseless Poor”, was not solely dedicated to relieving the distress of the poor sailor, despite the fervent emphasis on this angle by the local press. An article in *The Kaleidoscope* argued for the need of a reputable charitable shelter in Liverpool, including a summary of the latest purported figures on poverty in the town. It declares that during the winter of 1829-1830, 15,000-16,000 people were sheltered in temporary asylums (including 200-300 sailors), and that these institutions were deemed to be infinitely preferable to jail, the workhouse, or a police cell (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.512, 340). However, as with the previous correspondents, the argument ends with the emphasis on the particular needs of migrant sailors looking for temporary lodging in port but looking too rough or unkempt to get respectable lodgings elsewhere. The fervent depiction of Liverpool’s quayside needs supported the continued maritime focus at the Theatre Royal, but the weight had now shifted to explore the grittier, tougher side of the life of a British sailor.

The undesirable notion of the “Black Spot on the Mersey” – a label that became firmly fixed in the popular imagination by the 1840s – resonates profoundly when we consider the social conditions of Liverpool during this period. By 1831, it had a population of 230,000, with an estimated half a million migrants coming in to Liverpool during the first half of the nineteenth century, albeit with many only staying temporarily before travelling on elsewhere (Burrell & Gill 496). However these transient maritime figures accounted for a small percentage of the local poor. Liverpool had one of the highest rates of mortality in Britain and this was largely due to the poor living standards experienced across the town. In their exploration of the Liverpool Cholera epidemic

in 1832, one of the worst seen in England at this time, Sean Burrell and Geoffrey Gill noted that the area was “arguably the worst of Britain’s overcrowded and unsanitary cities”, with a large number of poor living in cramped cellar-dwellings (480). The combination of increasing population pressure and an inadequate supply of clean water, sewage disposal and general sanitary provisions ensured the rapid spread of disease and ill-health.

The Liverpool Theatre Royal was quick to address the deteriorating conditions within the town by hosting charity benefit evenings that aimed to aid the needy and desperate of the town. Benefit evenings such as these enabled the town’s wealthier patrons to play a charitable role in the relief of the poor, whilst partaking in a popular leisure activity. In 1834 the New Poor Law was implemented in Britain, which aimed to reduce the growing applications for Poor Relief with an ideology that until they entered the work market, or “mended their ways”, relief should only be available in workhouses, where conditions were deliberately harsh and undesirable (Daunton 71). The theory behind the new bill was to force the feckless into work and thus highlight the respectable poor as the truly deserving (Daunton 72). As a result there was a defined increase in voluntary societies and charitable efforts throughout Britain which aimed to discourage the dissolute and aid the deserving poor: “The Societies offered status and respectability to middle-class donors, creating reputations which had a real economic value in the business world. They helped to forge a middle-class identity, and also offered a means of mediating relations with the poor” (Daunton 72). The Theatre Royal’s charitable performances always aimed to encourage their audiences to truly imagine the plight of those in need and to remember the cause for which they have attended the benefit evening on a particular night. Mr. Ellidge’s address on an additional charity evening to raise funds for the permanent Liverpool night asylum on 14 May 1830 offers a fascinating example of the tone and imagery employed by the company at the beginning and often, also, at the end of the evening to portray the miserable life of local poverty:

Had I the poet’s fire, the actor’s art,
To warm the fancy, or to touch the heart;

To fling wild visions round me as I go,
And paint the dread *realities* of woe;
Then would I draw, in dreary shades but true,
Each dismal scene contemplated by you. (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.517, 380)

Ellidge's address deliberately aims to paint a vivid picture of the types of individuals he is depicting and by bringing to mind a visual image rather than just a speculative one, he encouraged his audience to think more deeply about the plight of these local men and women.

This tactic was, however, by no means unique to Liverpool's benefits. In her study of private theatricals in England and Wales, Sybil Rosenfeld points out that it was common for amateurs to give performances at their local theatre in the provinces for charitable causes (8). Only two months earlier the neighbouring Manchester Theatre Royal included a lengthy, passionate opening address before an amateur performance of *Othello*, "for the benefit of the Manchester Fever Hospital, or House of Recovery". Written by the anonymous T.H., the address emphasised the hopelessness of a poor man's life, compared to those fortunate enough to be blessed with wealth:

What numerous ills stalk about the earth
Encircle man! beset him from his birth [...]
From grief, from pain, what can frail mortals save,
What give a refuge, but the silent grave?
Yet some there are more favoured by high Heaven,
To whom a store of earthly bliss is given;
For whom the streams of wealth ne'er cease to flow,
Who seem almost exempt from human woe. (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.505, 280)

The address goes on to focus on specific heart-wrenching images, designed to tug on the audience's heartstrings and further highlight the evening's cause:

Behold a father stretched upon his bed, -
Fierce fever madd'ning his distracted head; -

Delirium's dead approach, he shuddering spies -

His torture heightened by his children's cries,

While their poor mother views his eye's wild glare

In all the agony of mute despair. (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.505, 280)

Clearly the image of the dying man, stricken by fever, is specific to the local beneficiary of the evening, the Manchester Fever Hospital; however one line in particular reminds us of the overarching design of such performances. After regaling those present with images of grief and woe, the actor delivering the prologue offers a prophetic statement to follow this up: "But, oh! how quickly altered is the scene / When charity appears with angel mien" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.505, 280). The purportedly pure or angelic quality of respectable charity and the effect it could have within a struggling community was a common theme during benefit evenings in both Manchester and Liverpool.

The most popular beneficiary at the beginning of the decade in Liverpool was undoubtedly the new Night Asylum for the Houseless Poor. The effects of a rapidly increasing population combined with the lack of housing provision within the town resulted in a desperate need to find suitable shelters for the homeless. In just one decade, from 1821 to 1831, the town's population had grown by more than forty percent (Saint 255). A review of a benefit evening at the Theatre Royal reminded the town of the desperate need to support the proposed night asylum: "Of the necessity of such an establishment, *at all times*, there can be little doubt, when we inform our readers that there are now in the house in Thomas-street, forty-two seamen, fifty-four mechanics and labourers, thirteen women, two girls, and two children" (21 May 1830). The town's theatres took up the cause with relish, featuring several benefit evenings in aid of the new poor asylum during 1830. The Liver Theatre held two such benefit evenings in April 1830 and the Theatre Royal also appears to have hosted at least three charitable evenings during April and May 1830. These performances, it must be noted, do not seem to have been treated as sub-standard or as theatrical

exceptions, but rather included the resident company at the theatre, as well as any visiting actors, and were advertised in the town as a normal evening's entertainment. A review of a performance of *Venice Preserved* in June 1830 indicated that the American actor, a "Mr. Adams", had recently appeared as Hamlet in a charity performance during his engagement at the theatre to great acclaim (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.522, 423). This production actually took place on 14 May, the same evening as Ellidge spoke his impassioned address to the town's audience. A review of the evening in *The Liverpool Mercury* offered thanks to Adams for his role in the production, but also thanked the managers of the Theatre Royal for their support of this charitable cause and the free use of the theatre on the night of the benefit and the preceding week for rehearsals (21 May 1830).

Alongside the increased appearance of charitable theatrical efforts in Liverpool during this period were the rising number of associated amateur evenings produced at both the Theatre Royal and the new Liver Theatre. Depending on the occasion, these could be either special performances put on by local inhabitants of the town who offered their untrained expertise and time for one-off productions, or the appearance of advertised amateurs in the midst of the professional stock company. Helen Brooks notes that audiences were used to seeing amateur actors performing alongside or on subsequent nights to professional actors and she argues that such theatrical crossovers created "the possibility that the quality of each night be comparable" (4). The craze for private or amateur theatricals had been "a dominant feature of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century culture" with prominent wealthy households – such as Lord Derby at Blenheim Palace and the Earl of Sandwich at Hinchinbroke House – putting on private productions, as well as the appearance of occasional urban private theatres run by subscription – including Well's Street, London and Fishamble Street, Dublin (Brooks 1). However due to the ubiquitous nature of amateur performances "many more must have gone their obscure way to total oblivion" (Rosenfeld 7). Sybil Rosenfeld also reminds us that, whilst it is often the performances of the aristocracy that are best remembered today "amateur acting was by no means confined to the *haut-ton* but was popular in

other strata of society” and it was common for amateurs to give performances at their local theatre in the provinces for charity or their own amusement (8). Despite Helen Brooks’ assertion that the craze for private theatricals had almost run its course by the mid-nineteenth century, there are few references to private theatricals in the Liverpool area before the 1830s. This is not to say that they did not occur but instead that they were not promoted or advertised through public media still in existence today. The vogue for amateur theatre had given rise to “much puritanical opposition” centred on accusations of immorality and debauchery, climaxing after the foundation of the well-known Pic-Nic – the first amateur dramatic society at Tottenham Street Rooms from 1802-3 (Rosenfeld 12). Many private performances were therefore not widely or publicly endorsed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although Rosenfeld does make the point that these accusations had been bandied around for centuries and there was no solid evidence for any increased fear during this period: “on the whole, for all this smoke, there was singularly little fire” (13). Thirty years later, a promotion for an upcoming amateur charity evening at the Liver Theatre in aid of the Night Asylum for the Houseless Poor in August 1831 acknowledged an alternative criticism that now abounded in relation to amateur performances:

In general, amateur performances, as they are styled, are not what they profess to be. The *soi-disant* amateur is often some obscure provincial actor, who, as his name is not known out of the precincts of a few country villages where he has been tolerated, is palmed off as “Mr.--, an amateur, being his first appearance on any stage;” whereas it should be, “his first appearance on any *decent* stage” (*The Kaleidoscope* 11.581, 472).

The author is quick to defend this particular performance against the critics, reminding readers that for a one-off, respectable, charitable cause such criticisms should be overlooked and were ill-founded in this case anyway. Instead the spirit of the production should be taken for what it is:

Our correspondent, however, assures us that the amateurs whom he wishes to press into the holy cause of charity, are really what they profess to be, and are individuals of respectable character. A play got up by such performers would be a real novelty, and we hope, for the sake

of an excellent charity, that our correspondent will prevail upon the Liverpool amateur company to consent to the arrangement he proposes (*The Kaleidoscope* 11.581, 472).

The review of the benefit for the night asylum at the Theatre Royal one year earlier on 14 May 1830 had also alluded to the appearance of amateurs on the professional stage and the cynicism occasionally associated with their performance. The production of *Hamlet* on this night featured an unknown Mr. Morgan as the second grave digger, firmly stated as being a “a genuine amateur” but “very well received” in the review of the evening (*The Liverpool Mercury* 21 May 1830). Both articles stress that such occasions not only gave local citizens an opportunity to offer a creative input to these charitable benefit evenings; they also catered to the increasingly popular leisure activity of private theatricals.

Due to their personal nature and largely domestic or low-key settings, private theatricals in Liverpool were not widely advertised. Their content, theatrical aim and target audience are therefore not easy to describe. However, and potentially more importantly for my research, we are able to ascertain the local reaction to these performances and what level of significance they were given in the town by examining letters and pieces of editorial printed in the local press. Amateur theatricals had apparently existed in Liverpool since the town’s earliest theatrical ventures, as Harold Ackroyd notes that the old, temporary Theatre Royal in the dockland area was used principally as an amateur venue after the opening of the new, grand theatre in Williamson Square in 1772 (12). On one level, as our previous correspondent has already highlighted, there was a certain amount of cynicism about these amateur performers offering their talents on the professional stage. Sometimes it was a clever marketing ploy to re-introduce an under-rated actor to the same audience twice over but several years apart. However for the majority of cases, the performers were keen local theatre-lovers who enjoyed having the chance to be on stage. Charity benefit evenings offered occasional chances to perform on stages such as the Liverpool Theatre Royal and the Liver Theatre but, for the most part, keen amateurs were limited to private performances. However the thought of donning a costume, making up and acting a part in a sphere outside the usual theatrical space was

still abominable to some and this is reflected in the criticisms that were published locally during this period. One editorial note in *The Liverpool Mercury* in 1830 observed the reaction of a few to a contemporary performance in the town:

We are informed by a correspondent that about twenty stage-struck heroes and heroines are in the practice of exhibiting nightly in the neighbourhood of Cooper-hill, and he speaks in strong terms of the injurious consequences likely to accrue to the performers, (of whom three, he says, have already gone on a strolling tour) their relatives, and employers. In language stronger than we care to repeat he denounces the whole affair, and calls the attention of the magistrates to the subject (26 Feb 1830).

This newspaper notice highlights the strength of opposition felt by some to enthusiastic theatrical exploits not sanctioned by professional status and leads us to question why this reaction occurred in a town which was so proud of its local theatre and cultural achievements. The answer seems to lie in a letter to *The Kaleidoscope* the following month, which further fuelled the fire by describing those enthusiastic amateurs as “guilty of the sin of getting up private theatricals” (10.507, 299). The inclusion of the idea of guilt and sin, suggests that the main opposition to this leisure activity was a moral one and, as such, repeats many of the accusations of immorality and corruption that had climaxed at the turn of the nineteenth century²⁴. Early nineteenth-century Birmingham saw the considerable growth of Methodist and Quaker communities fiercely opposed to both public and private theatricals, resulting in a hostile pamphlet war known as “The Battle of Preachers and Players” in the early 1820s (Cunningham 132). Titles such as “The Plagiary Warned: a Vindication of the Drama, the Stage and Public Morals, from the Plagiarisms and Compilations of J.A. James, Minister of Carr’s Lane Chapel”, and “The Reprover Admonished, by a Churchman” were printed and

²⁴ For an introduction to the contemporary debates surrounding the “vanity and folly” and “vice and misery” produced by amateur theatricals at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Vicesimus Knox’s “Of the Prevailing Practice of Acting Plays by Private Gentlemen and Ladies, Writing and Speaking Prologues and Epilogues and Building Private Theatres” in *The London Chronicle* (27 Dec 1787). Further reading on the subject can be found in Richard Cumberland’s “caution to the guardians and protectors of innocence” in “Remarks upon the Present Taste for Acting Private Plays” in *The European Magazine and London Review* 14 (1788) pp.115-8. Cumberland argues for the need to contain and moderate the new craze for amateur productions.

disseminated around the industrial town in 1824 (Cunningham 131). The “flames of hysteria” which had “scorched the newspapers with vituperative paragraphs and lampoons” (Rosenfeld 12) still resonated with a concerned few in Liverpool.

However it seems that this negative reaction to Liverpool’s amateur theatrical efforts did not represent the opinion of the local majority, as both letters inspired a flurry of positive and encouraging feedback from concerned correspondents. One such writer argued that the practice of amateur theatre was really an innocent or minor concern in the context of other more dangerous activities: “Is it not better to see young men thus engaged in an *intellectual* amusement, than the more common and destructive one of card-playing, or the equally pernicious custom of consuming whole evenings in the pot-house?” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.507, 299). The anonymous “Advocate for a Laudable Undertaking” further emphasised the respectable nature of this pastime and argued that it was not the degrading or disgraceful practice that some proclaimed it to be:

I happened, last Thursday evening, to visit our Liverpool Thespians, and found them to form a society of well-educated ladies and gentlemen, not short of natural genius or talent, and an honour, rather than a disgrace, to the town they belong to, and am surprised to think that any *Well-wisher* should attempt to check a society formed for innocent amusement. I should rather think it reflected credit to the gentlemen who would enjoy their leisure hours thus in the pleasing improvement of the mind, in lieu of spending their time idly in taverns or worse places. The society is conducted with respectability and the greatest decorum is observed (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.507, 299).

The content of this letter is interesting as it tells us that these theatrical enthusiasts have now formed themselves into a recognised society and, the writer tells us, are of a most respectable and laudable nature. The letter encourages us to wonder how this can possibly be deemed any kind of degenerative activity. A letter to *The Kaleidoscope* in 1830 took this question further by explicitly comparing Liverpool’s private theatricals to the public performances at the Theatre Royal and a new minor theatre, the Sans Pareil (translated from the French as “without equal”):

How is it that a tragedy performed in a room of 600 feet long is good and orderly; but that the same tragedy, performed in a room ten feet long is disorderly and improper? [...] If the *stage* is immoral, strike at the root, and do not descend from your celestial height to pick up *little* offenders, when *great* criminals stand ready to your hand. (10.507, 299).

He emphasises that the amateur performers do not seek money, advertisement or praise, but perform for their own amusement only. However this argument is to conveniently ignore the occasional performances of the town's amateurs in front a paying audience, sometimes to raise funds for a chosen charity. The conflict between the status of private and public performance is instead left unchallenged by this commentator, signalling perhaps that there was still no satisfactory conclusion to this long-standing debate.

Accusations of a hypocritical response to Liverpool's keen amateur performers hold some weight when we consider the types of theatrical productions appearing at the town's theatres throughout this period. It seems that not only do amateur performers occasionally tread the local boards, but apparently first-time dramatists try their hand at writing locally inspired pieces. These productions were staged, most frequently at the Theatre Royal, as part of the weekly programmes. In September 1832, a new farce appeared at the Theatre Royal entitled *The Birth Day; or, Hide and Seek*. No detail remains of the content of the piece but we know that it was written by Lieutenant John Shipp, the Superintendent of the Liverpool Night Police (Broadbent 147). Shipp had previously had a colourful military career, selling out of the army in 1825 under less than favourable circumstances, and he published his memoirs to popular success in 1829 (Seccombe). Although Shipp had written two earlier plays – *The Shepherdess of Aranville* (1826) and *The Maniac of the Pyrenees; or, The Heroic Soldier's Wife* (1829) – and was therefore no newcomer to the writing profession, this farce was presented to Liverpool audiences as a new, home-grown production with no big theatrical names or stars attached to it. Despite its widely (if ill-advisedly) advertised layperson authorship, there was not one mention in the press following its advertisement of the so-called potential harmful effects of locally inspired theatre. One year later another regional drama

was staged at the theatre entitled *Captain Ross, the Hero of the Arctic Regions*. Although no material text of this play exists anymore, the nautical emphasis is immediately evident. It is safe to assume that the drama focused on the exploits of Sir John Ross (1777-1856), a famous Rear Admiral in the Navy and celebrated Arctic explorer. However what is significant here is that the production was promoted to the town as a further home-grown effort, designed to cater to the maritime interests of the local inhabitants. Without any evidence to the contrary, the Liverpool public must have assumed that this was a play written by a layperson, staged at a professional theatre, and yet again it did not come under any criticism from the vocal few opposed to the amateur theatrical efforts of the keen local performers. This conclusion appears to support the accusation of the letter to *The Kaleidoscope* three years before that there is an element of hypercriticism amongst some moralists or theatrical purists in the town that warranted enquiry and reprimand. It is more likely however that the proposed corruptive or degenerate influences of performing as an amateur were not deemed relevant or applicable to the intellectually creative pastime of writing.

Indeed the appetite for home-grown drama to appear on the Liverpool stage only increased and there is one piece of particular interest that demands greater examination. *The Siege of Liverpool; or, The Days of Prince Rupert*, a two-act drama, was produced at the Liver Theatre in April 1830 and written by "Mrs. Caddick of Liverpool" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.518, 385). Significantly, this is the only Liverpool-based and Liverpool-written play from this period to still exist in its original form (as far as we can tell) thanks to its weekly publication in *The Kaleidoscope* throughout June 1830. No further indication of the author's identity is given but it is possible that she was related to the famous Liverpool Caddick family of portrait painters who achieved national prominence and recognition towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The Siege of Liverpool is set in the English Civil War during an eighteen-day battle for the strategically important town of Liverpool in 1644. The cast list is split into Roundheads (Parliamentarians) and Cavaliers (Royalists), with key characters including Prince Rupert (the son-in-

law of James I of England and Commander of the Royalist Cavalry) and General Moore (the Governor of the Liverpool Castle). The plot revolves around Prince Rupert's attempt to seize the strategically important castle and take-over Liverpool's strongholds for the Royalists. Underpinning this action is a tragic romantic subplot revolving around Bertha Warde (the niece and adopted daughter of General Moore) and Lieutenant Alfred Moore (General Moore's son, estranged from his father and serving on the enemy side for the Royalists). At the outset, the play has the distinctly jovial, maritime air that categorises the familiar nineteenth-century nautical melodramas of the period. The stage directions describe the action of the first scene as taking place in a "Public House on the sea shore, ships at anchor in the distance, sailors drinking" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.518, 385). So far, at least, the setting is a familiar one and Liverpool audiences would have felt at home and comfortable with this local historical scene. Furthermore, as the dialogue begins, the nautical feel continues with a bombardment of seafaring allusions and puns. In response to the song "Tom Starboard" (a tribute song to their aptly named Captain), one of the sailors, another appropriately named character, "Tom Tug", emotionally declares, "Shiver my topsails if I ever hear that ditty but I find the tide flooding in my larboard eye" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.518, 385). According to *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* "Tom Tug" was a common nickname for a waterman in the nineteenth century, probably due to the allusion to the tugging motion of rowing and the so-called tug or boat (136). The maritime-themed dialogue continues throughout the play, appropriately weaving its way between sailing references and fishing witticisms to convey a Liverpool that is both relevant to the contemporary audience and yet also represents the town's smaller, localised history. Further on in the play, the two comical lovers, Dicky Sam and Polly Mayflower, embark on a series of fish-themed banter that is designed to amuse and entertain its audience and provide light relief from the serious historical plot. Dick chooses to phrase his proposal to Polly in decidedly fishy terms, growing more comically offensive the more frustrated he becomes. After her initial refusal he disparages women by claiming that "it's easy enough to throw a line when one can see a poor foolish fish swimming about, just ready to take the bait" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.520, 406). However Polly has as much quick wit about

her as her companion, swiftly responding “There you go again – always talking about fish – but you needn’t think to *nibble* me” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.520, 406). The rapid quick-fire dialogue employed by these characters makes for amusing reading and the comic theatrical potential is emphasised by the accompanying stage directions. As the couple rile each other, they are continuously drawing together and moving apart as Polly first slaps Dick’s face and then, as they repeat their farewells over and over again, the directions tell us that “they keep drawing nearer to each other, and on meeting they involuntarily burst out into a laugh” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.520, 406).

Yet, although the amusing, localised dialogue undoubtedly entertained Liverpool audiences, why was this particular home-grown drama highlighted and reproduced for local intellectual interest in *The Kaleidoscope*, unlike other contemporary productions? We know that the play was originally performed at the Liver Theatre in April 1830 but, as no playbills for this minor theatre now exist and advertisements for its weekly productions in *The Liverpool Mercury* were sporadic at best in the theatre’s early days, we have no way of knowing how many times it was performed or how it fit into the evening repertory. However I believe that Mrs Caddick’s drama achieved such a favourable response due to the locally-inspired language, content and symbolic descriptions used in the play. The play brings together all the local threads, themes and sources of pride that we have seen developing here and there in Liverpool theatre throughout the nineteenth century.

The Siege of Liverpool was serialised by *The Kaleidoscope* suggesting that there was a relative demand amongst Liverpool’s residents to read and digest the text of the play in print. This was an unusual choice, as it was exceedingly rare for a play to be printed in its entirety in the local press during this period and the very nature of serialised publication was designed to leave readers wanting more, awaiting next week’s edition – a popular mid-nineteenth-century editorial technique. The play fed civic pride and depicted the town in an honourable and constructive light. Although some scenes take place in the familiar setting of a public house, there is none of the violent or degenerate behaviour that was beginning to cloud the status of the estimated 1,200 public houses,

taps, gin palaces, and penny ale cellars found in the borough of Liverpool in the 1830s (Murray 85). Equally the play represents all levels of this local seventeenth-century society as respectable, albeit occasionally cheeky, inhabitants who are very much rooted in the local geography and history of the region. Dickey Sam describes himself as “thorough-bred Lancashire [...] born and brought up beside the Mersey, and it furnishes me with meat, drink, washing, and lodging” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.519, 393). This one line identifies the root of local pride in the area, suggesting that the River Mersey provides all one needs in terms of sustenance, income, employment and nourishment.

Pride in the key physical location of this prosperous town is central to the play’s narrative and is highlighted by Prince Rupert’s ardent desire to seize it for the Royalists as an important fort. The significance of Liverpool’s geography and location was still the key priority for the town’s merchants and businessmen in the nineteenth century as trade and related industries boomed and many in the audience would therefore have appreciated the proud sentiments issued by Mrs Caddick’s drama. The authoritative character of General Moore sums up the strategic importance of Liverpool during the seventeenth century, uttering rhetoric that also held deep significance in a nineteenth-century world of European warfare and burgeoning international trade links: “Our good town is one of the keys to our island fortress; and hence we hold communications with the farthest end of the known world” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.518, 386). This tribute to the positioning and geographic importance of the town is furthered by his son’s acknowledgement of its enduring, hardy character. Lieutenant Moore praises the ability of his hometown to bounce back from crisis stronger than ever and alludes to the proud symbolic image of the Liver Bird, a species believed to be based on a cross between the eagle and the cormorant; a coastal sea bird known for dramatically swooping in and out of the water: “Yet, these days of trial once passed, she shall rise again; as her emblematic bird rises from the marshes, and extending along the shores of the Mersey, shall rule, by the industry and enterprise of individuals, the commercial destinies of the world” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.518, 386). I believe that this type of language and emotion holds the key to the relevance and success of the play in 1830. Mrs Caddick allowed local residents to see themselves favourably

represented and celebrated on their distinguished Liverpool stage, praising their commercial endeavours and attributing them to the international success and reputation of the port. Such a tribute to the nineteenth-century success of Liverpool seems designed to feed the proud nature of the nineteenth-century Liverpudlian and draw attention away from the critical social commentary on the town's overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

The rise in charitable and amateur efforts in the town's theatres alerts us to a change in civic attitudes and responsibilities within Liverpool during the 1830s. At the same time as classical buildings or renovations of the new Liverpool began to spring up across the town centre, the newly selected Council, "imbued with an 'improving' ethos of civic duty, initiated programmes of educational, sanitary and health reform" (Belchem "Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool" 16-17). Healthcare provisions had been expanded during the first twenty years of the nineteenth century and by the 1830s the town had relocated its Infirmary to larger, improved premises on Brownlow Street and established a new northern hospital, which opened in 1834 and was swiftly followed by a southern hospital eight years later (Belchem "Living in Liverpool: The Modern City" 230). These reforms fit in to the local shift from the "individualism of Georgian patronage towards a collective sense of civic culture" (Saint 256) and, if we return to further productions at the Theatre Royal, it appears that this new trend extended, or was at least promoted, to the upper echelons of Liverpool society. In 1838, the theatre featured an evening programme of "Oratorio, In Aid of the Funds for Relieving the Distresses of the Poor" by the Liverpool Choral Society, with the Patron, "The Worshipful the Mayor" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 2 Mar 1838). From the description which followed, we are immediately aware that this was a particularly high-brow charity evening marketed to an elite clientele who would not only attend a special gala evening, but would undoubtedly feel that they had fulfilled their civic duty by contributing towards a good cause. The advert tells us that the main music featured was "Ifandel's sublime Oratorio of *Messiah*, with accompaniments by Mozart", with nearly 900 performers in the band and chorus combined (*The Liverpool Mercury* 2 Mar 1838). For the first time at the theatre, an official programme of the evening had been produced "which

may be had at the Music Shops, and at the Theatre on the Evening of Performance, One Shilling each" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 2 Mar 1838). This was quite a unique promotional aspect to the evening as, in general, theatre programmes were not commonly sold until the 1870s, with the sale of playbills in the auditorium preferred instead (Booth *Theatre in the Victorian Age* 95). In addition to the cost of the souvenir programme, the prices for the evening were raised on average by a shilling across the board (with the gallery the only seating area to remain at one shilling a ticket), potentially precluding or deterring many (*The Liverpool Mercury* 2 Mar 1838). This was clearly not an average benefit evening but, when we consider the range of other charitable performances produced, it appears that the town's cultural community was showing their support for a pressing social cause.

However, as I have indicated already, the Theatre Royal was not the only establishment to join in the civic effort for respectable poor relief. In 1829 the newly established Liver Theatre opened its doors on Church Street under the control of Richard Malone Raymond and W.J. Hammond (previously actors at the Liverpool Theatre Royal) (Ackroyd 51). Smaller than the Theatre Royal, it was highlighted in the 1834 *The Picture of Liverpool, or Stranger's Guide* as Liverpool's second theatre, where "dramatic pieces are exhibited during the part of the year that the Theatre Royal is closed" (164). Soon after opening its doors it also began to advertise charity performances in aid of the houseless poor. Charging less for entrance than the Theatre Royal and technically prohibited from producing licensed drama at this point, the Liver Theatre therefore marketed such programmes as a chance for the average resident to do their bit for a local cause. One such performance in April 1830 stated that "for a few shillings, the inhabitants of Liverpool will now have an opportunity of doing an incalculable service to the most wretched class of their fellow-creatures" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.512, 340). Yet the theatre was also keen not to deter any more distinguished patrons from the premises with the thought of a lower class of theatre. Instead they reassured potential audience members that, as a charity performance, the pieces were "highly moral in their tendency, and no lady or gentleman need therefore hesitate to send their child or their servants to

the Theatre on this occasion" (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.512, 340). There would be no unsuitable content on display that evening, the advert suggests.

Theatrical Competition and Debate

The Liver Theatre's keen reassurance of its socially and morally respectable environment could be interpreted as a reflection on the style or standard of productions featured at the Liver Theatre, as opposed to the reputable, patented Theatre Royal. However the relationship between the two theatres cannot be categorised as simply or as quickly as that. Instead it requires a comparative analysis of contemporary Liverpool theatre and a deeper exploration of the emerging conflicts which provide a greater sense of the town's role in the wider national debate over theatre regulation and, most importantly for this study, offer an important connection between Liverpool's complex and continuously developing theatrical and civic identities.

As we have seen already, quality of living and social standards amongst the poorer residents of Liverpool had rapidly deteriorated in a relatively short period of time, as the town heaved with incoming migrants and growing dockland trade. It was, Sean Burrell and Geoffrey Gill suggest, "arguably the worst of Britain's overcrowded and unsanitary cities", with huge numbers of poor living cramped up in cellars and fear of disease and starvation never far away (480). For those families not directly on the bread line the demands of port life were hard and, as Harold Ackroyd notes in *The Liverpool Stage*, by the 1830s there was "an enormous demand for entertainment as an escape from the misery of everyday life" (10).

Throughout the country an increased number and variety of theatres began to appear which existed "to cater for the hundreds of thousands of working men and women [...] who, though earning less than £2 a week, would spend every other evening watching some performance or another" (Hibbert 629). During the early nineteenth century, Liverpool's Theatre Royal had enjoyed a monopoly on local theatre as the only patented venue legally able to showcase licensed drama and

entertainments. It continued to dominate Liverpool's theatrical landscape, offering a combination of the latest productions seen in the metropolis with tried and tested popular favourites. No other minor theatres had attempted to challenge the theatre's regional dominance until the late 1820s. This does not presume that the town was without varied performance or exhibition spaces during these earlier years, but rather that they took the form of musical halls, concert spaces and exhibition halls instead of recognised theatrical venues. Yet the end of the 1820s saw a sudden flurry in the erection of alternative theatrical venues in the town which catered for the apparent demand for variety and choice from the growing number of local workers and trade families seeking affordable entertainment. The biggest and potentially most controversial of these new theatres was the increasingly popular Liver Theatre. Built in 1825, it had previously been called The Pantheon and was a so-called "Dominion of Fancy" – an ornate space designed for balls, parties and panoramic exhibitions – before being converted into a theatre accommodating eight hundred to a thousand people (Ackroyd 19). *The Picture of Liverpool, or Stranger's Guide* (1834) describes it as a "neat little theatre" (164) and it quickly became a popular theatrical venue. Aside from the Theatre Royal, it was the only fully functioning, single purpose theatre in the town and identified itself as having an immediately visual local connection by the placement of a carved and gilded Liver Bird directly over the entrance to the auditorium (Ackroyd 20). This image tells us that the Liver Theatre was keen to gain the level of local support and patronage enjoyed by the Theatre Royal by appealing to the regional pride associated with this symbolic creature.

By looking at the Liver Theatre's playbills at the beginning of the 1830s we can gain useful insight in to the type of theatrical competition facing the Theatre Royal at this point in its history. It is clear that, by and large, the Liver offered a range of popular entertainments that provided light amusement and variety. Farces, short interludes and novelty pieces formed the staple programme for the theatre with ambiguous phrases such as "various Entertainments" and "various Novelties" frequently used to promote forthcoming evenings (*The Liverpool Mercury* 20 Jan 1832). However by looking further at the advertised programmes, it becomes obvious that the managers were not

solely operating a theatre for generic light relief. The external symbol of regional pride above the theatre's door continued inside on the stage, where nautical or naval themed entertainment provided the predominant subject of its theatrical performances. Raymond and Hammond clearly knew what most interested and excited local audiences and were keen to take advantage of this unique selling point, to use a modern marketing phrase. To take a couple of representative examples; a playbill in February 1831 promoted "an entirely new Ballet-dance, called The Ship-Wrecked Cabin Boy; or, A Sailor's Wedding" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 4 Feb 1831), whilst one year earlier the theatre advertised the similarly themed "popular Nautical Romance [...] The Pilot, or a Storm at Sea" to conclude the evening's programme (*The Liverpool Mercury* 19 Feb 1830). Interestingly, this romance followed on from the appearance of a "popular representative local sketch of 55 Ranelagh-Street, Liverpool; The View of Lord-Street by Moonlight" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 19 Feb 1830). In 1832, an advertisement for the theatre promoted "a new and popular Nautical Drama, called Sailor and Marine", to be followed by the ever popular *Black-Ey'd Susan* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Feb 1832). These examples tell us a great deal about the theatrical direction of the Liver Theatre during its crucial formative years. The first point to note is the direct correlation between maritime and civic representation. Pieces such as "The View of Lord Street by Moonlight", followed by an entertaining nautical romance, not only offered the audience an opportunity to see themselves represented on the stage both at home and on the seas, but also provided the constant reminder that Liverpool's local identity and affiliation was always to the sea and its associated trade and commerce. The popular, light-hearted representation of a sailor's life also offered further relief from the negative ramifications of the town's maritime identity, which had begun to invade areas of the town.

However, the playbills also show us that the managers of the Liver Theatre were not intimidated by the Theatre Royal's theatrical authority in the town but, instead, seem to be setting themselves up in direct competition with the older, established theatre. *Black-Ey'd Susan* was, as we have seen previously, a very popular licensed melodrama of the period and was usually produced in

minor theatres in an alternative form, such as “the truly laughable Burlesque Extravaganza, called Black-Eyed Sukey”, produced at the local Sans Pareil theatre in December 1831 (*The Liverpool Mercury* 30 Dec 1831).²⁵ Not only did the Liver Theatre produce the original melodrama, but they also engaged the actor T.P. Cooke to appear at the venue, “as originally acted by him in London, for upwards of 200 nights” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Feb 1832). This was a direct imitation of Cooke’s highly publicised engagement at the Liverpool Theatre Royal a couple of years previously, a fact that would not have gone unnoticed in the town. Admittedly Cooke had made a living throughout the late 1820s and early 1830s touring the provinces as William in *Black-Ey’d Susan*, but this was the first time he had appeared in two separate theatres in Liverpool, one licensed and one not. It appears that the foundations for an emerging theatrical battle had already been laid early on in the decade and were subsequently cemented by the decision of the Theatre Royal to take legal action against their new competitors.

An article in *The Liverpool Mercury* on 18 June 1830 gave a full report of legal proceedings started between the Theatre Royal and the Liver Theatre that year. According to the notice, the Liver Theatre came under fire from the Theatre Royal’s managers for purportedly producing “‘entertainments of the stage’, without being duly licensed for that purpose” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jun 1830). The decision to take action against managers Hammond and Raymond confirmed the dramatic risks they had been taking and signalled that the Theatre Royal’s managers were not happy at being challenged by this unlicensed competitor. Liverpool’s Theatre Royal was not the first patented theatre to take legal action against a minor theatre by any means; the capital had seen various suits brought against the growing numbers of competitive minor theatres eager to challenge

²⁵ This production is stated very specifically in the playbill as being “written as a burlesque on “Black Eyed Susan” and was followed by the “laughable burletta entitled Dead and Not Dead; or The Old Bailey Butcher” (30 Dec 1831). No other indication is given as to what the burlesque entailed. The definite distinction between the two genres of burlesque and burletta is unusual here as *Black Eyed Susan* was not usually performed in burlesque form in minor theatres. Instead the deliberately vague and hybrid genre of the burletta (a mixture of “recitative musical and spoken declamation or song”) was used as a means of getting round the prohibited spoken drama at minor theatres (Worrall 18-9).

the monopoly of the patented theatres. In his study of the Surrey Theatre, William G. Knight points out there existed, in many ways, a contradictory and ever-changeable relationship between the patented and minor theatres: "At times, blind eyes were turned; at others, legal proceedings were all the rage" (3). Jacky Bratton further states that the "manifestly absurd" theatrical laws (63) during this period were continually flouted and opposed in the capital by those theatres only licensed "to perform 'burletta', music and dancing, and 'the entertainments of the stage'" (49). She cites the action taken by the proprietors of the Theatres Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden in December 1831 as an example of the continued defence of the theatrical laws by the patented houses, but also the undeterred defiance of the minors. Upon receipt of a warning from the theatres' solicitors "asserting the illegality of putting on plays outside the Theatres Royal", Benjamin Rayner of the New Strand Subscription Theatre reacted by calling a public meeting of actors and managers on Christmas Eve, eventually resulting in a public petition and subscription fund in the capital (Bratton *New Readings in Theatre History* 71-2). The stage was set for reform and it appealed to those individuals, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton, eager to overhaul the stale and outmoded theatrical traditions: "Here was a clear case of 'Old Corruption', an area of the public sphere in which an outmoded system allowed the dregs of aristocratic privilege allied with venial cynicism and ignorant sensuality to gull the purchasing public and to debar the moral and intelligent middle classes from control" (Bratton *New Readings in Theatre History* 69). Managers of the Liver Theatre, Raymond and Hammond, played an important part in the national battle for reform and their actions provide an important example of the ongoing struggle for a free stage outside the London sphere.

The case brought against the Liver Theatre by the Theatre Royal in June 1830 rested upon a production of *The Sleepers Awakened; or, Zulimah and the Caliph* which, the prosecutors argued "differed only in name from a regular stage play called *Abon Hassan*" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jun 1830). *Abon Hassan* was a popular comedy that emerged out of "The Tale of the Sleeper Awakened" from the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*. According to the contemporary theatrical licensing laws, the Theatre Royal was within its rights to highlight the illegal behaviour of the Liver

Theatre but what is most intriguing here is the way the case was dealt with within the town. It was heard in the Kirkdale Petty Sessions²⁶ but the defendants, Hammond and Raymond, failed to show up for the hearing and did not send anyone to represent them. This could be interpreted as an act of fear but I believe that it was instead a signal that they did not take the prosecution's argument, or indeed the whole case, particularly seriously. In their absence, Raymond & Hammond were fined £50 for their alternative production but when the prosecution then attempted to raise another dispute against them the court stepped in to seemingly protect the Liver Theatre and undermine the case: "the magistrates, the Rev. T. Moss, and W. Blundell. Esq. intimated that the conviction already pronounced would probably be a sufficient warning, and it was withdrawn" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jun 1830). This refusal of Liverpool's political elite to take the matter any further, or to prevent the Liver Theatre from repeating their offence, seems to support Hammond and Raymond's defiance and laid the groundwork for further conflict and theatrical clashes in the town.

By the mid-1830s the Liver Theatre was truly engaged in a dramatic war with the Theatre Royal as it continued to produce a variety of licensed and non-licensed productions to enthusiastic audiences. However this battle was not restricted to the provinces as managers Hammond and Raymond played a significant role in the greater, national challenge to the patent monopoly. In 1832 a House of Commons Select Committee was given the brief to examine theatrical licensing and copyright laws. This investigation emerged from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's petition to Parliament for an in-depth analysis of the state of British drama. His original request to move for a Select Committee can be found in the *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* for 31 May 1832 and his argument appeared to rest on these fundamental questions: "How far is it expedient for the public, that privileges and enactments of this monopolizing description should be continued; how far is it expedient that the minor theatres should be suppressed, and the exclusive patents of the two great theatres should be continued?" (31 May 1832). Primarily focused on the state of London theatre

²⁶ Kirkdale, a rural district of Liverpool at this time, housed the port's large gaol and courthouse until it was moved in to the town in 1835.

and the ratio of patented houses to minor venues, the petition's overreaching argument concerns the country's theatrical arrangements as a whole. Bulwer-Lytton rested his case on logic and historical reasoning, arguing that the original cause for suppressing the "very disorderly and improper" minor theatres in the age of Charles II had, "amidst the growing good taste and civilization of the age, entirely ceased to exist" (*House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* 31 May 1832). Minor theatres, he argued, no longer presented a moral or social threat but instead now offered respectable, decent entertainment that was called for and vigorously supported by the general public: "Besides", Bulwer-Lytton stated, "if the law could not, in the teeth of public opinion, shut up the small theatres, why not let them assume a respectable, a lawful character? What encouragement did it give to the proprietors of the minor theatres for a regular and continued spirit of enterprise, whilst this uncertainty hung over their head?" (*House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* 31 May 1832). This lean towards the commercial, enterprise-focused aspect of drama and entertainment was picked up on by supporters of the cause in the House of Commons who followed Edward Bulwer-Lytton's petition and proceeded to take the matter further by expressly examining the case as a business proposition, choosing language of commerce and trade over individual opinion. Fellow law reformer John Campbell spoke up to issue a short statement supporting the idea that "the laws should be made to conform to the habits of the people, or the habits of the people to the laws", going on to state that "the principle of free trade should be extended to theatrical representations" (*House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* 31 May 1832). The key phrase, "free trade", was quickly picked up by MP Joseph Hume who observed that "now that they [Britain] were emancipating themselves from other monopolies, they should also put an end to that very injurious and most indefensible one-a [sic] theatrical monopoly" (*House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* 31 May 1832).

However these potential political advancements in the capital also had a considerable impact on the theatre industry in Liverpool. We know that Liverpool's Liver Theatre played a key role in this lengthy debate as it eventually became the first minor theatre in England to be licensed

under the new Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. Yet the lead up to this decision marks an important era in the port's theatrical history and cultural revolution. Whilst the attempts of pro-reform campaigners undoubtedly supported the case of the Liver Theatre during the 1830s, the discussions and findings of the Select Committee would have little effect unless they were taken into law by the House of Lords. The managers of the Theatre Royal Liverpool spoke out only to issue a petition to Parliament presented by Lord Sandon, Conservative MP for Liverpool, "praying that the Bill for regulating the drama might not pass into a law" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 May 1833). Their prayers were answered as the recommendation of the Select Committee to abolish the patent monopoly was rejected in the House of Lords very soon after and would not be re-introduced for another decade. However the conclusions and detailed minutes of the Select Committee Report were published in 1832 and they reveal a certain amount about the role and prominence of Liverpool's Liver Theatre in this national debate.

Although the findings of the 1832 report were thrown out by the House of Lords, their eight point report set the groundwork for future reforms. The current theatrical landscape in Liverpool features prominently in both the minutes and the appendices attached to the report. Liverpool is frequently referred to as an example of a key provincial theatrical town, along with Exeter, Birmingham, Dublin, and Birmingham. Furthermore, Richard Raymond of the Liver Theatre was one of the few provincial voices called as a witness. He answered questions predominantly about his opinion on provincial theatres producing plays written for the London stage and whether there should be some sort of authorial / metropolitan theatre remuneration. To this line of questioning he answered succinctly: "If they were prohibited from playing pieces produced in London, there would be a great scarcity of new pieces in the country" (*1832 Select Committee Report* 209). In the midst of his appearance before the Committee he also freely admitted to "repeatedly" putting on farces produced in London without having a licence to do so (*1832 Select Committee Report* 209). In addition to the lucid voice of this interested Liverpool reformer, a copy of the original patent for the Liverpool Theatre Royal is included in the appendices to the report. It is the only provincial patent

document to appear as evidence in the report, accompanied by the original patent for the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Although it is not referred to directly in the report, we can presume that it was placed there in addition to Raymond's appearance before the committee as evidence of the outmoded relevance of the monopoly in this growing North West port. Finally, and importantly for all minor theatres across the nation including the Liver Theatre, point three of the report's findings argued for the public need for an increased number of licensed theatres in addition to the patented few:

Your Committee believe that the number of Theatres thus licensed (although they might be more conveniently distributed) would suffice for the accommodation of the Public, in the present state of feeling towards Theatrical Performances, and also for the general advantages of competition; at the same time, as Theatres are intended for the amusement of the Public, so Your Committee are of opinion that the Public should have a voice in the number of Theatres to be allowed. And Your Committee would therefore respectfully submit to the House, that if a Requisition, signed by a majority of the Resident Householders in any large and populous Parish or District, be presented to the Chamberlain, praying for his Licence to a new Theatre in the said Parish or District, the Chamberlain should be bound to comply with the Public wish (*1832 Select Committee Report 4*).

Despite the rejection of this recommendation by the House of Lords, the managers of the Liver Theatre decided to petition the government, as the report suggested, just four years later, as a result of a fresh quarrel between the minor theatre and the town's Theatre Royal.

The cause of their new clash in 1836 was the arrangement of the Liver Theatre to stage the drama, *Sarah, The Jewess*, a play which had previously been performed at the Theatre Royal but had not been licensed by the Lord Chamberlain for representation at the minor theatre (Booth *Theatre in the Victorian Age* 209). The Theatre Royal attempted to stop the production going ahead but faced a stiffer defence from the management of the Liver Theatre. Manager Richard Raymond petitioned the government for the same right as the Theatre Royal in Liverpool; in effect, to become the town's

second licensed, legal dramatic theatre. Harold Ackroyd notes that their petition had the public support of the Town Corporation and was purportedly signed by eleven thousand people (20). The petition was countered by the current manager of the Theatre Royal, Mr Clarke, predicting future ruin on the grounds that there was a lack of sufficient house receipts and local support to warrant a second licensed theatre in the town (Ackroyd 20). The Liver Theatre's petition was eventually granted in September 1841 but refused by the Secretary of State the following month. Finally two years later, Raymond appealed against the Secretary of State's decision, asking him to "consider his unfortunate position regarding the prosecution of his theatre by the proprietors of the Theatre Royal" (Ackroyd 20). His appeal was granted, accompanied by parliament's decision to review the licensing laws. The details of the Liver Theatre's appeal in 1836 tell us a great deal about the theatrical landscape in Liverpool at this time, as well as providing an indication of both public and local council opinion. After all, members of the town council and local elite had made up many of the original investors in the Theatre Royal who had been immensely proud of this licensed institution and what it signified for the town. It is significant that the petition of a relatively new, minor theatre gained their support and induced Liverpool's influential men to turn away from the Theatre Royal.

As we know from the petitions raised in parliament, the Theatre Royal was the only legitimate, licensed theatre in Liverpool during the 1830s and it continued, by and large, to promote and market its productions with a confidence in the reputation and cultural standing of the institution. The theatre continued to attract some of the biggest names in the industry, including William Charles Macready, James Sheridan Knowles, Charles Kean, and Ellen Tree. William Charles Macready recorded a visit to Liverpool in his diary in 1834 during which he delivered what he proudly labelled as his best performance of Macbeth. He noted the encouraging, enthusiastic response of the Liverpool public and praised the town's residents for urging him on throughout the production and providing such an overwhelmingly positive reception: "The audience, proverbially, the most insensible and apathetic of any, seemed to feel it, for they went with the stream that bore

me on, and became so much excited that, after much applause, they became tumultuous for my reappearance – a very unusual practice here” (Macready 185). Macready’s rather biased opinion of the audience’s response to his performance suggests the possibility of an increased theatrical appreciation and awareness that had been frequently criticised as wanting in this northern port. Charles Kemble introduced his daughter, Fanny Kemble, to the Theatre Royal’s audiences during her first tour of the provinces following a tremendously successful debut on the London stage. His parting address alluded to an “enlightened and liberal public” to whom he had the honour to “present his daughter [and] appearing before you” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Sept 1830). Although we know that she appeared in the town with her father for a brief stint in 1831 and again in 1832 for a twelve-day engagement prior to travelling to America, her own memoirs, *Records of a Girlhood*, make no reference to her appearances in the town at any point. Instead she focuses her edited memoirs chiefly on her exploits on the London stage and across the ocean in America.

In addition to the repeated appearances of the Kembles in the town, the young Charles Kean established himself as a firm favourite at the Liverpool Theatre Royal. He committed to two engagements in 1833 (23-27 Sept; 21 Oct-8 Nov), followed by another two in 1834 (12-23 May; 15 Sept-3 Oct). Very few playbills exist from 1835 and so we cannot be sure of his appearances in the town during this year but he returned in 1836 for a ten-night engagement and again in 1837 for three lengthy engagements (13-26 May; 13-24 Nov; 22-30 Dec). His service at the theatre continued through to his farewell visit before travelling to America, from 29 April to 10 May 1839. The length of his appearances in the town and their frequency highlights his popularity amongst the local inhabitants. M. Glen Wilson notes that the reaction of Liverpool’s critics in particular boosted the opinion of the actor’s talents in the capital, bringing his popularity and growing reputation full-circle from the capital to the provinces and back again (“Kean, Charles John”). However J.W. Cole’s biography of the actor makes very little reference to his appearances in Liverpool. Like Fanny Kemble’s journal, he too focuses predominantly on Kean’s exploits on the capital’s stages and his

success in America. Instead he briefly states that the town “proved to Charles Kean another stronghold, equal in value to Dublin or Edinburgh” (230).

In spite of the port’s absence in his biography, we know that Kean chose the Liverpool Theatre Royal as the venue for his debut portrayal of King Lear, as enthusiastically reported at length by *The Liverpool Times and Billinge’s Advertiser*:

The lovers of the drama had a rich treat on Thursday night, in witnessing Mr. Kean’s personation of King Lear, in that sublime tragedy [...] It must have required some confidence in his own powers to admit of Mr. Kean’s making the first attempt of so arduous a character before the audience of a theatre which occupies no humble rank amongst the theatres of England [...] To say that Kean’s performance of the character exhibited Shakespeare’s Lear as fully before the eye as the great dramatist had placed the old man of many griefs before the mental view – that he carried the head and the heart of every cultivated intellect with him, from first to last, in one continuous flow amid all the transitions which hurried the mind of Lear into insanity, and carried his aged frame to the quiet grave – were, in simple prose, to record a truth which Kean has written in the memory of those who looked and listened with intense delight (4 Oct 1836, 5).

It is clear therefore that the theatre did not suffer a decline in numbers of visiting national theatrical celebrities during the 1830s and, equally, that it continued to promote their engagements with sustained vigour and pride. Adverts such as this one from 1833 were a familiar sight in the local newspapers: “Mr. JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES, of the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, author of the popular plays of *“The Wife”*, *“The Hunchback”*, *“William Tell”*, *“Virginus”*, &c. and Miss ELLEN TREE, of the Theatre-Royal, Covent-garden, are engaged for a fortnight” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 4 Oct 1833). Advertisements and playbills used marketing tactics familiar to local audiences, such as the bold capitalisation of actor’s names and the repetition of phrases such as “Metropolitan Performers” and “London Favourites”, to inform the town of future engagements and draw audiences in to the theatre.

Yet despite this busy and apparently successful season, Liverpool's Theatre Royal was struggling to maintain regular audience numbers and public recognition in the face of local adversity. On one level the theatre was subjected to the national theatrical decline of the early 1830s: "a time of severe economic recession when other managers were reducing prices and going bankrupt" (Saxon 214). According to Broadbent's unpublished thesis on Manchester's theatrical history, Liverpool's neighbouring patent theatre was also going through a rough period. The 1830 season, he believes, "proved all along perhaps the very worst experienced since the town possessed a patent house" as the managers were forced to reduce their prices (487). The southern maritime town of Bristol also saw a sudden decline in its fortunes as "in the uncertain political atmosphere, support for the theatre fell away" and the 1831 season shuddered to a stop mid-summer (Barker *The Theatre Royal Bristol, 1766-1966*, 104). In addition to this national theatrical downturn however, Liverpool's Theatre Royal was undoubtedly affected by the increasingly hostile and openly competitive campaign of the Liver Theatre. The minor theatre's petition to parliament to become the town's second licensed theatre in 1836 highlighted a new, previously unknown threat in the region. As I have discussed, the petition had the backing of the town council and was supported by a large number of signatures and pro-active voices. Never before had the theatre lost so much local support and faced a massive potential theatrical defection from its supporters.

Such a massive change in theatrical allegiance may have been as simple as a desire for an alternative choice in the town's cultural industry. However I believe that there is a more complex explanation and a close examination of Liverpool theatre in the context of national theatrical trends, as well as regional developments, offers an important insight in to the town's changing opinions on its patented theatre. By the mid-1830s the tentative developments in theatrical variety and audience expectation had begun to take root, as a variety of genres such as melodrama, farce and the increasingly popular extravaganza, hit their stride and formed the body of popular playbills. As Liverpool's population boomed, naturally so did the demand for affordable and entertaining leisure activities that would relieve the monotony and gloom of everyday working life or, as Russell Jackson

puts it, “a drab and laborious life” (11). This increased desire for entertainment sparked the need to consider several factors in the local theatrical economy, including cost, location, and content. With a growing demand for affordable and entertaining theatre that would appeal to Liverpool’s rising numbers of manual or casual workers, it is perhaps not surprising that the Theatre Royal found itself struggling to compete with a smaller, cheaper theatre, such as the Liver. Box office receipts across the nation began to dwindle during the early to mid-Victorian era as Britain found itself in a “new leisure world” where “leisure in its modern form became progressively more plentiful, more visible, more sought after and more controversial” (Bailey *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* 56). In the city “the expansion of the urban population and the development of a society ordered by the priorities of industrial growth fragmented social interaction” (Bailey *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* 35) and thus theatrical activities became spread across new affordable and accessible minor theatres, amphitheatres and circuses, in addition to the existing established theatres. The effects of such competition can be seen in Liverpool through a further analysis of reports on the Theatre Royal during the 1830s.

In 1833 a notice appeared at the beginning of a playbill advertising the continued engagement of an Italian Opera company at the theatre:

The Manager of the Italian Opera respectfully informs the Public that, finding that the receipts of the past week utterly inadequate to defray the heavy expenses attending a new undertaking of this kind, he is disposed to try if a reduction in the prices of admissions will bring such houses as may allow the company to remain in Liverpool. In consequence of the great applause with which the public has honoured Rossini’s grand Opera of Semiramide, it will be repeated. (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Feb 1833)

The paragraph acknowledges the consistent lack of audience numbers for the opera evenings, but also ensures that it highlights the “great applause” from those who did attend in the very last sentence. The season of Italian Opera may have received critical and cultural acclaim but, in a growing port such as Liverpool, it did not adequately cater to the audiences available. The prices for

an evening at the Opera stood at 4s for a box seat, 3s for the pit, 2s 6d for a seat in the second tier box and 1s for the gallery (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Feb 1833). These prices had not drastically changed in over twenty years but the theatre had not had to compete with cheaper opponents before and by offering a sustained season of opera only, albeit on a temporary basis, evidence indicates that the Theatre Royal was beginning to price itself out of the market in Liverpool. Four years later, a long editorial piece appeared in *The Liverpool Mercury* following the theatre's re-opening after a refurbishment, which began by declaring that it was "actuated by a sense of public duty, and a sincere wish also to serve the true interests of an establishment which will be most effectually promoted by a liberal discharge of their obligations to an enlightened and most indulgent public" – a phrase that seems to pander rather obsequiously to the town's interested residents (24 Mar 1837). However, despite its indulgent tone, the article proceeds to articulate issues the editors had with the current management of the theatre. The most pressing of these was the ticket price and the article openly questioned for the first time whether their prestigious Theatre Royal actually represented good value for money. Firstly, the writer raises the difference in price between the Liverpool Theatre Royal and its contemporary Theatre Royals in London and, closer to home, in Manchester:

The admission to the pit at both the splendid London theatres is two shillings, which is sixpence less than our townsmen are obliged to pay. Again, the prices at the Manchester theatre are, for the upper boxes three shillings, and pit two shillings; so that the Liverpool public are required to pay a higher price for admission to the upper boxes and pit than is demanded at the Manchester theatre (*The Liverpool Mercury* 24 Mar 1837).

When we consider that both the Liverpool and Manchester theatres were under the management of T.D. Lewis at the time, this anomaly seems even stranger. The article appeals directly to the town to question this inconsistency and ask "whether this strange anomaly does not demand inquiry, and we shall pause for reply from the manager, leaving the public to decide upon the nature of any explanations he may vouchsafe to offer" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 24 Mar 1837). As a piece of

interested journalism it does not seem to be written with any grudge or unwarranted bias, but instead seeks to appeal to the sense of decency and fairness of the theatre's managers, asking for justification as well as civic approval:

If it should be proved to the satisfaction of our townsmen, that it is reasonable that they should pay a higher price in Liverpool for the services of the same *corps dramatique* than our neighbours at the other end of the railway have to pay; - and if this strange anomaly should be satisfactorily explained, and the Liverpool audience should, moreover be reconciled by the logic of Messrs. Lewis, and Co. that it is right and proper that the Dicky Sams should pay sixpence more for a ticket of admission to the pit of a provincial theatre, than the Cockneys pay for a seat in the pit of the metropolitan theatres (*The Liverpool Mercury* 24 Mar 1837).

Examining the tone and language of the editorial is interesting as it becomes clear from looking at the excerpt above that, as well as a hint of irony, a subtle sense of distrust and misgiving had crept in to the newspapers dealings with the theatre – a relationship which had, despite its ups and downs, been mostly mutually positive since the late eighteenth century. Certainly, the town's newspapers had published some criticism and letters of disapproval of decisions made by the Theatre Royal's changing management over the last fifty years but, by and large, these had been produced without editorial comment. Now the editors of the *Liverpool Mercury* chose to composedly (but searchingly) comment directly on the local and national positions of the theatre and thus successfully undermined its standing in the town.

For the first time in its history, Liverpool's provincial newspaper chose to publicly attack the running and day-to-day management of its own patented theatre. Concerned residents had sent their reports to local and national theatrical pamphlets before and the Theatre Royal had certainly been subjected to a great deal of criticism in the national newspapers, but the town's own newspaper had never before displayed its doubts and concerns so openly. This report in *The Liverpool Mercury* was published just one year after the Liver Theatre pushed forward its popular petition to become the second licensed theatre in the town. It also came in the wake of a prolific

period of alternative theatrical activity in Liverpool, signalling that the Theatre Royal could no longer afford to rest on its laurels and become complacent about its theatrical superiority. Alongside the successful opening of the Liver Theatre, three other significant minor theatres opened in the town centre, each challenging the grand Theatre Royal in several ways.

Appendix 6 shows a map detailing the geographical relationship of the theatres in the town. The map is actually a section of the 1855 Davies Map of Liverpool but the layout of the streets detailed here had not changed significantly since the 1830s. From it we can see just how close the venues were to each other, showing the “proximity of the various sites of entertainment between which, on many nights, spectators could choose” (Robinson 4). In chronological order, the first to open its doors was the Sans Pareil Theatre in Great Charlotte Street. This wooden building was built in 1825 in a large, circular design and first housed Marshall’s Moving Panorama, which visited the town in the same year. The Marshall Brothers of Edinburgh were pioneers of the moving panorama in Britain; a long canvas sheet wound between two rollers that would scroll along to reveal a complex and incredibly detailed visual scene, usually accompanied by a narrator²⁷. Later the same year, the building was converted into a theatre and opened by W. J. Holloway as the Sans Pareil only to be enlarged and improved in 1826 following a successful debut year (Ackroyd 20). The next to appear, just steps from the Sans Pareil in Great Charlotte Street, was the Amphitheatre in January 1826. It was the only other performance space to feature alongside the Theatre Royal and the Liver Theatre in *The Picture of Liverpool, or Stranger’s Guide* (1834) and was described as “a spacious building of brick, with a stuccoed front [...] allotted to equestrian and pantomimic performances” (164). The third and final theatrical space which I want to focus on here was the Queen’s Theatre (formerly the Christian Street Circus in 1795 and the Olympic Circus in 1805). The converted theatre opened its doors in December 1831, with the ring area converted in to the stage and pit to accompany the existing gallery and boxes (Ackroyd 14). Initially, these three venues may seem like

²⁷ For an example of the work of the Marshall Brothers and further information on the moving panorama, visit <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/bdc/collections/panorama.shtml>.

poor competition for an institution such as the Theatre Royal, considering their low dramatic standing but, along with the Liver Theatre, they were consistently pitched against the Theatre Royal in the eyes of the local inhabitants.

From the early 1830s, playbills for all these venues were frequently advertised next to one another in *The Liverpool Mercury*, allowing the town's residents to see exactly what entertainments were currently on offer. Although it was standard practice in the mid-nineteenth century to print theatrical playbills adjacent to each other in both local and national press, such a practice subconsciously instilled and encouraged a sense of competition and budding theatrical rivalry. An advert in early December 1831 promoted productions featured at the Theatre Royal and the Sans Pareil. The former produced a playbill headlined by the historical tragedy and national longstanding favourite *The Rival Queens; or, the Death of Alexander the Great* (1677), followed by the military musical farce *The Invincibles* (1828) and popular melodrama *Black-Ey'd Susan* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 9 Dec 1831). The advertisement for the programme at the San Pareil Theatre then appeared in the newspaper immediately after the Theatre Royal. First up was a performance entitled *Fifteen Years of a British Seaman's Life* with a particular local-sounding character highlighted in the advert called "The Lancashire Recruit". This was then followed by a "broad Extravaganza, *The Doctor and His Men*" and concluded with "an entirely new Comic Burletta, in one-act, *The Three Spectres; or, The Man and the Marquis*" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 9 Dec 1831). It is important to analyse these two programmes as they were originally advertised, side-by-side. The Theatre Royal produced a combination of serious drama (here a favourite tragedy), a contemporary farce and highly popular melodrama that continued to please and entertain audiences across the country. Just a couple of streets away, the unlicensed Sans Pareil chose to concentrate on a series of light entertainments that were designed to be varied and amusing pieces which would engage its audience and strike a chord with local residents. Like the Theatre Royal, the Sans Pareil also realised that nautically themed productions were guaranteed to lure audiences through the door and, as such, presented theatrical competition with its representation of a seaman's life, focusing specifically on Lancashire

recruits. The genre of this piece is unspecified, which suggests a visual representation of nautical life, possibly including songs and maritime ditties.

But how did these different pieces at the two theatres engage Liverpool audiences? Are we able to tell who they appealed to and, more significantly, ascertain who they drew in through their doors? Although these detailed local playbills offered an incredible amount of theatrical variety, catering to almost every possible desire for dramatic entertainment, it is still difficult to accurately identify the type of person that attended each production. Instead we are reliant upon a certain amount of conjecture, based upon ticket prices, existing newspaper reports and modern research on nineteenth-century audience trends. In their study of London audiences in Victorian England, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow remind us of the impossibility of categorically identifying a generic theatre audience in a specific locale. Focusing on local neighbourhoods and individual theatres “demonstrates the difficulty of making broad assumption of any kind, of even the notion that an audience for a specific theatre is representative of a specific community” (226). In December 1831 *The Liverpool Mercury* again included a detailed feature on the programmes of Liverpool’s main theatres, choosing this time to include all of the five main theatres in the town. Once again the individual playbills were printed next to each other, silently inviting general comparison and open for public evaluation. The Theatre Royal concentrated on a series of concerts from the celebrated Signor Paginini, which would continue for several weeks. The Liver Theatre chose a combination of a domestic melodrama, *The Farmer’s Daughter of the Severnside*, followed by a short piece entitled *P.S. Come to Dinner* and a “new and popular” farce, *Misconception; or, The Mayor and the Three Coffins*, which was advertised as coming direct from the London stage (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Dec 1831).

Next to advertise its fare was the Amphitheatre, managed by Andrew Ducrow, the famous equestrian entertainer of the period. Ducrow and his company had taken over the Liverpool Amphitheatre in January 1830 following a period of substantial managerial success in London.

Arthur Saxon points out that the appearance of Ducrow in the provinces was a lucrative business move for him but the lure of his highly anticipated equestrian acts was not always so profitable for the established theatres within the town (214). His appearance in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1829 forced the local Theatre Royal to close for three weeks in December (including the lucrative Christmas holiday week) due to the loss of audiences to the circus, reportedly losing £200 as a result (Saxon 215). On 29 December 1831 the evening of entertainment at the Liverpool Amphitheatre was devoted entirely to the idea of the spectacle, with every piece featuring horses in a variety of guises and locations. The choice of genre is interesting as Ducrow combined military (*The Battle of Waterloo, Quatre Bras, & of Ligny*), classical ("Apollo training the Golden Feathered Horse of Mount Olympus"), fairy-tale (*Jack the Giant Killer; or, The Castle of Little Thumb*), and comedy (*The Witch and The White Horse*) together in a programme that promised eclectic but riveting entertainment (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Dec 1831). One can only imagine the array of costume, effects and visual tricks that would have featured throughout the evening. Unfortunately local playbills do not state any prices for an evening's entertainment at the Liverpool Amphitheatre but Saxon warns against trying to pinpoint an exact audience in attendance at such an evening as this: "It would be erroneous to assume, however, as is so commonly done in discussions of nineteenth-century minor theatres, that the appeal of Astley's was restricted to any particular social class or neighbourhood" (212). In the late 1820s, Astley's Amphitheatre (under Ducrow's management) in London "had drawn its patrons from all strata of society, with carriages nightly arriving via Westminster Bridge to deposit aristocrats and well-to-do burghers before the portico outside the principal entrances in Bridge Road, coaches and omnibuses setting down suburbanites from the east and the south, and artisans and labourers from Lambeth itself crowding through the gallery entrance farther down the street" (Saxon 212-3). There is no reason to assume that Liverpool's audience composition would be any different in its general form as the lure of the latest Ducrow entertainment appealed to all strata of society.

However, importantly, Saxon reveals an important insight into the complexity of Liverpool's theatrical scene at this point in its history. Ducrow, he believes, was having second thoughts about renewing his lease on the town's amphitheatre in December 1831 due to the sheer volume of theatrical outlets offering different nightly entertainments: "The company was again scheduled to commence operations there on Boxing Night, but competition from the town's half-dozen theatres – not to mention two visiting menageries, a diorama, and a series of concerts by the great Paganini – promised to prove formidable this winter" (Saxon 242). We must consult a map of the town at this time (*Appendix 6*) to remember that the layout of the port was still so relatively condensed that not only were these venues in competition, but they were within a very short walk or carriage ride of each other. It seems that the Theatre Royal was not the only institution to feel the pressure of this theatrical competition. Ducrow ended his lease on the venue four months later in April 1832

Just a couple of doors away down Great Charlotte Street, the Sans Pareil chose a different tack again by choosing to promote the established burletta (*Frozen Hand! or, The Ice Witch*), together with the burlesque *Black Eyed Sukey; or All in the Dumps*, as previously discussed (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Dec 1831). Tickets for this venue cost two shillings for a box, one shilling for the pit and just sixpence for a seat in the gallery. Half price entry was also included at quarter to nine, apart from the gallery. Finally, the Queen's Theatre presented a combination of musical farce (the burletta, *Pedlar's Acre; Have I A Father?*) and a fantastical romance (*Dominique the Resolute*) (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Dec 1831). Again we cannot be sure of the prices for this venue as none are included on the playbill in *The Liverpool Mercury* but it seems reasonable to assume that they would not have been any higher than its neighbouring minor theatre, the Sans Pareil.

It is clear, therefore, that the Theatre Royal faced its greatest ever competition during the 1830s with the rise of Liverpool's alternative venues and the increasing popularity of minor theatrical genres with the general public. An article in *The Kaleidoscope* in early 1830 took it upon itself to compare audiences and the typical atmosphere at the Theatre Royal and the Sans Pareil,

with clear bias towards the former and blatant disregard for lighter forms of theatrical entertainment. In support of the Theatre Royal and its position within the town, the author chooses to pick out these two theatres only and does not mention the Liver or Amphitheatre, both of which received considerable public notice and praise throughout the decade. The writer chooses to identify Shakespearian drama as the most typical genre of theatre produced at the Theatre Royal, neatly ignoring the number of farces, melodramas and pantomimes which regularly appeared on the playbills, and describes the atmosphere as one that encourages all levels of society to experience respectable drama in a proper, enlightened atmosphere: “The company at the theatre is a mixed one of all ranks, and all characters, who can pay for the admission, obtain it” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.507, 299). In contrast, he dismissively identifies melodramas and burlettas as the common genres produced at the Sans Pareil, noting that “the audience there is of the humbler classes, and the scenes around the doors are frequently anything but orderly” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.507, 300). The inclusion of the parenthesis in his description of the Theatre Royal’s audience – those “who can pay for the admission” – tells us that although the theatre may believe it caters for different levels of society, it automatically precludes anyone who could not afford the price of a ticket. The article implies a higher standard of social behaviour at the licensed theatre, compared to its rough, unlicensed neighbour.

An evening at the Theatre Royal to watch the Paganini concerts would take three shillings out of the working man’s pay packet for a seat in the gallery. To upgrade to the pit would cost five shillings, whilst seats in the lower boxes and upper boxes were charged at seven shillings and six shillings respectively. To be accurate, these prices were considerably inflated from the ticket price for a regular evening at the Theatre Royal, which came in at four shillings, three shillings, two shillings and sixpence, and one shilling according to the area in the auditorium. However both sets of charges cost considerably more than the theatre’s key competitors and were certainly prohibitive for the average working man. In her study of class and culture at Charles Dickens’s public readings, Helen Small notes that even by the mid-1860s a one shilling ticket would have excluded the majority

of the labouring population who, according to a report in neighbouring Manchester, survived on “a minimum of three shillings per head per week exclusive of rent”(273). In 1831 the Liver Theatre advertised its programme at three shillings for the boxes, two shillings for the pit and one shilling for the gallery. However, unlike the Theatre Royal, the Liver also included a second price for all parts of the house half way through the evening at half past eight, charging two shillings for the boxes, one shilling for the pit and just sixpence for a seat in the gallery. In light of the contemporary criticisms levied at the Theatre Royal with regard to its ticket prices, it seems that the Liver Theatre deliberately strove to offer a similar standard of theatre at considerably more affordable prices. For those inhabitants seeking lighter forms of dramatic entertainment, the Queen’s Theatre advertised its programme at just three shillings for a seat in the boxes (dropping to one shilling and sixpence at half-time), one shilling for the pit or sixpence to watch from the gallery (*The Liverpool Mercury* 20 Jan 1832). So, going on prices alone, one might assume that the composition of audiences at the town’s theatre would split according to financial prosperity – the richer maintaining allegiance to the established Theatre Royal, while the middling and poorer classes entertained themselves at the town’s minor theatrical venues.

Broadbent appears to support this assumption by citing the 1832 Government Inquiry into Juvenile Delinquency in Liverpool in his study of Liverpool’s theatrical history as an example of the type of clientele regularly attending the Sans Pareil theatre, noting that “it is highly probable that some of the patrons of the Sans Pareil had, more than once, seen the inside of a prison” (218). The report itself condemned both the Sans Pareil and the Liver Theatre as places of ill repute and immorality:

Perhaps no other town in the United Kingdom has the demoralising influence of low theatres and amusements upon children been so decidedly experienced as at Liverpool. The number of children frequenting the Sans Pareil, the Liver, and other theatres of a still lower description is almost incredible. The streets in front, and the avenues leading to them, may be seen on the

nights of performances, occupied by boys, who have not been able to possess themselves of the few pence required for admission (qtd. in Broadbent 219).

Such a report was not unusual at this time as numerous police reports and investigations were carried out across the nation to address growing concerns of public instability in working class society. Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow remind us that several inquiries were carried out in 1840s London on the numbers of thieves and prostitutes frequenting its theatres, especially in the East End. They state that such reports resulted primarily from “a generally held belief that theatrical entertainments had a corrupting influence on young people”, normally from the lower classes (49). However, crucially, Davis and Emeljanow also point out that although there was obviously some truth to the reports, they also provided a “colourful view” of East End audiences, often basing their findings on “the assumption that the boys and girls who formed the audiences at East End theatres were either thieves or prostitutes or soon would be through the corrupting influence of the drama” (49-50). Liverpool’s growing migrant character and associations meant that it was stigmatised as an unusually violent and criminal location. In the introduction to his book *The Monster Evil: Policing and Violence in Victorian Liverpool*, John E. Archer notes that the “port dwarfed neighbouring towns and dominated southern Lancashire to such an extent it was regarded by the mid-1830s as the centre for criminals”, due to its relative size and busy environment compared to its rural surroundings (5). He further observes that “no other British town or city was regarded in quite the same way as Liverpool” (3). With little other evidence forthcoming, we cannot state accurately what percentage of the Sans Pareil and Liver Theatre’s audiences were involved in any criminal activity. Broadbent offers this report in his theatrical review without any other comment on its accuracy and there were no other such investigations carried out within the town. However, bearing in mind the poor criminal reputation of the town during this period, as well as Davis and Emejanow’s reminder of the social prejudice at this time, I believe that it is dangerous to categorise these theatres as centres of overwhelming disrepute – especially when we remember that the Liver Theatre played such a crucial public role in the ongoing national struggle for a respectable free stage.

It is useful at this point to remember that the 1836 petition to license the Liver Theatre contained around eleven thousand signatures and counted on the support of the Town Corporation. Bearing this in mind, the idea that the Theatre Royal catered to the wealthy, whilst everyone else dispersed amongst the smaller theatres, becomes problematic. We know that the Theatre Royal was struggling to maintain audience numbers amidst rising criticism of unjustifiable ticket prices and questionable managerial choices but this was nothing new in the town. If the increase in theatrical choices in Liverpool was down to economics alone, surely the Theatre Royal would have kept its regular patrons whilst the poorer residents, who had not previously been able to afford the licensed theatre or, indeed, have any desire to attend it, could now find alternative popular venues to satisfy their desire. This does not seem to have been the case. Although Liverpool's new minor theatres did not hold the kind of prestige or royal patronage held by many in such high esteem at the Theatre Royal, this does not mean that they were poor relations in terms of dramatic standard, performance skills or, indeed, managerial choices. The descriptions "minor" and "unlicensed" were not a reflection on the artistic standard of these theatres, but instead related solely to the drama they were legally allowed to produce. This, I believe, is borne out in Liverpool by the considerable success of its minor theatres in relation to the Theatre Royal, together with the favourable reviews, patronage and civic support afforded them. In support of this argument, Harold Ackroyd notes that the Sans Pareil in particular "was considered to be the home of good acting as a rule rather than the exception" (20). He goes on to state explicitly that "together with the Pantheon / Liver Theatre, they vied with the Olympic Circus [Queen's Theatre] in breaking down the monopoly of the Theatre Royal" (20). I believe that Ackroyd is accurate in this statement and I would also include the Amphitheatre. Their success in the face of a bigger, established institution relied considerably on the astute, themed programming of the theatre managers that acknowledged the changing tastes and requirements of Liverpool's inhabitants in the 1830s

Diverse Entertainments & a Question of Taste

The changing content of playbills throughout the beginning of the nineteenth century reflected a dramatic shift in the cravings and clamouring of Britain's theatregoers across the nation. Variety, novelty and visual entertainment were now in demand over traditional theatrical genres and licensed theatres across the country struggled to cater for this need and balance it with more dramatic pieces. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's petition to parliament on the State of Drama in 1832 highlighted this change in dramatic tastes, attributing it to the growing size of the modern theatre and the inability of the entire auditorium to hear standard dialogue: "thus the managers had been compelled to substitute noise, and glitter, and spectacle, and the various ingenuities of foil and canvas, for wit which would be three parts inaudible, and for pathos which would scarcely travel beyond the side-boxes" (*House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* 31 May 1832). While there is a modicum of truth in this argument, as the patented houses in London and, indeed, in Liverpool had expanded considerably throughout the nineteenth century, it does not give any credence to the possibility that public demand had also altered considerably in the passing years, no matter what part of the auditorium they sat in and, by implication, how well-to-do they were. The Theatre Royal Liverpool was no exception as the town developed its own unique theatrical requirements. This challenge was picked up on by local journal *The Kaleidoscope* and it proceeded to publish articles with reasonable regularity on the state of contemporary dramatic taste in the country as a whole, as well as in Liverpool's own current theatrical landscape. As we have seen, the journal disparaged the Sans Pareil as a minor theatre not suitable for the more refined, respectable palate and it continued to offer its superior views throughout the decade. In 1830, it published a letter from the anonymous "Philanthropos", bemoaning the dominant desire and "squeamishness of taste" of modern theatre audiences:

The public, like a delicate epicure, prefers variety to solidity, and as one wish is gratified, it is immediately succeeded by twenty more, each of which has a different object, and as eagerly expects to be indulged. Thus we find that the utmost despatch of the press hardly keeps pace with this desire for novelty and although new and richly-dressed, dishes are served up day by

day, still the unaccountable appetites of this monster increase in proportion (*The Kaleidoscope* 11.529, 55).

Critical and elitist views such as this were not a new phenomenon in *The Kaleidoscope*, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters. One only has to glance through the weekly copies of the journal (which ceased to be published this same year) to realise that it prided itself upon catering to the educated elite, favouring witty, classical references and frequently scathing reviews of modern advances in the theatrical arts.

However by 1830 the views of *The Kaleidoscope* seemed out of touch with the outlook of the majority of Liverpool society. In his exploration of the changes in nineteenth-century melodrama, David Mayer suggests that the growth of the British city created not only industrial growth but also the appearance of a new social class, what he calls a “middle-class bourgeoisie”: “Entertainment for this new citizenry became a priority for some dramatists and theatrical managements” (157). Whilst *The Kaleidoscope* immediately disparaged theatres such as the Sans Pareil for catering to the humbler wishes of Liverpool’s working audiences by favouring burlettas and extravaganzas above all else, we know that they had a wide public appeal. They aimed to entertain through spectacle and exaggerated visual representation, but many also relied heavily on references and allusions to Shakespearian and classical drama as well as to contemporary operas, respected dramatists and poets. Of course part of the reason for this was to cleverly negotiate the licensing laws that forbade drama to be performed in any theatre other than a patented venue – a law which we know was frequently ignored in Liverpool. However it did mean that the pieces had a fascinating combination of literary puns and witty allusions catering to the educated audience, together with a fast-paced, over-the-top quality (Booth *Theatre in the Victorian Age* 194-7). It is not therefore as straightforward as *The Kaleidoscope* suggests to identify the differences between the Theatre Royal and the Sans Pareil as a simple class or educational divide.

A report on the production of *Frozen Hand! Or, The Ice Witch*, a fantastical, gothic melodrama produced at the Sans Pareil in 1831, seems to confirm that, like audiences across the country, Liverpool's theatre-goers favoured such varied, dramatic entertainment:

The flattering reception with which the new Dramatic Spectacle of the Ice Witch has been honoured nightly is beyond all precedent; overcrowded and respectable Audiences have by their unqualified approbation, stamped its fame on the most splendid and effective Melodrama ever produced. The lavish applause bestowed on every scene, and the deafening cheers attending the falling of the curtain, at the close of each successive act, have induced the Management to repeat the representation of it, for a few nights longer, when it must be withdrawn, in order that the various other novelties which are in preparation may be produced (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Dec 1831).

The author of this report is unknown so it cannot be relied upon for complete honesty and truthful coverage but, when considered alongside the outpouring of similar productions across the town, it does suggest that a significant number of Liverpool's audiences now favoured this type of theatre over the typically more conventional fare at the Theatre Royal. One year later, in January 1832, the Sans Pareil advertised a programme that highlights the continued demand for the exaggerated spectacle and, in particular, a desire for fantastical, gothic entertainment. The main piece of the evening advertised was the sinister-sounding "*Death Curse; Or, The Phantom Bride*, the terrific Melodramatic Spectacle, founded on a well-known tale of terror, and now produced with new Scenery, &c. astounding in novel, peculiar, and impressive tableaux, and appalling effects" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 20 Jan 1832). The playbill also includes a scene-by-scene programme of the production, designed to give "an imperfect idea of the interest and effect of this drama" and lure audiences in to the theatre (*The Liverpool Mercury* 20 Jan 1832). The advert tells us that the intriguing plot of the "melodramatic spectacle" ends with the enticing "awful appearance of the Apparition of the Murdered Agnes, to the sleeping guilty Villain" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Jan 1832).

The Sans Pareil had clearly realised that this fantastical type of entertainment, which relied on literary influences represented through dark, gothic visual effect, produced a crowd-pleasing and successful theatrical programme. As I have mentioned previously, the Queen's Theatre chose to concentrate on a series of melodramas and burlettas that provided light, popular entertainment, interwoven with distinctly nautically-themed pieces that challenged the long-standing popularity of this genre at the Theatre Royal and, indeed, the Liver Theatre. In 1832, the theatre produced a programme on the same night as T.P. Cooke's engagement in *Sailor and Marine* and *Black-Eyed Susan* at the Liver Theatre that was clearly designed to provide local theatrical competition with a mix of old and new nautical entertainment. It commenced with "the Historical and Nautical Melo-Drama of the *Mutiny at the Nore and Spithead or, British Sailors in 1797*", concluding with "an entire new Melo-Dramatic Spectacle called the *Advance Guard; or, The Night Before The Battle*" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Feb 1832). It is possible to pick virtually any date throughout the decade to demonstrate the stiff and direct competition cannily thrown at the Theatre Royal by the popular minor theatres, playing upon the strengths and favourites of the local theatrical scene.

Of course the idea of theatrical competition from a growing number of entertainment venues was not restricted to Liverpool at this point. London's Theatres Royal had faced competition from minor theatres such as The Adelphi, The Olympic and The Surrey since the beginning of the nineteenth century and, closer to home, Manchester's Theatre Royal found itself increasingly challenged by the New Amphitheatre (later to be renamed the New Pavilion Theatre) from 1809 onwards. However Liverpool's Theatre Royal had enjoyed a long and unchallenged monopoly within the town until the end of the 1820s. The sudden rise of several theatres publicly competing for its audiences therefore posed a new and startling threat to the established patented theatre. The theatre had already adapted its programme to provide a more varied and popular focus to its playbills, but this did not prove enough to retrieve the box office success of previous years. Despite the manager's warning that there was not enough local support for drama to sustain several

theatres in the town during its legal battles with the Liver Theatre, these minor theatres continued to flourish for the rest of the 1830s (Ackroyd 10).

Instead the Theatre Royal was forced to acknowledge the dominant popular desire for spectacular entertainment and further adapt its dramatic outlook to suit. An example of this occurs in 1830 when questions were raised in the press over the possibility of the Amphitheatre “infringing on the patent rights of the Theatre Royal, in an ostentatious and unwarrantable manner” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.500, 244). Despite *The Kaleidoscope’s* normal allegiance to the patent theatre, this editorial does not turn out to be a straightforward condemnation of the tactics of the minor theatrical venue. The article accuses the Amphitheatre of attempting to overstep the mark and lure audiences away from the Theatre Royal. In response, the Amphitheatre’s manager, Ducrow, stated that the venue was not only sanctioned by Liverpool’s Chief Magistrate, but it also actually opened one month late to allow for the Theatre Royal to finish its season. He goes on to note that audience attendance and approval were proof of the venue’s viability in the town, “particularly as the public of Liverpool have evinced so decided a predilection for the amusements at the Amphitheatre” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.500, 244). So far the article has communicated a fairly clear-cut and established argument, but suddenly the focus of the editorial begins to change. It alludes to the direct competition between the two theatres but turns against the Theatre Royal to accuse them of straying into the entertainment field with the appearance of an elephant on stage, rather than sticking to straight theatre:

He [Ducrow] says that in announcing the appearance of the elephant at the same time as the Managers of the Theatre [Royal], he was merely acting on the defensive; that the spectacle in which the animal is to appear had been in preparation three weeks previously; and that the Managers were themselves encroaching on the “rights of drama”, in announcing in the same bill the performances of Miss Fanny Kemble and an elephant! (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.500, 244).

The article concludes by giving Ducrow the last word, claiming that it was up to the Liverpool public to decide whether they were concerned about such theatrical crossovers and to go to the venue of

their choice: “Mr Ducrow, in conclusion, expresses his determination to persevere in his endeavours to merit the support of the public, and to leave it to that public to determine whether they will sanction monopoly in theatrical affairs” (*The Kaleidoscope* 10.500, 244).

Whilst this article may just seem to focus on another example of the day-to-day impact of theatrical competition on the Liverpool Theatre Royal in the 1830s, it highlights two important ideas that would come to have greater impact in the following years. The first questions just how far genre development and theatrical expectation would develop in Liverpool in the coming years and what effect they would have on the Theatre Royal’s dramatic output and identity within the town. The second idea is the symbolic significance of an elephant on stage. Elephants had of course appeared earlier in the century on the London patent theatre stages but this is the first known appearance at a Liverpool theatre and its symbolic image could easily become lost in the argument between the two theatres. With the expansion of trade and travel to the Far East in the 1830s came the beginnings of a distinct increase in foreign influences on the Liverpool stage.

Chapter Five: Global Versus Local – A Theatre of the World

Liverpool's position as a commercial town with an influential global outreach was well cemented by the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. As the port's substantial trade links continued to flourish from the 1830s onwards, so too did the attitude of its inhabitants. Graeme Milne encourages us to remember that "if nineteenth-century Liverpool seems odd compared with the average English provincial town, it fits well enough in the company of Hamburg or Marseilles, and the outlook of many of its people was moulded, for good and ill, by that sense of being citizens of the world" ("Maritime Liverpool" 257). Whilst I do not believe that we could label Liverpool's theatrical outlook "odd" thus far, it is certainly distinctive in its dominant nautical and maritime influences. This chapter analyses how the town's maritime identity affected the position of the Theatre Royal by the mid-nineteenth century. Beginning with the influence of the Orient, I then move on to key changes in management and criticism of decline, and conclude with the successful emergence of the seasonal pantomime. Throughout this analysis, I will explore how its theatrical productions reflected the connection between the port's global and local identity.

It is interesting that Milne describes the mid-nineteenth-century Liverpudlian as a "citizen of the world" – an emphatic and almost overwhelming label in terms of attitude and frame of mind. To be a citizen of the world sounds a rather grandiose responsibility but the title makes sense when we think of how far Liverpool's maritime interests governed its industrial, commercial and cultural concerns during this period. The dock and river area dominated visitors' first impressions with a seven-mile line of river wall enclosing the docks (Lane 3). As well as foreign trade – which, from 1840 to 1870, expanded "at rates well above the growth rate of industrial production" (Milne "Trade and Traders in mid-Victorian Liverpool" 9) – the town's shipping industry experienced a considerable growth spurt, which led Liverpool to become the country's leading passenger port. From 1825 to 1913, twelve million passengers passed through the town's docks, amounting to nearly 56% of the total number leaving all ports in the United Kingdom - London was second, taking less than a fifth of the number of passengers as Liverpool (Henson 56). As well as passenger ships, the port was the

first to use steam troopships heavily for the first time during the Crimean War (1854-1855). The town's ship owners had been experimenting with steam voyages since the 1840s but the war gave them "windfall income, and encouraged the building of bigger and better steamships" (Milne "Maritime Liverpool" 260). By the 1850s, the Cunard steamship liners offered regular travel to America, whilst the headline vessels leaving Liverpool were large sailing ships carrying emigrants across the seas to Australia (Aughton 137). Graeme Milne considers shipping and its associated industries as a "high art form", arguing that "the visual impact and sense of theatre associated with big ships" were developed long before the twentieth century and can be seen in all their glory in mid-nineteenth-century Liverpool ("Maritime Liverpool" 278).

By bringing industry and art together in such a way, it is particularly pertinent to consider Milne's observations in relation to the interior design of the Theatre Royal in the 1840s. An article in *The Sunday Times* in 1843 includes a detailed description of the maritime-themed design on the front of the boxes inside the theatre:

The designs in front of the second tier of boxes are peculiarly appropriate to a great commercial town like Liverpool; they represent the progress of a ship from the time she is laid on the stocks, through all the different stages of being built, launched and rigged, until she at last floats upon the waters complete in every part (31 Dec 1843, 4).

This homage to one of the main trades of the town was situated within an auditorium decorated and designed to represent the wealth and fortune obtained from such commerce. An article in the same newspaper six years earlier described the theatre as "the most splendid *interior* in the kingdom", focusing on the repeated use of elaborate gold and red decoration all around the auditorium (*The Sunday Times* 2 Apr 1837, 5). The pillars are a mixture of crimson "picked out [...] with bright gold" whilst "the proscenium is one of the most splendid, perhaps, ever seen: the supporting pillars are fluted with burnished gold; the side doors have curiously over-worked panels of the same costly work, and the boxes over are surmounted by a rich crimson and gold cupola" (*The Sunday Times* 2 Apr 1837, 5). The recognition of the labour-intensive foundations of the town's commercial success

within its leading theatrical establishment suggests that Liverpool still held its commercial exploits in great esteem and recognised that these underpinned every aspect of the port's day-to-day life.

As we have already seen, the popularity of maritime-themed productions continued at all Liverpool's theatres with increasing regularity from the 1830s onwards. From examining playbills advertised in *The Liverpool Mercury*, it is clear that nautical entertainment featured extensively as both the headline production and concluding piece of the programme. John Buckstone's *The Wreck Ashore* (1830), Edward Fitzball's plays *The Floating Beacon* (1824) and *The Flying Dutchman; or, The Phantom Ship* (1827), and a dramatic adaptation of Frederick Marryat's seafaring novel *Poor Jack* (1840), were performed extensively in Liverpool throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Often more than one theatre was actually advertising the same play on the same evening, only doors away from each other (*Appendix 6*). For example, on 11 March 1831, the Liver Theatre and the Sans Pareil both advertised *The Floating Beacon* as the chief draw to their evening programme. The only obvious difference between the two productions appeared in how they were promoted. The Liver Theatre described it as a "Romance", whilst the Sans Pareil chose to advertise it as "the favourite Nautical Melo-drama" and featured a long description of the scenery and individual scenes, which began with an immediate maritime focus: "In the course of the piece the following Scenery and Incidents will be presented. – The Sea Coast at Hergen – Shipping at Anchor [...] and 'Hazza! for England, ho!'" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 11 Mar 1831). In 1845 an advert for an evening at the Concert Hall on Lord Nelson Street promoted a night of maritime entertainment with Edinburgh's Mr. Ebsworth's "Celebrated Nautical Entertainment entitled Ditties and Oddities of the Sea, consisting of Sea Yarns and Anecdotes of the last War, in which he will introduce a great variety of Popular Naval Songs" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 29 Aug 1845). Four years earlier, the Liver Theatre had also continued the town's charitable efforts by hosting a benefit evening for widows and relations of those on board the SS President, a passenger liner which left Liverpool for New York in March 1841 but was lost at sea days later with all 136 passengers unaccounted for. The theatrical evening included an historical lecture, followed by musical entertainment and a request to support this evening's "exertions to

administer to the widows and the fatherless, who, after the excitement regarding the fate of the vessel has *died away, still live, without hope and without friends*" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 23 Jul 1841). Although these variations in nautical entertainment (both dramatic and musical) were by no means exclusive to the Liverpool stage, the enthusiasm of Liverpool's theatre managers to pursue maritime-dominated playbills reminds us that, whilst the town was buying into the current national demand for nautical drama, it did so aiming to portray a full picture of maritime activity in the town. Many of the productions often featured idealistic and sentimental representations of life on the seas, which boosted civic pride in the town's economic and social foundations, but they were also balanced with reminders of the hardships of such a life (epitomised by the ardent pleas of the charitable performances) and the business involved in all aspects of maritime trade and travel, including shipbuilding, the transient life of the individual sailor and the procurement and selling of various goods and merchandise. Whilst these dramatic trends and themes were not unique to productions favoured in Liverpool, the tough and often emotional imagery had particular relevance in a town so reliant on its maritime trade and activity.

When we consider the celebrated maritime identity of the town by the mid-nineteenth century it is perhaps by no means surprising that Liverpool's theatres continued to favour nautical entertainment for many years after the craze for such productions was beginning to wane in the capital. After all this was a town that experienced the highest figures of passenger and trade traffic coming through its ports and impacting on the fabric of the local society. By 1851, nearly 47% of Liverpool's adult population were British but born outside of the town, whilst the 1841 census records that 17.3 per cent of Liverpool's population were Irish-born (Henson 65). Although the famine in Ireland caused more than one million Irish to pass through the port from 1845 to 1854, an estimated three quarters of this amount quickly picked up connections to a further destination (Henson 60). However with so many ships, passengers and foreign sailors docking at port daily, it is difficult to accurately assess the impact of emigrant trade and connections on Liverpool. As John Henson points out: "The balance of passengers' origins and destinations was never stable [...]" and

the trade often shifted in orientation in response to changes in the world markets” (61). It is clear that Liverpool welcomed people (sailors, merchants, passengers, etc.) from all over the world and could, in many senses, be labelled a global town, but what is rather more uncertain is the actual impact these transient individuals had on the town’s culture and character during this period: “they had no particular commitment to the city and their identification remained primarily with the societies from which they came. Liverpool had little influence on them but they may have influenced Liverpool” (Henson 74). In his study of the diasporic nature of nineteenth-century Liverpool, Henson recognises that the effect of such human traffic on the town’s entertainment economy is, as yet, unclear. I believe there is scope for further research in this area but there will inevitably be a certain amount of informed speculation as to the direct influence behind the specific theatrical choices and trends occurring at the Theatre Royal and its neighbouring entertainment venues.

An immediate point of note from examining the town’s playbills throughout the 1840s is the lack of obvious sustained engagement with Irish-themed productions in any of the local theatres. I can find little evidence in any theatre of a specific Irish focus on the Liverpool stage. This would appear to support the population statistics suggesting that many migrants passed through the port rather than settling and those that remained did not, as yet, demand a specific theatrical niche. John Belchem notes that those choosing to remain in the port of entry during the early Victorian years were dismissed as the “*caput mortuum*, a kind of underclass, as it were, unable, unwilling, or unsuited to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere in Britain or the new world” (“Comment: Whiteness and the Liverpool-Irish” 147). As such, the negative caricature of the derided Irishman was “expressed throughout print culture and across performance arenas from the pulpit to the ‘low concert hall’ but

had little prominence as yet on the legitimate stage” (Belchem “Comment: Whiteness and the Liverpool-Irish” 148)²⁸.

Britain’s trading links had expanded rapidly throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and Liverpool evinced a distinct and fascinating theatrical reaction to the global trade and connections docking at the port on a daily basis. The key effect on the nation’s theatres from such increased trade and global awareness was the growth of a cultural Orientalism and dramatic representation of exotic cultures and landscapes to eager audiences. Said’s definition of Orientalism pins down the “essential relationship” between the East and West as one of power and superiority, with Europe always in the dominant position: “Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world” (*Orientalism* 40). The outpouring of Orientalist entertainments across nineteenth-century Britain largely followed the lead of interest in the sciences, “disseminating popularized versions of the theories emerging in disciplines such as geography, ethnology, and archaeology, shaping public perceptions of these disciplines, and ultimately influencing their methods” (Ziter 10). 1843 saw the founding of London’s Ethnological Society (publishing its own journal in 1848), whilst 1851 witnessed the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace - the culmination of Eastern fascination and collection in Great Britain. The Exhibition exemplified the contemporary interest in authenticity and native performance by showcasing the most fascinating reconstructions of Eastern and / or exotic locations, including native, “real” exotic people featured in increasingly realistic settings: “The various entertainments of 1851 transformed London into a comprehensive catalogue of an expanding world geography through the elaborate framing of regional resources” (Ziter 102). Eight years earlier London’s Victoria Theatre had engaged a troupe of Moroccan tumblers whose performance typified the desire for authenticity and native performance. A review of the tumblers described their act as a combination of entertainment and anthropological interest, claiming

²⁸ Belchem goes on to discuss how the image of the Irish stereotype changed from approximately 1860s onwards, as a more sympathetic and “authentic” representation began to emerge on both the licensed stage and in popular entertainment venues (“Comment: Whiteness and the Liverpool-Irish” 148-149).

that “here were not simply marvellous feats but a balanced presentation of Moroccan physiology and manners” (Ziter 99). As such, the idea of Empire and the foreign “Other” became “a major topic of unembarrassed cultural attention” in British cultural life throughout the nineteenth century (Said *Culture and Imperialism* 8).

Said’s cultural focus in his seminal work, *Culture and Imperialism*, lies predominantly in the century’s literary and artistic outpourings. He notes that, “in time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that” (xiii). In his study, “Representing Empire: Class, Culture and the Popular Theatre in the Nineteenth Century”, Michael Hays points out that due to the breadth of his topic and considerations, Said is unable to fully analyse the cultural struggle within England during this period and how it was borne out in popular theatre (67). Of course an examination of England’s cultural scene, and the theatre in particular, was never Said’s objective when writing his pioneering study. Hays therefore argues that it is necessary to revise and contribute to Said’s study by looking at the role of theatre and drama in historical and social discourse as “a marker of and participant in the politically charged historical transformation of British and other European societies in the nineteenth century” (70). I believe this is particularly important when we consider how the regional theatres dealt with ideas of nation and internationalism, and, specifically, how Liverpool conveyed its foreign interests on stage.

The effects of global expansion were a very visible, physical reality on Liverpool’s streets, as were the increasingly exotic goods and cargo emerging off the impressive ships docking in port. Adverts for items such as “much esteemed and excellent” canary wine (2 Jan 1835), bees wax, castor oil, cigars, live turtle and “particularly fine New Labrador salmon” (27 Jan 1837) direct from the quayside were commonly found in weekly editions of *The Liverpool Mercury*. Said traces one of the key points of global impact on Britain back to Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, after which new connections were opened and knowledge of the Orient in the West was modernised, putting, as Said

notes, “ideas about the Orient in very close touch with modern realities” (*Orientalism* 43). Crucially for Liverpool, Napoleon’s Egyptian exploits also produced new shipping links across the East, opening up a new overland route from Cairo to Suez for trade with India (Ziter 11). When we look back at the playbills from the 1830s onwards, it is clear that the Napoleonic Wars still held a great fascination for Liverpool’s theatre-goers. Productions centred around new links with the East and the nation’s naval exploits during the wars were repeated throughout the 1830s and early 1840s with increasing spectacle, such as *The Life and Death of Napoleon*, the equestrian spectacle of *Buonaparte’s Passage of the Deserts, or, the French in Egypt and Siege of Acre* and the “Eastern Melo-Dramatic Spectacle of *Earthquake; or, the Spectre of the Nile*” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Feb 1832), suggesting continued audience appreciation and demand. *Appendix 7* highlights two brief representative periods from either end of the 1830s showing the popularity and regularity of these productions at the town’s theatrical venues. The first table shows pieces produced at all of the town’s main theatrical venues, allowing for venue closures and missing information. The second focuses on the opening of the Theatre Royal’s season in 1838 during a period when the other venues were not open for business. Both tables evidence the production of Eastern and / or naval-focused pieces that continued to be produced for Liverpool audiences in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. These productions would often feature new moving dioramas designed to showcase the latest stage technology and also provide romantic images of far-off lands and escapades to fascinated audiences. One playbill for an 1832 Liverpool production of *Earthquake* promoted the piece with a description of:

The novel and splendid moving Diorama! consisting of a series of Views during a Journey up the course of the Nile, over the Sandy Deserts of Arabia, &c. to Fair of Artinoe, being the most complete and extensive scale of any that has ever been offered to the public, painted upon a surface upwards of 2000 square feet of Canvas (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Feb 1832).

Indeed this production at the Sans Pareil Theatre was deemed to be so popularly received by Liverpool audiences that its run was extended indefinitely: “In consequence of the immense applause bestowed on each representation of the Earthquake, and the long and continued bursts of approbation excited

nightly at the Exhibition of the novel and splendid Diorama, it will be repeated until further notice” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 3 Feb 1832). The production appears to have run for over two weeks, from 30 January to 15 February; a considerable length of time in the Sans Pareil Theatre, where amusements were normally changed every couple of days.

Depictions of, and interest in, the Orient were not a new mid-century occurrence in British theatre but by the 1840s the emphasis had changed with the development of Imperial links, increased public awareness and expectation, and progressive staging techniques. It became more common to use side-walls, or to angle the wings so that they were perpendicular to the stage, in order to represent exotic space in a three-dimensional setting. Similarly, there was a shift towards using built-out practical scenery, “notably in several highly spectacular mid-century productions depicting Eastern cities in the biblical past” (Ziter 131). The development of such theatrical techniques and advancement provided the grounding for oriental imagery and entertainment to come together, “submerged in a unifying fantasy about the imperial adventure”, which captured the attention and enjoyment of “all classes” (Hays 66). Hays argues that, in many ways, theatrical engagement with the Eastern other provided not only a source of intellectual, social and anthropological fascination, but a kind of escapist quality or ideology for mixed-class audiences:

These fabulations of general English superiority over the colonized other refashion the actual status of the poor and working classes and banish the real conditions of existence while offering in their stead the image of the imperial domain and the ideal of distant lands and wealth as compensation for the otherwise painful need to submit to the palpable constraints (spatial, economic, and political) that governed life in metropolitan England (81).

However such theoretical engagement with the idea of the Orient and its cultural appeal to the British public does not tell us how these elaborate and potentially idealistic images related to Liverpool’s audiences. Instead I believe it is particularly useful and pertinent to examine how this important global town engaged with the influence of the East in its theatres.

It is clear from scanning the playbills advertised in *The Liverpool Mercury* that, like the rest of the nation, Liverpool also committed itself to oriental productions designed to intrigue and entertain its mixed audiences. The Sans Pareil Theatre followed the trend in the capital's minor theatres with the engagement of the other, or the "Amphi Arabs", who "will go through the whole of their wonderful Performances" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 14 Feb 1840). This slightly vague promise of Eastern authenticity was balanced in the town with a cunning marketing ploy. Several times throughout the 1830s and 1840s the Theatre Royal advertised an ambiguous "Oriental Spectacle" with, unfortunately, few further details other than the occasional promise of "entirely new gorgeous Scenery, Dresses, &c." (*The Liverpool Mercury* 6 Jan 1832). In cases such as these, the use of the key word "Oriental", combined with the lure of a promised elaborate spectacle, was used as an enticing advertising technique by the Theatre Royal. The theatre's managers also chose to combine eastern and nautical influences through productions such as the aforementioned *Earthquake*, the "splendid Eastern Drama" of *Aladdin* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 1 Dec 1837) and the Eastern afterpiece *Harlequin Mariner; or, the Demon of the Red Sea* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Dec 1837).

The 1837 production of *Harlequin Mariner* was particularly interesting for a different reason. It was also advertised as featuring "the Stupendous Elephant Rajah" who, audiences are promised, "will, at the command of his Keeper, display several extraordinary feats of sagacity" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Dec 1837). The article goes on to note that also accompanying this amazing elephant are a camel, a llama and a large pelican. Trained animals were not strangers to nineteenth-century entertainment and venues around the country often based whole productions on exciting equestrian displays and exotic (and often dangerous) animals designed to entertain and amaze audiences. In 1830 the appearance of the famed elephant from Siam, Mlle D'Jeck, provoked considerable public excitement as she walked from Edinburgh to North-East England to commence an engagement at the Theatre Royal Newcastle (Histon 17). Notoriously this journey also fostered "a certain morbid fascination" with the elephant after she killed one of her keepers with her trunk on her journey down south (Histon 18). Mobile zoos, or menageries, were a common travelling exhibition in the provinces,

“transporting their collections of animals in cages drawn by horses, and accompanied, as in the circus, by brass and woodwind bands, who travelled in purpose-built ornate band carriages” (Bratton & Featherstone 13). Circus venues, including purpose-built amphitheatres, also offered entertainments featuring trained animals and, as Jacky Bratton and Ann Featherstone note in their study of the Victorian clown, the line between the circus and the menagerie was distinctly blurred (13). Liverpool’s Amphitheatre had frequently housed visiting circus tours and spectacles dominated by impressive horsemanship and flair. In terms of advertising within the town, these posters and playbills would have attracted much interest as they were visually exciting and therefore “also attracted the attention of potential audience members who couldn’t read” (“Theatre Posters” <www.vam.ac.uk>). With the importation of new, previously unseen exotic animals the realms of possibility widened and Liverpool embraced this new theatrical challenge in the early 1830s. In 1832 a detailed playbill appeared in *The Liverpool Mercury* describing the forthcoming appearance at the Ducrow-managed Amphitheatre of the “‘Lions of Mysore’ at the enormous expense of £1000” (10 Feb 1832). The lions from this Indian city were not the only exotic attraction on this playbill. After this you could also see the “Stupendous Elephant [...] which will appear in the Chase of the Wild Animals”, swiftly followed by the “beautiful Peruvian Lama” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 10 Feb 1832). Despite the exhibitionist and often nomadic identity of both the circus and the menagerie, these venues had maintained a reputation for respectable and dignified entertainment, avoiding any associations with immoral or debauched activity: “Thus their spectatorial entertainments were offered as superior not only to the fairground on which they sometimes stood, but even to the theatres with which they vied” (Bratton & Featherstone 27). Before his departure from Liverpool in April 1832, Ducrow’s management of the Amphitheatre was one of the town’s most popular theatrical venues and, as we have seen, competed with the Theatre Royal for the town’s audiences night after night.

With this in mind, how did Liverpool’s Theatre Royal fare in the context of the increasing popularity of exotic, animal-focused entertainment in the town? It swiftly recognised and responded to the appeal and demand for such diverse acts, often combining the Eastern and the nautical with an

exhibition of exotic animals. The 1837 appearance of the elephant Rajah was not a one-off. Recognising the appeal of the animal-focused entertainments offered at the Amphitheatre, the theatre began to promote various collections of wild and exotic animals on its playbills with increasing regularity. Following on from the 1837 production, *Harlequin Mariner*, Mr Van Amburgh was engaged in April 1839, exhibiting “a series of extraordinary performances with the whole of his trained animals” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 19 Apr 1839). These animals, we are told one week later, include “living lions, tigers, leopards and other trained animals”, as seen at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane (*The Liverpool Mercury* 26 Apr 1839). A review of the production expressed its amazement at the feats presented before the audience, arguing that it is difficult “to attempt a description of the feelings which agitate the spectator during the brief moments in which he gazes upon the extraordinary spectacle”:

To behold nine of the most ferocious animals in nature – lions, tigers, leopards, panthers, and others, so perfectly under the commandment of one defenceless individual, as to restrain their inherent passions when a lamb is placed within their reach, - nay, rubbed against their very mouths, is something so exceedingly uncommon, that we cannot be surprised at persons who have not had the opportunity of judging for themselves, imagining that there must be some juggling in the whole affair (*The Liverpool Mercury* 26 Apr 1839).

Van Amburgh returned to the theatre for a brief engagement in June 1839 but the Theatre Royal continued its commitment to unusual animal entertainments in the meantime, acknowledging the appeal and demand for such pieces. Throughout May 1839 *Herr Heinrich Schreyer's Veritable Troupe of Monkeys and Dogs* appeared on the playbill to fill the gap before Van Amburgh's exotic company returned. There is no newspaper editorial to tell us how this new piece was received by Liverpool's audiences.

Two years later the theatre once again advertised the engagement of Van Amburgh and “the whole of his matchless collection of LIONS, LEOPARDS, and TIGERS”, introduced to the public in *Mungo Park; or, The Arab of the NIGER: a “new and original Drama, in three Acts”* (*The Liverpool Mercury* 12 Feb 1841). Van Amburgh's exotic troupe headlined the Theatre Royal's playbills for the whole month,

concluding their engagement on 5 March. We are told that this was not a new production, as it was advertised as having been performed since being licensed at both the Theatre Royal Edinburgh and the Theatre Royal Manchester. Clearly Liverpool was not the only patented theatre to adapt to this popular theatrical trend and nor was it limited to the provinces. The Theatre Royal Drury Lane had produced the familiar sounding “New Grand Oriental Spectacle, called *Hyder Ali, or the Lions of Mysore*” from November to December 1831 when, we are informed, a tiger died following a performance “under circumstances which would lead to the probable inference that it had been unfairly dealt with” (*The Morning Post* 12 Dec 1831). However the popularity of such exotic acts at the Theatre Royal Liverpool indicates a couple of important factors when considering the town’s engagement with these images of the East and its outwardly-focused position within the British Isles.

Firstly, the appearance of such exotic animals and the diverse troupes that came with them was a very real, physical reminder of the distant and continuously expanding trading outposts, whose goods and merchandise came through the port’s bustling docks on a daily basis. Joseph Roach reminds us that the value of performances lay in what they revealed about those engaged in the act of watching and interpreting the production before them: “because they make publicly visible through symbolic action both the tangible existence of social boundaries and, at the same time, the contingency of those boundaries on fictions of identity, their shoddy construction out of intricate otherness” (39). In amongst the listings in every weekly edition of *The Liverpool Mercury*, a regular catalogue was printed of the current imports docking at the port. These imported goods came regularly from Africa, the East and West Indies, United States, British America, South America, Brazil, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Germany, Holland, Spain, the Azores, and France. The list of goods passing through the port was as diverse and exotic as it was long, including various meats, spices, spirits, materials and oils. At least once a month ships would arrive from Africa and unload large number of elephant ivory teeth and tusks as part of their cargo, whilst vessels from the West Indies produced tortoise shell and those from South America offered ox horns and salted cow and ox hides. This is, of course, to name only a selection of the extensive list of goods printed every week.

Liverpool's theatrical productions therefore acted as a reminder of the global importance of the town's maritime economy and subconsciously reinforced a proud notion of its imperial superiority, whilst entertaining and thrilling the audiences with their exoticism. Michael Hays notes how this kind of two-pronged theatrical approach explores "the ways in which supposedly autonomous works of art participate in the labor of elaborating and consolidating the practice of empire by fixing and naturalizing the spatial as well as social relations that empower the imperial center, connecting it to and defining the priorities that regulate other, subordinate peoples and places" (65). He furthers this idea of western dominance and pride with the acknowledgement that such populist entertainments "urged the unity and dominance of the British 'race' in the imperial enterprise" (81). Nowhere in the British Isles would this have been felt more than in the country's leading port, where the town's traders pushed themselves to prove that they were a "dynamic – perhaps too dynamic – group willing to exploit opportunities and seize trade where it was available" (Milne *Trade and Traders in mid-Victorian Liverpool* 4).

The engagement of various exotic animals on the town's stages also served to highlight the continuance of the local theatrical competition, which had steadily grown in strength since the mid-1820s. In 1830 the rivalry between the Amphitheatre (under the temporary management of Andrew Ducrow) and the Theatre Royal (under Lewis and Banks) came to a head over the appearance of a renowned elephant in the town. Broadbent recorded that the Theatre Royal planned to foil Ducrow's opening night – which starred the aforementioned elephant as its main attraction – by covering the walls of the town with posters "announcing the forthcoming appearance of a then fashionable 'star', no other than the celebrated trained elephant of Siam, 'Mddle. Dejeek', as she was called" (222). Catching wind of this plan, Ducrow hatched a plan to loan another elephant from Wombwell's circus and put on *The Elephant of Siam*, a "Grand Eastern Spectacle", just four months before the Theatre Royal's show: "Thus Andrew took the wind out of his rivals' sails completely, and when the real Simon Pure followed (Mddle. Dejeek), that unfortunate quadruped was in almost every case a dead failure" (Broadbent 223-4). However Saxon's biography of Ducrow reveals certain differences when compared

to Broadbent's account of this tale. He notes that Ducrow returned to Liverpool in January 1830, when "a new star of impressive magnitude [Mlle. Djeck] had arisen in the theatrical firmament", having made her debut at the Cirque Olympique in Paris the previous July (216). However he goes on to state that Mlle. Djeck (as she is usually known) was never scheduled to appear in Liverpool when Ducrow produced *The Elephant of Siam* with a different elephant: "Ducrow himself, always abreast of developments at the Cirque Olympique, brought out *The Elephant of Siam* at the Liverpool circus toward the end of February [1830] and the following season at Astley's, beginning 13 September, produced an adaptation he and his ballet-master Leclercq had made entitled *The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire-Fiend*" (216). Unlike Broadbent, Saxon makes no mention of the proposed Liverpool elephant causing any contention in Liverpool during this period.

However further investigation reveals that Broadbent is not completely mistaken in his telling of the tale. Although Saxon maintains that Mlle. Djeck did not actually appear in Liverpool at this point, the elephant which did perform on the Theatre Royal's stage may well have been advertised as her in order to take advantage of her fame. Broadbent mentions no specific dates in his account of the theatrical rivalry but advertisements in *The Liverpool Mercury* tell us that the original planned productions from both the Theatre Royal and the Royal Amphitheatre were due to take place just a few days apart, rather than the four months proposed by Broadbent in his thesis. The Amphitheatre advertised the newly prepared production of *The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire-Fiend* for Monday 15 February 1830 but does not mention the name of the elephant (on this playbill at least). The adjacent playbill for the Theatre Royal also advertises the same forthcoming production featuring a Royal Elephant, unnamed but promoted as having featured in "extraordinary performances" in Paris and at the Adelphi Theatre, London (*The Liverpool Mercury* 12 Feb 1830). If this was not Djeck, it was certainly designed to sound like her. This piece was due to debut in Liverpool on 16 February, just one day after Ducrow's production. A further piece of editorial in the local newspaper briefly references the appearances of "the rival elephants about to pay their respects to the Liverpool public" (*The*

Liverpool Mercury 12 Feb 1830). Clearly both productions were therefore ready to take place in the same week. However the following week *The Elephant of Siam* is advertised as ready for production at the Theatre Royal but it had clearly not yet been staged. This delay suggests that Broadbent was correct in his assertion that Ducrow's rival production affected the plans of the Theatre Royal. In actual fact, as Broadbent stated, the theatre's elephant did not appear until four months later. He is further shown to be accurate in his version of events by a piece of editorial in *The Liverpool Mercury* which confirms that the elephant featured at the Amphitheatre came from the Wombwell circus (19 Feb 1830). The editorial acknowledges the popularity of the piece, noting that it "called forth much applause" and is now advertised "for repetition till further notice" (19 Feb 1830). An accompanying verse highlighted the astonishment and wonder produced by the animal:

The elephant, beyond dispute,
Is, as we're told, a reasoning brute,
And those that doubt that he is so
Need but to Ducrow's Circus go;
There they will see the noble beast,
Though born in the despotic East,
Strip a usurper of his crown,
And trample despotism down.
Oh! that Ducrow to Miguel's Court
This noble creature would transport,
And to bigot's vassals show

The way to lay a tyrant low (*The Liverpool Mercury* 19 Feb 1830).

Ducrow's decision to feature a highly anticipated elephant in his repertoire until the end of March 1830 delayed the Theatre Royal's production of *The Elephant of Siam* until 14 June 1830. The elephant's engagement at the patent theatre concluded around the end of the month (we cannot be sure of the exact date) and, despite the hype and lengthy editorial produced about the Amphitheatre's

production, the Theatre Royal's elephant received no critical attention in the local press. Although we cannot therefore be sure of the elephant's popular reception in the town, the lack of newspaper coverage and its limited two-week run suggests that, as Broadbent claimed, the production was not as well received as its rival counterpart.

Whilst the rivalry between the Theatre Royal and the other minor theatres in the town has been well documented, it is fascinating to observe that at this point in history the competition for audience favour put an elephant at the forefront of the theatrical battle. The celebrated talents of Mlle. Djeck had produced "a rage for elephant drama over the next several years, with playwrights either dishing up new pieces or rehashing old ones to accommodate pachydermatous performers, and managers reinforcing their stages and scrambling to obtain the services of Djeck or one of her reasonable facsimiles" (Saxon 218). It tells us that the Theatre Royal felt threatened and insecure about the appearance of such an exotic creature at the Amphitheatre and the subsequent effect or response it would solicit from the town. The impact of the port's superior global connections and widened maritime links and opportunities now posed a local dilemma for the managers of the Theatre Royal in their battle for theatrical supremacy within the town.

The Theatre Royal in Critical Decline

By 1840 the Theatre Royal was feeling the effects of a decade of theatrical competition and struggle with its neighbouring minor theatres. Critical comments about the condition and management of the theatre had begun to creep into the town's local press as it battled to sustain its dominance and credibility within the port. Despite being described in the national newspaper *The Sunday Times* as "one of the finest and handsomest [theatres] in the kingdom" (2 Apr 1837, 5) an article in *The Liverpool Mercury* in December 1839 suggested that the public demanded improvement and increased comfort from its patent theatre, noting that "it would be very convenient if the manager of the theatre would furnish rails or backs to the seats in the pit" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 6 Dec 1839). The following November, T.D. Lewis severed his connection as lessee of the theatre and the next couple of years

saw the theatre go through a series of short-term managers, all of whom struggled to regain a positive critical response from both local and national press (*Appendix 4*). Robert Clarke reopened the theatre in February 1841 but by January 1842 J.H. Anderson and William Hammond had taken on the lease. Just under two years later the theatre passed into the hands of actors and theatre managers Benjamin Webster and Madame Céleste.

In just a few years the Theatre Royal's reputation had declined and it lost long-term managerial stability. An indication of the theatre's struggle to maintain its dominant position within the port lies in an advertisement for the lease of the Theatre Royal in October 1840. After the particulars of the lease, a paragraph appeared that had not previously been included: "This well-frequented Theatre is established under Letters Patent, granted by his late Majesty King George the Fourth, by virtue of an Act of Parliament passed for its erection, and is the only Theatre in the Town possessed of Patent Rights" (*The Examiner* 11 Oct 1840). Two things are particularly striking about this new wording in the advert. Firstly, the promise that the theatre is currently "well-frequented" and, therefore, a promising proposition for any new manager. Although we cannot be sure of exact audience numbers and box-office takings, an article in *The Morning Chronicle* in November 1840 tells us that the "Theatre Royal, Liverpool, formerly a highly lucrative concern, has been shut up by the last manager, who has sustained a heavy loss" (5 Nov 1840). The article does, however, acknowledge that Liverpool is by no means unique in its situation, noting the "deplorable state" of provincial theatres in towns such as Bath, Brighton, Cheltenham, Gloucester and Norwich (5 Nov 1840). An article in *The Era* further substantiates this report, noting that "Brighton theatricals, like the Bath, are at a discount; Batty's Circus in the former, and Assemblies in the latter city, proving the magnets of attraction" (24 Jan 1841). Despite the poor state of the nation's theatres, Liverpool's Theatre Royal still does not sound like a profitable prospect to a potential lease-holder, despite the wording of the advert in 1840. Secondly, and more significant to the cultural politics in the town and the national theatrical debate as a whole, the final sentence of the advert stresses the unique position of the Theatre Royal as the only patent theatre in the town.

By late 1842 complaints of a suggested decline within the theatre began to grow as its energies became increasingly taken up with legal disputes. As we know, it had come under pressure from the rise of several minor theatres which threatened the previously dominant position of the Theatre Royal at the centre of the port. The Amphitheatre, now run by Andrew Ducrow once again, renamed itself the Royal Amphitheatre in 1840 as a clear encroachment on the contested rights of the patent theatre at the beginning of this decade. Equally the Liver Theatre continued, in the eyes of the Theatre Royal, to challenge its authority and produce similar productions and playbills on a daily basis. An extract from George Vandenhoff's autobiographical text, *Dramatic Reminiscences; or, Actors and Actresses in England and America*, confirms the theatre's proposed decline:

In his [Hammond's] hands the Royal lost its high prestige, as the school in which artists were formed for the London arena, to which, "in its high and palmy days", it was the stepping stone. But its glories were past; it had fallen from its high estate. From being next in rank to the metropolis, and where, "as I heard my father tell", John Kemble was wont to say, a tragedy was as well done as in London, it had, in 1842, sunk to the level of a mere country-theatre (120).

Vandenhoff does not single out Liverpool as being in an isolated state of theatrical deterioration but states, in accordance with contemporary critiques of the period, that it was "most significant of the general decline of the drama in England" (120). However Broadbent suggests that Vandenhoff's observations about the deteriorating state of the theatre were a direct result of legal distractions rather than its repertoire (151). Certainly the quality of the drama produced at the Theatre Royal was no longer the editorial focus at this point. After Hammond and Anderson took over the theatre in 1842, "the great fight between the respective managements of the Theatre Royal and the Liver Theatre" came to a head in January 1843 with a final case brought against the Liver Theatre for performances in an unlicensed theatre (Broadbent 151). This concluding court case, before the Theatre Regulation Act was eventually passed in 1843, gained extensive coverage in the national press and encouraged an in-depth analysis of the Theatre Royal's attitude and its standing within the port. Interestingly, the Theatre Royal chose to pursue a slightly different tack in this last court case,

accusing the actors, as well as the management, of knowingly acting in an unlicensed drama and getting paid for it. Immediately it is clear that the patented theatre had decided on a more personal and obtrusive attack on the Liver Theatre and this decision was to dramatically affect how the Theatre Royal was perceived and valued by its own townsfolk, as well the nation.

In order to explore contemporary perceptions of the theatre and its position within the town, it is particularly useful to follow the regular reports of the court case in *The Sunday Times* and, in particular, to observe how their emphasis and partiality began to change over the course of the hearing and eventual verdict. In January 1843 an article reporting the advent of the case appeared in the newspaper, beginning with a detailed defence of the Theatre Royal's actions. It acknowledged that there may be a level of public demand for another theatre to produce licensed productions in the town but countered this with the rights and prestige of the Theatre Royal:

It was said to be very hard that the people at the Liver Theatre could put on no plays; that the public surely had a right to be allowed the choice of going to what theatre they pleased, and that the public convenience ought to be consulted. Persons who reasoned thus should remember that there was no stage which inculcated that it was proper for individuals to be just before they were generous [...] Had not the proprietors of the Theatre Royal a right to be protected against the infringements upon their patent, which was their property, and which had cost them a large amount of money (*The Sunday Times* 29 Jan 1843, 6).

This article emphasises the cost to the Theatre Royal of securing its position within the town, as well as its privilege. The theatre continued to support its defence with a symbolic use of the maritime imagery that had previously provided the backbone of the port's cultural and economic identity. "Let", they claimed, "any one look to the right of ferry on the river Mersey for instance. The boatman might exclaim against the monopoly as putting their interests at stake, but the right of ferry was supported" (*The Sunday Times* 29 Jan 1843, 6). This comparison not only brought the case of the Theatre Royal down to an accessible level, but also reminded the public of the overriding

commercial interests and identity of the town. Cultural values had always been connected to, and a result of, the commercial success and gains of the town's merchants and businessmen. This, after all, was a town that fiercely valued its property, goods and commercial achievements and a theatrical patent was therefore just as rigorously guarded. The report of the Theatre Royal's defence concluded with a practical argument that there was no actual demand for another theatre in the town, only an ideological requirement: "It might be urged that the town had greatly increased in size, and that it required an extension on dramatic amusement, but it was a notorious fact that the taste for theatrical amusement had decreased" (*The Sunday Times* 29 Jan 1843, 6). This statement was, to some extent, borne out a few years later when the fortunes of Liverpool's minor theatres took a turn for the worse. The Sans Pareil Theatre was taken down in 1843 due to the New Streets' Improvement initiative, whilst the Queen's Theatre declined under W.J. Holloway from 1843 onwards with *Oxberry's Budget* reporting that it had "good houses now and then, but taking it on the whole it is a failure" (qtd in Broadbent 191). Holloway was forced to reduce his prices but the theatre eventually closed its doors until its revival as the new Theatre Royal Adelphi in April 1846.

Despite the Theatre Royal's declaration to honour and uphold the privilege of its theatrical patent in Liverpool, its case against the Liver Theatre remained in the air for several months while it waited for the next assizes. Whilst the legal contest continued, national opinion of the Theatre Royal appeared to dramatically change. *The Sunday Times* reported the ongoing trial with gusto but by April 1843 it did not seem as keen to relay the defence of the Theatre Royal in such a favourable light as it had done just a couple of months previously. On 9 April 1843 a paragraph appeared in the newspaper with a truculent comment on the intentions of the theatre should the Liver Theatre be reprieved: "The proprietors of the Theatre Royal have, it is said, indicated their determination, in the event of their not being able to maintain their patent, to pull down their property and apply the space, which is very valuable, to other purposes" (5). The inclusion of this comment suggests that the newspaper now began to perceive the theatre's attitude as petulant and rather arrogant and this was furthered a couple of weeks later when the paper included a damning report indicating its

disapproval of the Theatre Royal's actions and showing a certain amount of sympathy with the situation of the Liver Theatre. In it the writer ridicules and lambasts the Theatre Royal as being out of touch and too antiquated for modern times:

It is a most unfortunate thing for the cause of Toryism that the patent trustees of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, were not alive and stirring, and did not take an active part in the discussions of public questions, at the time that the question of Parliamentary Reform was the great topic of the day. Doubtless they would have thrown into the scale of tyranny and oppression of class legislation and class monopoly the same terrible energy of purpose, the same desperate devotedness of zeal and of action which they have lately put forward in defence of their vested rights [...] An act of Parliament, forsooth! why, it is enough to make one's hair stand on end, and one's very blood run cold, to think that in this era of the world, any set or body of men could be found so steeped in stupidity [...] as to imagine for a moment that about an act of Parliament there is anything of that venerable majesty of aspect, that immaculate purity of purpose, as to preserve it inviolate and intact – to make it pass uninjured and unscathed through all the changes of things, through all the revolutions and vicissitudes of circumstances and time (23 Apr 1843, 4).

The Sunday Times was no longer providing an objective viewpoint on Liverpool's theatrical struggles but was instead quick to comment on what it believed to be a laughable, naive and out of touch argument put forward by the "antiquated monstrosities" who owned the theatre (23 Apr 1843, 4).

The emphatic language and tone of the newspaper article reminds us that the Theatre Royal's decision to repeatedly challenge the Liver Theatre came after a period of political and social upheaval. The 1832 Reform Act had broken down the electoral monopoly in England and Wales, increasing the number of men eligible to vote and opening up seats in the growing industrial cities. In Liverpool Tory leaders, such as local builder and future mayor Samuel Holme, were coming to the forefront of local politics. John Belchem notes that these trade-orientated men did not belong to any of the elite cultural or social institutions but instead focused on the need for public improvements and the desire "to upgrade the town's physical fabric and cultural provision"

(*Merseypride* 163). This revised political thinking was, as Belchem observes, “an exercise in ‘one nation’ Toryism, stressing the links, economic and organic, between the classes” (*Merseypride* 165) and stretched to the need, or desire, for increased theatrical provision that was not led by any elitist or historic tradition. This formed part of the concept of an emerging idea of popular culture in the mid-nineteenth century, which Peter Bailey defines as “a sprawling hybrid, a generically eclectic ensemble or repertoire of texts, sites and practices that constitute a widely shared social and symbolic resource” (Bailey *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* 10). The theatre was a key institution in these changing cultural industries, along with the new pub, the popular press and the music hall (Bailey *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* 10).

We can see the practical effects of this change in political and cultural thinking in the conclusion of the theatrical battle between the Liver Theatre and the Theatre Royal. Although the Liver Theatre lost its court case in April 1843, and was heavily fined as a result, Broadbent (rather bitterly) attributes the court case to be “primarily the cause of the passing of ‘The Act for Regulating Theatres’ (1843), whereby the patent theatres lost all their ancient privileges, save that of being exempt from a yearly renewal of license to act” (152). The Act was passed following fervent campaigns by MP and playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton and, as we have seen, the management and interested parties of the Liver Theatre. It sought to and succeeded in abolishing the patent monopoly and allowing local authorities to license places of entertainment. The key principle of the campaign featured in the critical statement in *The Sunday Times’* article on the case of the Theatre Royal versus the Liver Theatre, as it declared that “all monopolies are bad [...] They strike at the root of the first principles of natural justice” (23 Apr 1843, 4). The writer went on to classify this particular case as an intellectual monopoly, or a “monopoly of the mind”: “Granting a patent to a particular theatre, in a particular town, for the exclusive performance of the legitimate drama, is exactly of this order [...] We are sure that the reader already perceives the folly and downright absolute nonsense of the claim set up by the trustees of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool” (23 Apr 1843, 4). The change in law strengthened local theatrical competition and reinforced the notion that the

market for traditional, legitimate drama had radically decreased, if not all but disappeared (Davis and Emeljanow 193).

Whilst the case to review theatrical licensing laws gathered pace in the capital, the attitude of Liverpool's inhabitants to the theatrical contest continuing in their town provides an indication of the local cultural mind-set during the mid-century. It is all too easy to overlook or forget the impact and significance of the court cases on the actual theatre-goers concerned. Naturally it is impossible to ascertain the opinion of the average person on the street during this period but we are able to consider the arguments put forward by individuals such as the Mayor of Liverpool and Malone Raymond (the manager of the Liver Theatre) in letters written to parliament in support of the petition of the Liver Theatre for a second licensed theatre in Liverpool. Throughout the letters the emphasis focuses on the growth of the town since the original patent was granted, the need for a second establishment, and the desire for choice and variety - or at least "fair competition" in drama: "we are humbly of the opinion that a second patent or licensed theatre would tend to improve and elevate the character of the drama in this great commercial town" (*The Sunday Times* 15 Oct 1843, 2). Raymond's address to a packed audience on the opening night of the newly patented Liver Theatre (now proudly calling itself the Royal Liver Theatre) in October 1843 suggests that support for the Liver's case was overwhelming and had significantly contributed to the success of the theatre's appeal:

I take this opportunity to return grateful thanks to the inhabitants of Liverpool and vicinity, who have on so many occasions honoured with their signatures and support, the various petitions to Government, to legalise this favourite establishment, I am happy to announce that, chiefly owing to their kindness as well as an arduous struggle on my own part, this theatre is at length placed on a footing second to none, either in or out of the metropolis, being now legally authorised by the magistrates of Liverpool, according to Act of Parliament, to represent and perform the legitimate drama in all its various forms, including tragedy comedy, opera, farce, interlude,

pantomime, and every other entertainment of the stage without restriction (qtd. in Broadbent 213²⁹).

Of course this address cannot be taken as absolute proof of the town's overwhelming support of the Liver Theatre in preference to the established patent theatre. Raymond's relief and pride in securing a patent and knocking the Theatre Royal off its pedestal is self-evident and it is echoed in *The Sunday Times'* report on the theatre's opening night. The writer articulates the pride of the newspaper in championing the underdog, describing Raymond as "decidedly the 'pet' of the Liverpool play-goers" and declaring the Liver to be "the most popular and best conducted theatre in Liverpool and second to none out of the metropolis" (15 Oct 1843, 2). Despite this report, it seems clear that the average play-goer in Liverpool had not permanently turned its back on the Theatre Royal, as any favouritism or change of theatrical allegiance certainly did not last long. The Liver Theatre declined rapidly only a couple of years after its much lauded success, experiencing several changes of management and an enforced reduction of prices in 1847. By 1850 it had been converted into the Liver Drapery Establishment and all but forgotten by national newspapers such as *The Sunday Times* (Broadbent 215).

Whilst the Theatre Royal did not suffer the same fate (not yet at least) as its competitor, we must try and ascertain what effect the Theatre Regulation Act and the negative press associated with it had on the popularity and status of the theatre in Liverpool. Shortly after it won its case against the Liver Theatre in April 1843, it suddenly closed its doors one month later and manager Hammond was reported as having gone bankrupt. *The Sunday Times* reported on the closure of this "notorious" theatre stating that the proprietors blamed the closure on the decline of provincial theatre in general, but the correspondent gives no credibility to this argument: "If the badness of the times prevents people from going to the Theatre Royal, why does it not prevent them from going to

²⁹ I cannot discover the original source used by Broadbent here and am therefore reliant upon his report. However the tone and content of the address seem to reflect Liverpool's theatrical context at this time and I have therefore included it with the proviso that it may not have been reproduced entirely accurately by Broadbent in his thesis.

the Royal Amphitheatre, which is nightly crowded, and was so even whilst the Theatre Royal was open?" (21 May 1843, 5). Instead the article argues that its closure comes as no surprise and blames the trustees of the theatre for its decline in popularity:

Had they let the minor theatres alone, instead of using the arbitrary and coercive measures they have done in prosecuting them, we have no doubt but the theatre would be now open. But no, "like the dog in the manger", because the public were disgusted with their conduct and proceeding, and did not go to their theatre, they turned round upon the poor "minors" and attacked them (*The Sunday Times* 21 May 1843, 5).

The "they" referred to in the article appears to be the trustees of the theatre, who pushed through the case against the Liver Theatre amidst fears for the status and future of their establishment. The newspaper does not blame Hammond as the manager, noting that he made several attempts to appeal to the theatrical tastes of the town by offering locally sourced and themed entertainment:

All other means failing, Mr. Hammond, anxious to cater for the prevailing taste of the public, made arrangements for the production of an original opera, which was written by Mr. James Stonehouse [...] and the music composed by Mr. George Hargreaves, both Liverpool gentlemen. It would have been thought that from the fact of an original opera being produced from the pen of a townsman, it would have been successful, and tend in some measure to make up for the very heavy losses sustained by the management previously. Such, however, was not the case (*The Sunday Times* 21 May 1843, 5).

The opera referred to in the above article was entitled *Marinette; or, the Wolf of St. Ange* and was billed as a "novel experiment" and "the first attempt ever made to bring out an original opera on the provincial boards" (*The Sunday Times* 8 Jan 1843, 2). Such an exciting new venture would previously have met with critical acclaim and interest in a town that placed great value on being ahead of the crowd and superior to its contemporaries. However even this was, apparently, not enough to secure the future of the Theatre Royal as audiences appear to have spurned its attempts to offer novel and unique productions. Instead Hammond became the scapegoat behind whom the owners could hide

and against whom the town's audiences could make their dissatisfaction known. A newspaper report on his bankruptcy blamed the town's inhabitants for his downfall, suggesting that he was very much let down by Liverpool through no fault of his own: "I very much regret to see the very little encouragement which the most industrious and assiduous management of the theatre seems to have met with in the town of Liverpool [...] I observe that he has been by no means parsimonious in his endeavours to cater for the public amusement" (*The Sunday Times* 2 Jul 1843, 12). Five years later, Hammond gave a farewell performance on the Theatre Royal's stage (as an actor rather than a manager) before travelling to America. During this engagement he gave a speech in which he acknowledged that his career in the town had been neither easy nor straightforward:

A good space of the journey of my life, both as passenger and coachman, have I travelled upon the Liverpool stage – a journey, it must be owned, of ups and downs; now all smooth and pleasant as a bowling-green, and now on some-what heavy roads. Now, too, a wheel may have come off; but I hope, ladies and gentlemen, you will not lay such mishap to the rashness or neglect of the driver. If, too, the stage has stuck now and then, I trust it will be allowed that the coachman did not seat himself upon a milestone, light his pipe, and call upon Mr. Hercules – the public – to clear the vehicle; I hope it will be, at least, allowed of an old servant, that he put his own shoulder to the wheel, and did his best to make all right again (*Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* 17 Jun 1848, 789).

His comparison of the theatrical stage to the "stage" coach asserts his belief that his efforts in the town were very much subject to the social and economic events of the time. Hammond was discharged from his debts in 1843, as they were deemed to have occurred through no fault of his own, but the accompanying report in *The Sunday Times* offers a damning opinion on the state of Liverpool theatre at this present time: "I must say that this book holds out very little encouragement to anybody to speculate in this town in theatrical matters for the public amusement" (2 Jul 1843, 12). If, the article argues, high profile actors such as Charles and Lucia Mathews (formerly Madame Vestris) still do not incur decent box office receipts, "there is but little

hope of doing any good in the theatrical way at present. When it is seen what poor sums the most eminent of our performers have drawn, with every addition and attention on the part of the management, but faint hopes can be entertained for the future" (*The Sunday Times* 2 Jul 1843, 12). This article, however, chooses to omit the fact that Vestris and Mathews's social appeal was quite limited during the summer of 1843 due to their bankruptcy and Mathews's brief sojourn in the Queen's Bench Prison whilst his financial affairs were examined. The couple sought to relieve their debts through a season of provincial engagements but they could not free themselves from their "financial liabilities" (Pearce 288). Although Madame Vestris's biographer believes that there was much sympathy shown for the couple (Pearce 279), their social and financial embarrassment may well have played a part in reduced box office figures during their engagement.

If the newspaper reports are to be believed, the future of Liverpool theatre looked bleak at this point. With the *Liver*, the *Sans Pareil* and the *Queen's Theatres* all closing within a couple of years, and the *Theatre Royal* facing short-term closure while the trustees advertised for new managers, the theatrical reforms of the 1840s do not seem, on the surface, to have helped the local theatrical scene. However while some of the minor theatres fell by the wayside, I believe that the need and desire for a *Theatre Royal* remained strong in the town and the venue remained an attractive prospect for theatrical entrepreneurs. Indeed the theatre did not stay closed for very long but opened its doors a few months later in December 1843 under the management of respected actor and manager duo, Benjamin Webster and Madame Céleste. Webster was currently the lessee of the *Theatre Royal Haymarket*, London, and had now come to control two key British theatres during a rather unstable period in Britain's theatrical history. *The Sunday Times* described Webster in glowing terms, as an "enterprising manager, to whom the drama of this country and its professors owe so much", whilst declaring that his plan was to bulk out a stock company at the Liverpool theatre with famous London performers and various novelty acts (24 Dec 1843, 5). Webster had London contacts at his fingertips and bringing them to the North for occasional engagements was a

tactic that had been used by many managers since the theatre's foundation sixty years previously; indeed, it had been actively encouraged by local audiences. Whether Webster lived up to his plans and, more importantly, were these promises were in line with the expectations, desires and critical responses of Liverpool's exacting audiences is, however, a different issue. Local newspaper responses to the managerial decisions of Webster and Celeste offer a clue to their popularity within the town. Broadbent also offers us an interesting opinion on their success that deserves deeper investigation.

The Theatre Royal was redecorated before opening in December 1843 and the prices for admission were immediately reduced quite dramatically from four shillings (dress boxes), three shillings (upper boxes), two shillings (pit) and sixpence and one shilling (gallery), to three shillings, two shillings, one shilling and sixpence respectively. This drop in prices brought the Theatre Royal more in line with the Liver Theatre and the other minor theatres, making it more accessible in the aim of reviving previously poor audience figures. However this decision was not met with a favourable response by all. Whilst *The Sunday Times* (which had opposed the Theatre Royal's superior attitude throughout its legal battles) applauded the decision, a review in *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* in December 1843 described it as "another knell to the drama, and we fear a decidedly impolitic step on the part of Webster and his fair partner" (qtd. in Broadbent 154). The writer argued that by lowering the prices the theatre had now devalued its status and history of producing legitimate, high-quality drama, as well as undermining the defence put forward in its recent court case:

Hitherto the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, has had the unpopular distinction of being more opposed to the extension of the drama than any house in England, through its determined hostility to minor theatres, and it would now seem as if that spirit of opposition, instead of emulation, was meant to be carried on, even after the legalization of the minors, by the recent statute (qtd. in Broadbent 154).

The article claims that this step is “decidedly calculated to produce unpopularity” and even predicts that “in a very little time the old prices will be restored” (qtd. in Broadbent 154), yet I would argue that the Theatre Royal could not get much more unpopular attention in the town and across the country than it had already received in the last couple of years. An article in *The Liverpool Mercury* suggests that the town’s own inhabitants were sensible to the reasoning behind this decision, whilst acknowledging that it did come as a bit of a surprise to local audiences: “After the splendid and extensively advertised arrangements by the new lessees of the Theatre Royal, the announcement of the reduction of prices must have been as startling to the play-going public as it is spirited and portentous of success” (22 Dec 1843). In language befitting Liverpool’s commercial sensibilities, the writer noted that the change in prices could be identified as a result of the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act: “Free trade in theatrical performances was sure to have like effects with free trade in the substantial of life. These effects, of course, are to cheapen prices and increase demand” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Dec 1843). The divergent reactions to this managerial decision serve to highlight the main bone of contention over the running of, and critical response to, the theatre after 1843.

By challenging the authority and standards of its theatrical contemporaries, the Theatre Royal had laid itself open to a running critical commentary on its own dramatic standards, staging decisions and managerial prowess that superseded all previous analysis of the theatre. This did not mean that they were necessarily fair or in line with previous criticisms. Indeed, while many censured the decision to lower prices in 1843, it had been previously been argued in the press (before Webster and Madame Céleste took over the lease) that a new company and lowered prices could be the key to reviving the theatre (*The Sunday Times* 21 May 1843, 5). Webster did indeed introduce a new company and they too, along with the quality of the productions they appeared in, were subjected to a critical public appraisal. Broadbent reports that the “Webster-Céleste *regime*” was rejected by the public in several instances during their short tenure (155). The first reason, he claims, was the ugliness of the actresses. The commentary blames Webster for disappointing the

public by opening with a good company “seldom equalled in the provinces” but then gradually removing them to the Theatre Royal Haymarket, subsequently choosing to “foist upon his patrons a number of inferior performers” (155). The result, Broadbent notes, was “empty benches” (155). However Broadbent goes further to accuse Webster of physically neglecting the Liverpool theatre and choosing dancing over managerial duties: “Mr. Webster’s two theatres demanded his constant care and personal attendance, but the polka epidemic (inaugurated by Jullien) having broken out, he was tempted to neglect his duties, and went dancing about the country with Madame Céleste” (155). However amusing this anecdote now sounds, it reminds us that, although the Theatre Royal continued to survive whilst some of the minor theatres fell by the wayside, concerns over standards and quality of entertainment continued to be raised.

But is it possible to ascertain how valid these concerns really were? Had the theatre entered a period of critical decline, as some newspaper reports suggested? If we believe Broadbent’s narrative, the answer is yes. Writing just over fifty years later, he again suggests that Liverpool’s inhabitants became highly concerned about the artistic condition of the theatre in 1844. He claims that “the townsfolk and the authorities at the Theatre Royal got at loggerheads over the quality of the entertainments submitted” as it was “mostly of the blue-and-red-fire school” (Broadbent 155). This intriguing description suggests that the productions were selected for their entertainment value or spectacle, rather than dramatic quality. Broadbent further suggests the neglectful nature of the Webster-Céleste management by recounting a story of how a sub-standard pantomime clown provided by the Theatre Royal during this period was rejected by the town’s audiences. According to this hearsay tale of Webster’s ineptitude, he was forced to go to the Sans Pareil Theatre and borrow a clown for the rest of the run. Such a story demeans the status of the Theatre Royal during this regime, putting it beneath a rival theatre in terms of quality and potential audience response³⁰.

³⁰ I can find no reference to this occurrence in local or national newspapers for this date. It is possible however that Broadbent is confusing this pantomime with the seasonal production one year earlier, *Harlequin, Baron Muchausen*, when the actor playing the clown was changed mid-run (*The Liverpool Mercury* 13 Jan 1843).

Yet what is apparent from scanning playbills and advertisements placed in *The Liverpool Mercury*, as well as reports on the condition of the theatre in the capital's newspapers, is the difficulty in ascertaining the truth behind the public response to the new management post-1843. Instead the reports offer hints or suggestions of the truth, or lack of it, behind Broadbent's accusations which can help to identify what kind of decline the Theatre Royal truly experienced following its disastrous year in the critical eyes of the nation.

The first accusation to be addressed is Broadbent's charge that whilst Webster and Madame Céleste started keenly, they slowly rejected the Theatre Royal Liverpool in favour of dancing and foisted sub-standard performers on the northern theatre. Despite Broadbent's protestations that Madame Céleste abandoned the theatre to go dancing with her theatrical partner, her performances were regularly advertised on the Theatre Royal playbills throughout their management season. His references to Webster and Céleste's dancing could therefore be interpreted as an allusion to distracting provincial touring or even their private relationship. However allusions to their polka obsession are borne out in adverts towards the end of the season which introduced "the new dance of the Polka" into the entertainments on the playbill (*Liverpool Mercury* 10 May 1844). One week earlier an advert also appeared in *The Liverpool Mercury* for music to "The True Polka" which claimed that "the edition of The Polka, as danced by Mr. Webster and Madame Celeste, is merely an arrangement of the old air, 'The Krakovienne'" (3 May 1844). I believe that Broadbent's uncomplicated, if selective, style should therefore be taken as read here and this is supported by the newspaper references to the couple's interest in the new dance craze.

The enthusiasm of the new management certainly seems evident in newspaper reports at the beginning of 1844, all of which agreed on the good intentions of the celebrated duo. An article in *The Morning Post* noted that "Mr. Webster seems determined that no attraction shall be wanting to the 'little theatre'" (27 Jan 1844). Despite the rather condescending tone – suggesting the status of the Liverpool theatre was akin to a younger sibling of the great London theatres – the article

agrees that several highly-rated actors and musicians had already been engaged for the season direct from London. This was supported by a review of the town's theatrical entertainments in *The Liverpool Mercury* two weeks previously, which noted that "never was the town of Liverpool better supplied with recreations calculated to please the taste of all parties" (12 Jan 1844). According to the report, popular actors Fanny Fitzwilliam, T.P. Cooke and John Buckstone had all been engaged over the forthcoming weeks, with more promised as the season progressed (*The Liverpool Mercury* 12 Jan 1844). However Broadbent suggests that engagements of this quality did not continue throughout the season. His assertion is not supported by the playbills from 1844, which show a continued influx of metropolitan performers coming to the town with no obvious objections made from the town's inhabitants. Actors such as T.P. Cooke, John Buckstone, and Charles and Ellen Kean, along with Webster and Céleste themselves, regularly trod the boards of the Theatre Royal. Furthermore, newspaper reports from both local and national papers suggested that the town's response to the quality of entertainers was more positive than Broadbent believes. Cooke was re-engaged in April in the new nautical drama, *The Lost Ship*, which according to a contemporary report was "totally devoid of originality" but "comparatively successful, owing to the excellent acting of the 'veteran tar'" (*The Era* 14 Apr 1844). Again, it is reasonably difficult to ascertain the thoughts or reactions of the town's audiences to the quality of the theatrical season but it is important to note that the theatre did not have to close its doors due to poor audience figures from December 1843 onwards. An article in the London newspaper, *The Era*, declared outright that "the season has been a most prosperous one to the management and satisfactory to their patrons" (9 Jun 1844). Closer to home, the editorial on "Public Amusements" in *The Liverpool Mercury* four months earlier described Webster as "the enterprising lessee" and notes that "no man ever deserved a bumper from the Liverpool play-going public" (23 Feb 1844). A "bumper" here can be read as the desire for a packed house and there were certainly no references to empty seats advertised in the newspapers during this period, which seems to contradict Broadbent's argument.

A comment in the middle of a report on provincial theatricals in *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* holds a clue to the difference in opinion between Broadbent's 1908 thesis and contemporary reports. The article discusses the opening of Catherine Gore's new comedy *Quid Pro Quo* at the Liverpool Theatre Royal and notes that "although it did not by any means attract a fashionable audience, still it was a very full one, and one who had no party feeling, but still most willing to do justice to the talents of the authoress" (*Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* 28 Jul 1844). Reduced ticket prices, combined with an increasingly varied playbill, seem to have encouraged a fresh wave of audience members who were not so concerned with any theatrical arguments or political entanglements but instead wished to be entertained and engaged by the productions put before them. With box and pit prices more affordable and on a par with the other theatrical institutions of the town, these areas of the theatre were no longer economically restricted to Liverpool's wealthier, well-to-do inhabitants. This change in the quality of audience offers the key to the proposed critical decline referred to by Broadbent.

Jim Davis and Victor Emejanow's study of London audiences during the Victorian period notes that certain challenges abound when we try to investigate nineteenth-century theatre audiences: "the closer we get to the evidence, the more we are aware that the theatre in the nineteenth century was itself subject to myth-making and the invention of traditions [...] propagated by these same detached and discriminating observers on whose evidence we have come to rely" (99). Here Davis and Emejanow refer specifically to the writing of critics such as Charles Dickens, Henry Mayhew and W.B. Donne but I believe the same tendencies occur when we consider the reviews and articles of newspaper journalists, as well as the later observations of the enthusiastic Broadbent. Each had their own agenda and viewpoint on the quality and expectations of Liverpool's theatrical output at this time, and each therefore created their own sense of a cultural identity or assembly through their reviews and critiques. At this point in history the nation's theatres were all going through a period of dramatic change following the 1843 Act as "growing competition from the minor theatres had already forced the patent theatres to offer popular entertainments" (Johnson

157) – a fact we have already seen manifest itself in Liverpool. Added to this competition was the Theatre Royal’s close proximity to the town’s other theatrical venues. In mid-Victorian Britain, this was not an issue limited to Theatres Royal as Davis and Emeljanow note in their study of theatres in the metropolis. Here they argue that the character of East End theatre audiences in London varied substantially with the choice of affordable theatres all within walking distance of each other: “These audiences were probably quite diverse, not necessarily comprising a majority from the most cited occupations in the neighbourhood and almost certainly including a wider social mix than many accounts imply” (47). When this is the case, the impact of theatrical choice becomes incredibly important, as Joanne Robinson observes in her study, “Mapping Performance Culture: Locating the Spectator in Theatre History”. Choosing to attend a particular performance, or not, becomes key when a range of entertainments are on offer (Robinson 4). Her research focuses on Nottingham as an example of a small but rapidly growing centre where “a wide variety of sites of entertainment existed side by side, whether sharing and competing for audiences or, alternatively, catering for distinct sectors of the town’s population” (Robinson 8).

I believe that now, more than ever, Liverpool’s Theatre Royal was experiencing the practical effects of increased competition and this was the reason behind the proposed critical decline, as suggested by Broadbent and certain newspaper correspondents. This argument is supported by the traditional criticism of theatrical decline in the provinces during the 1830s and 1840s which, as Linda Fitzsimmons notes in her research on the Theatre Royal York, tended to take three factors into account: class of audience, size of houses and quality of programme (18). She suggests that one of the problems with York was the tendency to look back to a “supposed golden age, one which – as is the way of golden ages – never existed” (Fitzsimmons 19). It is interesting that Broadbent’s study of nineteenth-century Liverpool theatre suggests a similar tendency as, in the middle of his musings on the standard and quality of the theatrical productions of the 1840s and 1850s, he takes a moment to ask, “may not the present voracious chronicler interpolate a sigh for ‘the good old times’ that once belonged to Liverpool?” (167). At this point Broadbent seems to be conveniently ignoring the

frequently problem-filled narrative first half of his thesis and reminds us once again of the highly subjective nature of his work.

Linda Fitzsimmons's research on theatrical practices in York during the 1840s offers a practical way to re-consider the suggested critical decline of the Theatre Royal Liverpool during the same period. York shared some similar traits with Liverpool in that it was predominantly a rising trades and professions town with little manufacturing, as well as being a military centre of considerable standing. Fitzsimmons suggests therefore that the audience quality at the York Theatre Royal did not dwindle during the mid-nineteenth century but instead altered to suit a rising new professional and intellectual audience (19). Equally it is interesting to note that the theatre's manager, John Langford Pritchard, also reduced the theatre's ticket prices in March 1848 by sixpence (as Liverpool did) "in order, he says on the bills, 'to meet the present times'" (Fitzsimmons 21). Fitzsimmons believes that this may have been an astute marketing ploy rather than an act of desperation –a shrewd response to the increase in population and the influx of visitors to the town (22). This kind of practical response to the proposed provincial theatrical decline deserves to be explored with regard to Liverpool theatregoing practices during this period and, more specifically, to the suggestions of a Theatre Royal in flux.

By considering Liverpool's theatrical identity from the mid-1840s onwards from a market-driven perspective, key concerns become increasingly evident in the newspaper reports circulating out of the town during this period. As Joanne Robinson points out, when conducting research on spectatorship and theatre the tendency is to consider that "the audience is there, imaginatively necessary, but critically unconsidered" (3). Instead, she argues, "theatrical meaning is created in the interaction between performer and audience, between stage and auditorium" (3). This idea remains constant in the challenge of investigating regional theatregoing practices and is, I believe, especially important when there is a difference in opinion on the state of Liverpool's Theatre Royal in the mid-nineteenth century. In July 1845, the management of the Theatre Royal once again changed hands

to come under the direction of Mercer H. Simpson. According to a contemporary report in *The Liverpool Mercury* he was largely unknown in the town, having come direct to Liverpool from Birmingham, where, we are told, he “has succeeded in resuscitating the love of the legitimate drama [...] after theatricals in that town had appeared for ever consigned to the tomb of all the Capulets” (11 Jul 1845). The resurgent dominance of serious, or legitimate, drama in the town after an apparently frivolous, albeit moderately successful, season under Benjamin Webster and Madame Céleste, was purported to be desired by all the town. From 1845 onwards, classic plays such as *Pizarro* (1804), *Hamlet* (c.1602), *The Merchant of Venice* (c.1598), and even a translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (c.1844) were produced with increasing regularity at the Theatre Royal as the main attraction on the playbill. *The Liverpool Mercury* even took to describing dramatic plays of good standing by providing a detailed outline of plot and character analysis separate to the advertised playbills. An extensive report on the new production of *Antigone* (translated for the English stage by J.W. Bartholomew) began by noting that: “It is an era in our local history to produce upon the stage a tragic drama written four centuries and a half before the birth of our Saviour: - a drama surviving the ravages done to men and to men’s productions during a period of 2,300 years, and to this day shedding the honours of fame” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jul 1845). The report went on to praise the dialogue and lyrical sentiments of the play, reproducing an excerpt which the reporter believes to be “acceptable to the general reader, as being a lyrical ‘Essay on Man’, independent of the story itself”, and finishing with a brief memoir of the life of Sophocles himself (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jul 1845). This kind of journalistic intent has three potential effects. Firstly, the lengthy raptures on the drama remind us that the editors of the local paper support this kind of classical, legitimate theatre as the most desirable and advantageous to the inhabitants of the town. It also ensures that their readership knows this, as well as providing a basic knowledge of the background and plot of the play, which they may have been lacking and which may have dissuaded them from attending their local theatre to see this production. Finally, the editorial space given to theatrical description of this kind suggests that there was some enthusiasm within Liverpool’s

general public for the rising dominance of legitimate drama on the stage of the Theatre Royal once more.

Although it is difficult to accurately understand and gauge the true opinion and interests of the average Liverpool audience member, further examination of these newspaper articles offers several clues to audience quality and composition at this time. Tucked in the middle of the 1845 report on the production of *Antigone* is a brief comment on the kind of audience present at the theatre. The article recognises the gap between audience expectation and reality:

We quite expected that the desire to witness so classical a play, as of old, in one and the same scene, with an attendant “chorus” throughout, and embellished by architecture and costume depicting the art and fashion of ancient Greece, would have attracted all the educated gentry of the town and neighbourhood [...] But we regret to say that while the gallery was well attended, and the pit crowded to excess by those who are bent upon intellectual enjoyment, such as no other kind of public amusement can afford, the boxes were only scantily occupied by a few enlightened families, who did honour to their good taste by being present, and seeing and listening to performances which prove the immortality of the renowned bard (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jul 1845).

This report on audience quality at the Theatre Royal provides a class-preoccupied commentary, upon which Broadbent may have based his views on the apparent decline of Liverpool theatre around this time. *The Liverpool Mercury* is quick to highlight the presence of “crowded and fashionable, and still better, sensible and attentive audiences”, as purported to be present during William Macready’s engagement in 1845 (12 Sept 1845), but these reports are largely outnumbered by criticisms of attendance and attention from the wealthy, elite inhabitants of the town. In 1847 *The Liverpool Mercury* produced an interesting note on the behaviour of the Theatre Royal audience during a production of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s “exquisitely beautiful play”, *The Lady of Lyons* (1838) which was headlined by the celebrated Fanny Butler (née Kemble) (5 Mar 1847). Although the article reports that the house was “densely crowded”, it also notes that some theatregoers did not

appear to value this “intellectual treat” as they might have done: “Unfortunately, a good deal of the effect of the first act was lost, owing to the unpunctual arrivals of parties who had taken places in the dress boxes: they themselves missed the explanatory opening, and prevented, by their ingress to places, the more punctual from hearing much of what was said” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 5 Mar 1847). The apparently noisy and tardy arrival at the theatre of the more wealthy members of the town (those who could afford the three shillings entrance for a seat in the boxes) suggests that these theatregoers were not necessarily interested in the content of the drama but valued the act of going to the theatre instead – a familiar habit that can be traced back throughout history and was certainly not unique to Liverpool’s audiences.

However the report also gives us an indication of the average audience member and composition targeted by the Theatre Royal’s managers. Although the apparent dramatic disinterest of the town’s elite is lamented by local reviewers – who, rather hypocritically, often admit mid-critique that they themselves do not attend the theatre as frequently as they should: “Our opportunities of attending the theatre being but few and far between” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 15 Aug 1845) – I believe that these members of Liverpool society were not the main focus for the theatre’s managers. Instead the newspaper reports frequently tell us that “the boxes of the Royal were almost empty” whilst audience figures in the pit and gallery continue to thrive (*The Liverpool Mercury* 6 Jun 1848). I believe that a key factor in this attendance trend was the slight adjustment of ticket prices between 1843 and 1845. It still cost sixpence for a seat in the gallery but pit prices quietly rose by sixpence upon the commencement of Simpson’s management. The cost of entrance to the theatre was quietly referred to in the middle of an article in *The Liverpool Mercury*, subtly mentioning only the range of ticket prices and not individual costs, declaring that “the terms of admission, ranging from 6d. to 3s., are such as to suit all classes” (11 Jul 1845). This emphasis on inclusion and accessibility is, I believe, an honest avowal of the lessees’ intentions but it conceals a developing target audience which is highlighted in a letter written to the same newspaper just one week later. On 18 July 1845 *The Liverpool Mercury* published a letter from Birmingham-based

Christopher Nubbles, congratulating the town on the engagement of Simpson as the new manager of the Liverpool Theatre Royal. After wishing “the folks of Liverpool” a “succession of dramatic enjoyment of the very highest order”, he expressed a concern about the cost of going to the theatre:

I really think one shilling and sixpence to the pit is too high a charge, and one that often excludes from the theatre many worthy persons, especially among the better class of operatives, who, were the charge a little lower, would more frequently resort there for a night’s enjoyment (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jul 1845).

In actual fact, the revised prices brought entry to the pit in Liverpool’s theatre in line with those at the Theatre Royal Manchester. Upon the opening night of the new season in September 1845, Manchester’s ticket prices were advertised at 1s 6d for the pit, 4s for the stalls and dress circle boxes and 1s and 6d for the gallery and upper gallery respectively (with half-price entry included for all areas bar the upper gallery). The editors of *The Liverpool Mercury* were quick to issue a reply beneath the published letter expressing their disagreement with the correspondent from the midlands: “We think 1s. 6d. very reasonable and well proportioned: at the lower price the pit was often disagreeably crowded, while other parts were deserted” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 18 Jul 1845).

This firm affirmation supports my contention that, at this time in its history, the key audience concern at the Theatre Royal was quality and not necessarily quantity. This did not mean that the theatre could continue with close to empty houses but nor was it prepared to pack out the pit with the poorer members of society. The ticket prices did not prohibit the majority from securing a seat in the gallery but the pit returned to being the domain of the merchant and business classes who could afford the extra sixpence for the privilege of sitting there. This higher-class quality of audience in the pit, the editors’ response suggests, would also not put off the town’s wealthier inhabitants from securing their seats in the theatre’s boxes.

After a period of cultural uncertainty Liverpool’s Theatre Royal found its niche by returning to the commercial composition of the town. It settled down after a series of exhausting battles with

the smaller theatres in the town and appeared to re-evaluate who it ultimately aimed to cater for in local society. This was not a decline in standard but rather a change in managerial direction. Whilst it continued to produce extravaganzas, musical entertainments and exotic acts like its local contemporaries, it did not show signs of having to compete with them directly any more. This was undoubtedly helped by the gradual decline of some of its former competitors (such as the Liver Theatre and the Queen's Theatre) but also by the decision to provide intellectual yet entertaining theatre that appealed, in terms of both amusement and price, to the flourishing mid-section of Liverpool society. Despite his avowal that the theatre was in a period of decline, Broadbent cites a remembrance by actor-manager James Roger "that the company engaged by Mr. Simpson at the Liverpool Royal was one such as would be hard to get together nowadays, and included more than one young actor who has since made his mark", including Tom Swinburne, Tom Mead, John Coleman and Nye Chant (156). In 1847 Charles Dickens also first appeared on the Theatre Royal's stage with his friend and fellow writer, Douglas Jerrold. During an amateur benefit for Leigh Hunt, Dickens played the roles of Captain Bobadil in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) and Jeremiah Bumps in John Poole's one-act farce, *Turning Tables* (1830). *The Liverpool Mercury* called Dickens and Jerrold the principal "lions" of the evening and noted that:

Never was greater enthusiasm evinced by any audience within the walls of this theatre than that which attended the clever acting of these distinguished men. Rounds of applause greeted them every time they came on stage, and they seemed deeply sensible of the good feeling manifested towards them (30 Jul 1847)

The article went on to provide a glowing critique of Dickens's acting abilities, relating the author to his fictional pen-name: "Bobadil [...] was well personated by 'Boz'"; he looked the character to perfection, and went through the many parts assigned to him with an ease that would lead one to believe him an 'old stager'" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 30 Jul 1847). The packed out houses that met the celebrated writer showed no signs of decline or abated enthusiasm and the management

appeared keen to appeal to the mid-and upper-sections of Liverpool society first and foremost. One review of the evening described the composition of the auditorium:

The boxes (upper and lower) and the entire area of the pit, were filled with our merchant princes and other leading townsmen, their wives and families – a dazzling array of beauty and fashion [...] Not a single seat was empty in the boxes, upper boxes, and the pit; but we are informed that many seats in the gallery remained untenanted. This is easily accounted for, such performances not being in accordance with either the tastes or pockets of the noisy, brawling “gods”, who usually patronize that part of the house (*The Liverpool Mercury* 30 Jul 1847).

Indeed the article goes on to comment that many of those who were sat in the gallery were from “the respectable classes” and had only sat up there as they could not get a ticket in the sold-out pit (*The Liverpool Mercury* 30 Jul 1847). Although such an evening was not a regular occurrence in the annual calendar of the Liverpool theatre, the continued emphasis on the respectable quality of the audience present further highlights the theatre’s new policy to appeal to and attract decent and well-to-do audiences through its doors.

An address was written specially for the evening by Edward Bulwer-Lytton and it reminds us that the performance catered specifically to those profiting from maritime trade and associated business, as well as appealing to the local interests of the audience members. Like former tributes, the address paid homage to the maritime profits and continued commercial success of the town:

What lights with magic stars your glittering streets?

What with all India freights your homeward fleets?

What magic art outstrips the swiftest steed?

And wings your movements with the whirlwind’s speed? (*The Liverpool Mercury* 30 Jul 1847)

The reference to “your homeward fleets” and “your movements” supports the newspaper’s assertion that the bulk of those present came from the wealthy merchant classes who had a vested commercial interest in the maritime fortunes of the town. However the language of this theatrical

address also indicates a subtle shift in thinking and views on the Theatre Royal's stage. The focus is on these great trade ships coming home to the North West port and the appearance of, and effect on, the landscape of the town. The suggestion of a change of direction in the theatrical representation of the maritime town is sustained when we consider further productions put on at the theatre over the next few years. Rather than looking outward to its global connections and transatlantic reputation, theatrical representations of the town now shifted to focus on the local impact of such maritime success on the streets surrounding the Theatre Royal. Liverpool's global interests and achievements were still highlighted but depictions of local events, images and day-to-day happenings now proved to be of particular growing interest to the residents of this proud, prosperous port.

Pantomime: a reflection of local pride

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Theatre Royal's artistic interests began to be dominated by the idea of the day-to-day life and image of a prospering Liverpool, where the effects of economic and commercial success could be seen on the streets of the town. This is not to say that Liverpool had left its days of poverty, illness and sanitation problems behind. Indeed the rising numbers of inhabitants meant that housing and provisions were stretched to the maximum in the poorer urban dwellings, with high levels of migrant workers and their families coming to the town for labour jobs at the docks and associated businesses: "As a large industrial city with much casual labour Liverpool attracted many vagrants and travellers seeking employment, and in the mid-nineteenth-century many who failed to find work ended up in vagrant sheds of the workhouse" (Pooley 203). However, for those in the prospering middle classes local pride was at an all-time high and urban developments, such as the building of the new, grand, neoclassical-inspired St George's Hall (which eventually opened in 1854, ten years after it was first commissioned), epitomised the superior, successful self-made image of the town. This civic sentiment was articulated best in the

theatre through the development of a series of popular pantomimes that appealed to local pride and played to packed houses year after year.

The pantomime was, of course, not a new feature on the Liverpool playbill but by the mid-century it had become the staple Christmas entertainment that theatre managers across the country depended upon as their pecuniary insurance for a continued season. The first mention of a seasonal pantomime in Liverpool occurs in December 1842 when the “grand new Christmas pantomime *Harlequin, Baron Munchausen; or, Harlequin and the Green Wizard*” was advertised (*The Liverpool Mercury* 23 Dec 1842). Three weeks into its run a review of the programme at the Theatre Royal declared that “in consequence of some judicious curtailment and the introduction of a new clown, in the person of Mr. J. Wood, it is now more attractive than ever” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 13 Jan 1843). There are no further details in any edition of the local newspaper as to the content or setting of the production but we know that it ran until 3 February 1843. The Christmas pantomime does not then make an appearance until the winter of 1845 when the playbills advertise “an entirely original Grand Christmas Pantomime” to open on Boxing Day at the theatre (*The Liverpool Mercury* 19 Dec 1845). It appears to have closed at the end of January 1846. This pantomime was, oddly, never given a title on any of the playbills produced during its run but a paragraph in *The Liverpool Mercury* provides us with an inkling of the scenes and imagery used during the production:

Some of the principal shops in Liverpool will be represented in a series of scenes by Mr. Lloyd, and Mr. Gordon has bestowed his genius on a panorama from the Mersey to the Hudson! It commences with the Great Britain getting under weigh [*sic*], opposite Rock Ferry, and pictures her progress as she passes by Woodside, Seacombe, New Brighton, and the Fort. Night closes on the gallant ship opposite Wales, and the Moon rises to disclose her position opposite the city of New York (26 Dec 1845).

This description confirms that the outlook of this theatrical representation was, once again, a global one as the setting moves from the town’s streets to its commercial prospects across the Atlantic in America. The idea of a panorama depicting the connections from the North West port to the

Hudson Bay in New York serves to highlight the town's proud maritime identity once more, choosing to look out across the ocean and focus on opportunities and connections abroad, rather than those from within.

However the decision not to give the production a title on any advertised playbills, combined with the removal of the Christmas pantomime for the next three years, suggests that the seasonal pantomime had not yet fully hit its stride at the Liverpool Theatre Royal. It was not until December 1849 that the pantomime began to appear regularly on the playbills from December to February and the plot, characters and scenery were usually fully listed and critiqued in *The Liverpool Mercury*. From this point on, the focus and detail of these reviews and advertisements provide a unique theatrical perspective on the day-to-day life and image of the town's landscape and self-image that had hitherto been passed over in favour of grand global representations.

Glimpses into the content and design of the mid-nineteenth-century Liverpool pantomimes are important as one of the key objectives of the theatrical genre is to offer a witty, ironic, or even occasionally hostile, social commentary on topical local events or attitudes. In the past, details of regional pantomime practices have been passed over in favour of analysis of the capital's pantomimes as theatre historiographers "focused on London, in particular giving preference to the histories of the patent theatres and, to an extent, assuming homogeneity of those productions that occurred beyond Euston station" (Sullivan 2). However by paying closer attention to the details of local pantomime productions, particular information can be gleaned about Liverpool's socio-economic and political environment. In her study, *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860-1900*, Jill Sullivan notes the particular draw of local pantomimes for the regional theatre historian as they "depended on more than scene-settings; references to local issues, traditions and the promoted status of theatres, managers, authors and location all formed a part of the theatre-going experience" (11). Although she begins her research a decade after the time period I wish to consider here, her use of written reviews, local publicity and textual evidence to "source a

notion of audience, a notion that defined the managerial policies at each theatre”, is a useful example to follow in the case of Liverpool’s mid-century pantomime policies (Sullivan 11).

Of course, as Sullivan’s study makes abundantly clear, the use of local allusions and topical imagery was by no means unique to the Liverpool theatre as provincial towns across the nation represented and poked fun at their society and customs on their local stage. However this is the first time that Liverpool’s Theatre Royal offered a sustained annual review of the issues and events topical to local society that did not necessarily involve transatlantic commercial travel or mercantile interest. Whilst the premise of the local Christmas pantomime is therefore not a new one, the images and inward direction of the productions represents a new theatrical lens through which to explore Liverpool’s self-image and conflictive civic identity.

I want to focus here in particular on five pantomimes produced at the Theatre Royal from 1849 to 1855. By choosing to finish my examination of Liverpool theatre in 1855, this study only provides an initial foray into the beginning of a rich and colourful era of regional pantomime. While I believe this analysis provides a useful insight into the character and identity of the port by the mid-nineteenth century, it is my hope that further work will be carried out on this yet-to-be explored theatrical territory. By the mid-nineteenth century the pantomime had become a firm seasonal favourite across the nation’s theatres and by 1849, Liverpool’s audiences had also taken the genre to heart. Its sustained popularity and appeal, as well as its deliberate local references and wit, deserve further analysis in order to examine Liverpool’s cultural identity and outlook during this period. The Theatre Royal was the first local theatre to embrace the three-month run of the annual pantomime, swiftly followed by the town’s minor theatres. In December 1849, the Theatre Royal’s new seasonal pantomime, *Harlequin Crusader; or, Richard Coeur de Lion and the Knights Templar*, was advertised across Liverpool’s newspapers. An article in *The Liverpool Mercury* commented that this production signalled a new era of pantomime strength and focus in the town: “So considerable a period of time has elapsed since the production of a pantomime in Liverpool, really deserving the attention and

support of the histrionic portion of our community [...] this entertainment is calculated to afford much amusement to lovers of fun and merriment” (8 Jan 1850). From details given in a further article one week later, the production was interesting on several levels and it is useful to look further at the staging details for a detailed insight into how the Theatre Royal reflected and engaged with its local community.

Despite the historical title of the pantomime, the newspaper articles emphasise the staging details of individual scenes, focusing particularly on scenes of local interest and relevance. For example, scene twelve features “a view of the Mersey by Moonlight from the Old Church of St. Nicholas, of which there is a very neat painting and faithful imitation”, whilst scene fourteen is set in the kitchen of the Adelphi Hotel (*The Liverpool Mercury* 8 Jan 1850). However an excerpt reproduced from scene four of the pantomime tells us that the original script aimed to entertain and amuse its audience more than by merely reproducing local places of interest. This early scene portrayed members of the Liverpool Corporation awaiting the arrival of the King who, on his arrival, engages those present in a discussion of St George’s Hall, which was still in the stages of being built in 1850:

What building’s that at the corner of the street?

Is it a private house, or house of call?

No sire, it’s a public-house – St. George’s Hall.

Ha! ump! when will it be done? – it is not finished yet, I see!

Sire, if you’d make me your bosom friend, don’t puzzle me;

‘Tis handed down in history, clear as mud,

The first stone was laid somewhere about the Flood;

The only ones that will see it finished, ‘twixt I and you,

Will be Widdicomb, of Astley’s, or the Wandering Jew! (*The Liverpool Mercury* 15 Jan 1850).

Construction of the grand hall started in 1841 and its impressive, bold architectural design represented to many the high point of that “new spirit of civic pride” which was engulfing the town

(Belchem “Celebrating Liverpool” 17). However the building was not without its problems, both practical and ideological, as the verse in the pantomime indicates. Firstly, many reformers thought that the huge amount of money spent on designing and building the hall (estimated at over £100,000 in 1841) would have been better spent overhauling the town’s sanitary provisions and “eradicating its reputation as ‘the black spot on the Mersey’” (Belchem “Celebrating Liverpool” 17). Equally the time taken to complete the project, further delayed by a change of architect mid-build due to the death of the original designer, meant that the site remained under construction for most of the decade. It is this delay that is satirised in the 1849 pantomime when the hall would have been nearly completed but was still two years off opening. Jill Sullivan argues that such dramatic tactics had a dual role in providing both “visual and verbal referencing that reflected local, current and ongoing concerns, as well as specific celebrations of regional culture and civic achievement” (179). The writer’s choice to lampoon a topic of such local significance in Liverpool highlights how the new pantomime productions sought to engage those present with their immediate environment and one can imagine the amusement and appreciative groans that would have emerged from auditorium at the mention of this slow build.

It is important to remember at this point that by relying on newspaper reports for excerpts and reviews of the textual content of the pantomime, we are not necessarily reading the script as it was performed. This is, of course, always the case with such resources as we cannot be sure what exactly was spoken by the actors during each performance but, due to the participatory and light-hearted nature of this genre, it is even more likely to be the case here. Jill Sullivan reminds us that pantomime is, at heart, a “mutable” genre, designed to have lines changed each performance depending on audience response, updated topical references, ad-libbing and unwritten comic “business” (12). However the reproduction of such passages as they were meant to be spoken tells us a lot about the local social context in which the pantomimes were produced, as well as providing “a clearer indication of elements such as the *mise-en-scène* than is apparent from the scripts” (Sullivan 12). Equally our perception of the specifics of each production is in the hands of the

reviewer as each newspaper article was written “to promote particular aspects of the production or to realign public perception and expectation” and therefore highlighted particular references or aspects of the production with this in mind (Sullivan 13). However, as long as we bear this in mind, it is nevertheless fortunate for the modern researcher that such articles were written as the original scripts of these regional productions no longer exist and were not submitted for licensing.

In December 1850 the annual pantomime at the Theatre Royal had the decidedly more local-sounding title of *Harlequin and the Childe of Hale; or, the King of the Red Noses and the Liver Queen*. Based on the old Lancashire legend, the plot revolved around the “childe” who “is said to have been of most marvellous and gigantic proportions, and within twenty-four hours after his birth he grew to the height of nine feet three inches” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). By the mid-century, local legends were frequently used as inspiration for plots and the use of well-known Lancashire tales was not an idea unique to the Liverpool pantomime. For example, the 1872 production at the Queen’s Theatre in Manchester was entitled *Little Red Riding Hood and the Lancashire Witches; or, Harlequin Count Lothair, the Good Spirit Ariel, and the Demon Wolf of Baggart Hole Clough* and was located in the regional setting of Pendle Hill and the surrounding forest area (Sullivan 110). Indeed the legend of the Lancashire Witches of Pendle Hill is still one that is well-known and re-told in the county today. However the 1850 production at Liverpool’s Theatre Royal is particularly significant again for its local references and also for the individual characterisations and settings promoted on stage. As well as the Childe of Hale, the other main characters consist of “King Konkey” the well-named King of the Red Noses and the archetypal baddy of the pantomime, “Persepina” the Liver Queen and good Fairy character, and the unnamed “beauty of Speke Hall”³¹ who is the romantic interest of the Childe of Hale (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). During the course of the pantomime, the Childe and his love are turned into the Harlequin and Columbine respectively in the traditional transformation scene, whilst the King and “his mischievous sprite” turn into the Clown and

³¹ Speke Hall was constructed in the sixteenth century by the wealthy Norris family and was located seven miles from the centre of Liverpool. Today it is owned by the National Trust.

Pantaloon (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). The transformation scene and ensuing harlequinade was still the traditional conclusion of the mid-century provincial pantomime and normally consisted of all the principal characters magically transforming in to their original Commedia dell'Arte archetypes, along with a showcase of various tricks and illusions: "sudden transformations of palaces and temples to huts and cottages; or men and women into wheelbarrows and joint stools; or trees turned into houses; colonnades to beds of tulips; and mechanical shops into serpents and ostriches" (Johnson 156). Michael Booth notes that outside of London's West End, the traditions of the harlequinade lasted longer than in the metropolis as "the provinces [...] preserved a vigorous and often independent theatrical life of their own" (*Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre* 201). However by the mid-1850s the Clown and Harlequin were often separate, specialised performers engaged at the theatre expressly to perform in the harlequinade and the traditional link between the opening and harlequinade characters began to gradually disappear (Sullivan 41). This looks to have been the case in *The Childe of Hale* as the arrangement of the harlequinade was under the direction of Signor Bolono (possibly the clown Harry Boleno) who, together with three other performers, took over the transformation roles (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). However, whilst the transformation scenes relied on various theatrical tricks and illusions to entertain and amuse the audience, it was also common for the harlequinade to deliberately feature and promote civic or public buildings, local achievements and even purposeful urban street scenes: "The businesses illustrated provided an opportunity for advertising, the feature embracing the theatre in the commercial world of the urban environment" (Sullivan 42). As such, *The Childe of Hale* based its narrative in the rural setting of the Cheshire village of Hale, before changing to a viaduct and railway train to Liverpool and London – an obvious tribute to the growing railway network which linked the self-claimed second town of the kingdom to the metropolis.

The transformation scenes also introduced a range of new settings that would have been very familiar to local audiences. Local businesses, such as "Mr. Hobb's hat shop", were mixed with key local landmarks that articulated the town's expertise and pleasure in its architectural and

benevolent achievements; the impressive town centre Post Office, the Blind Asylum and the Sailor's Home all featured in the harlequinade (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). It seems very apt that Liverpool – a town in which culture had been intrinsically linked with commerce since the eighteenth century – embraced this artistic feature in its pantomimes. Interestingly, this pantomime ended with a brief but impressive-sounding return to the global outlook of town: "The pantomime concludes with a grand allegorical tableaux of all nations, representing Britannia attended by Peace [...] with the Fine Arts, Plenty, Agriculture, and Commerce; attended by the four quarters of the globe – Europe, Asia, Africa, and America" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). This striking image served to remind audiences that pride in local civic achievements and appearances was a direct result of its international prowess.

However despite the global references, the overwhelming emphasis from the newspaper reviews of the Theatre Royal's pantomimes during the early 1850s is on their local content and influence. An article in *The Liverpool Mercury* in January 1853 described the latest seasonal offering, entitled *Three Legs, King of Man; or, Harlequin Lord Stanlie and the Eagle and Child*. Although it is relatively brief, the key words used to relate the pantomime to the reader are "traditionary" [*sic*] and "local" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 4 Jan 1853). The article does not tell us much about the actual content of the pantomime, but once again this latest production appears to have used a local image and legend of *The Eagle and the Child*, of which the origins were under debate. The image of the eagle carrying the swaddled child appears on the crest of the coat of arms of the Stanley family (the Earls of Derby); one of the wealthiest titled families in the North West who owned the grand Knowsley Hall in the Liverpool suburbs and had previously governed the Isle of Man. The image purportedly comes from a romantic legend in which an ancestor of the Stanley family discovered a child in an eagle's nest³² ("The Romance of the Middle Ages"). Whilst the local references to one of

³² Further information and original materials pertaining to the legend of *The Eagle and the Child* can be found in the Bodleian Libraries (University of Oxford) or by visiting "The Romance of the Middle Ages" <http://medievalromance.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/The_eagle_and_child_and_the_Stanley_family>

the grandest Liverpool families are clearly evident, this production is particularly interesting as it appears to have been inspired by recent archaeological events within the town. The article tells us that there was a current debate about the accurate origins of the legend. It claims that John Roby's previously accepted version of the tale in his book, *Traditions of Lancashire*, is partially correct but the discovery of a decaying volume buried under the aviary at Knowsley Hall and deciphered by the Liverpool Archaeological Society details the original legend, showing how "Ye descendants of that Doughty Knight became Kings of Man" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 4 Jan 1853). The Theatre Royal's theatrical response to this local event seemed designed to stir up local interest and directly appeal to the educated members of the audience who would, no doubt, have been intrigued by this new discovery at Knowsley Hall. In this way, the theatre developed the accepted mixture of tradition and local significance to create a story and spectacle "written and invented expressly for this Theatre" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 4 Jan 1853). The emphasis on the exclusivity of their local productions promotes a sense of ownership and engagement with the town's audiences which allowed Liverpool to proudly compare its seasonal dramatic offering to the London pantomimes: "local talent, exercised in this branch of the drama, will bear successful comparison with that brought into requisition in the metropolis" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 27 Dec 1850). Liverpool, the newspaper reports suggest, was not only successful in keeping up with the capital in its theatrical output but believed itself to be superior in the deliberate exclusivity of its successful locally-inspired pantomimes.

Of course, it is again important to state that Liverpool was incorrect in this theatrical assertion of exclusivity and local self-referencing, despite the proud coverage of the local newspaper reports. It was common for provincial pantomimes to include references to local identity and landscape in the content and plot of the Christmas pantomime, although this was the first time that Liverpool had done so in such an extensive and deliberate manner. The inclusion and representation of local places, buildings and businesses had been standard practice in harlequinades since the early nineteenth-century and were practised at national and provincial theatres alike (Sullivan 108).

Neighbouring Manchester produced its first regular Christmas pantomime in December 1846, entitled *Gulliver; or, Dwarfs and Giants*. The playbill for the opening performance tells us that the transformation and harlequinade scenes included Deansgate (the Swan Inn), Oxford Street (the fishmonger, grocer's shop, bookmaker and tailor), Turnpike Gate and Tall House, and the Manchester Botanical Gardens (*Manchester Theatre Royal Playbills 1789-1848*). Liverpool's local scenic focus was therefore by no means unique in its approach. However the decision to repeatedly situate the plot, location and title of these mid-century pantomimes in the Liverpool landscape bolstered sentiments of local pride and the town's self-belief in its own exceptionality.

The exploits and discoveries of Liverpool's Archaeological Society appear to have been held in high esteem by the residents of the town and continued to provide distinctive and alternative subject matter for the latest Theatre Royal pantomimes. December 1854 saw the new production of *St. George and the Dragon; or, Harlequin and the Prophecy of the Spirit of the Mersey* which used the legend of Saint George, as described "in the book of the Seven Champions of Christendom, written in the reign of James the First" as its basic plot (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Dec 1854). Whilst the storyline to the pantomime appears to have loosely followed the traditional legend, with George rescuing the Princess Sabra from "the wrath and hunger of a fiery dragon" (*The Liverpool Mercury* 22 Dec 1854), it is the decision to use this as the story of the pantomime at this time that is particularly interesting. From the detailed description of the pantomime produced in *The Liverpool Mercury* we are aware that, whilst the stress is on the local references and Mersey-based focus, the production is set firmly in Egypt (traversing from an exotic forest and an enchanted cave to the Memphis palace of Ptolemy, King of Egypt) and seems comfortable mixing Eastern influences with local content. Although the pantomime maintains interest in the Eastern and the exotic through its setting and characterisations, the key emphasis emerging from the advertising literature surrounding the production is the relevance of the saint to Liverpool's own history. A description of the "Particulars of the Pantomime" in *The Liverpool Mercury* claimed that the decision to write and stage this

particular pantomime was due to the Archaeological Society's rather woolly appropriation of the figure of Saint George:

[The Archaeological Society], discovering that not only was a noble hall in Liverpool named after St. George, but there being mighty basins, terraces, hills, nay, even a nursery, bearing the name of the valiant knight, gave it their decided opinion that St. George must have originally been born in Lancashire, and most probably was the first Liverpool gentleman (22 Dec 1854).

This distinctly tenuous and vaguely amusing interpretation of Saint George's origins and relevance to Liverpool further demonstrates the determination of the theatre to produce pantomimes that played into topical areas of local interest and thus encouraged more ticket sales and enthusiasm for the latest production. Jill Sullivan notes that "an astute investment of time and money was crucial as the profit from the pantomime would contribute significantly to the realisation of a successful theatre season for the remainder of the year" (25). Ensuring maximum ticket sales was an important aspect of the pantomime as its success had an economic impact on the rest of the theatrical season. Drawing on recent local developments and topics of interest within the town therefore was guaranteed to draw audiences through the doors, whilst also providing a pertinent cultural boost to self-importance and local pride.

As the 1850s progressed, it became apparent that the Theatre Royal was aiming to produce pantomimes that celebrated Liverpool's local achievements and / or specific sources of civic pride. From local legends to the history of the one of the oldest families in the region, the productions offered a different witty and entertaining view of everyday Liverpool life within the parameters of the traditional pantomime format year by year. In December 1853 the latest pantomime at the theatre was announced, with an immediately recognisable literary title and unique twist. *The Butterfly Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast; or, Harlequin and the Genius of Spring* was based on William Roscoe's poem of the same name (1802) and took a slightly different approach to the usual conventions of the genre. Whilst the character types are immediately recognisable, they have been translated into animal form in keeping with the characters of Roscoe's poem. As such, the good fairy

figure is the “Genius of Spring” of the title, whilst the baddy character of the piece is “Belladonna, the Poison Witch”. Next to them are the Wasp (transformed later in to the Clown), Silverwings the Butterfly (Columbine), the Grasshopper (Harlequin) and the Spider (Pantaloon) (*The Liverpool Mercury* 23 Dec 1853). Equally the scenes did not portray local places of interest or significance but instead featured pastoral locations of natural beauty and idyllic rural environments. A description of the pantomime in *The Liverpool Mercury* described the first scene as taking place in “Nightshade Nook”, moving to “the butterfly’s garden by sunrise”, a “grassy knoll”, the butterfly’s kitchen and, finally, concluding with the banqueting scene in which a “large mushroom will form the table, covered with a water dock leaf for a table cloth” (23 Dec 1853). The romantic nature of the pantomime and its theatrical representation of Roscoe’s idyllic poetical landscape drew its audiences out of the busy, bustling port life and offered a whimsical and original production designed to honour Liverpool’s leading political and cultural figure. A review of the pantomime the following January noted that the production appealed “not only to the little folks, but children of a larger growth forget the grave concerns of life, and are enchanted with the fairy scenes which, for a while again, almost delude the senses”, whilst also observing that it is “rich in spectacle, the incidents are highly poetical, and the characters are sustained with an ability which the originals would no doubt feel honoured in acknowledging worthy of their companionship” (*The Liverpool Mercury* 3 Jan 1854). The language of this review articulates the challenge of the mid-Victorian pantomime to balance audience appeal (with traditional features, such as the transformation scene and harlequinade, and the latest technology of spectacle and effects) with economic security ensured by sustained audience numbers for a run of two to three months (Sullivan 27).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Liverpool’s Theatre Royal was in a comfortable position, both financially and artistically, as it found a way to balance and pay homage to its global and local concerns on stage. The locally-themed pantomimes became the staple of the theatrical year and demand increased year after year. The 1850 production of *Harlequin and the Childe of Hale* continued on until the end of February 1851 and was placed at the top of the playbill “in order

to give those living on the Cheshire side of the river an opportunity of witnessing it, as the boats ceased running between 10 and 11 o'clock" (Broadbent 165). In 1855 the locally-inspired pantomimes continued with the Theatre Royal's *Harlequin Steam; or, the Old Swan and the Knotty Ash*, whilst Liverpool's other theatres also began to imitate this successful trend. The Theatre Royal Adelphi (formerly the Queen's Theatre) produced *Cinderella: or, the Fairy of the Crystal Fountain* in 1854 which was "interspersed with hits, jokes, and jests of the past, the present, and to come, prophesying, typifying, and verifying old saws and modern instances; replete with fun, frolic and folly with all, at all, and among all having a Lancaster range from Liverpool to Sebastopol" (Broadbent 197). December 1855 saw the Royal Park Theatre advertise their seasonal offering of *Jack and the Beanstalk; or, the Spirit of the Mersey* in which the good fairy (Jack's Godmother) lives "in a beautiful dingle on the Mersey's bank", whilst Jack ends up as "one of the early mayors of Liverpool" and his son becomes the Childe of Hale, thus linking traditional and local legend in one pantomimic conclusion (*The Liverpool Mercury* 4 Jan 1856).

Although the pantomime genre was viewed by many nineteenth-century critics as "commercial, popular (vulgar) and inartistic" (Sullivan 5), its locally-driven plot, topical references and fervent sense of regional importance makes it the ideal genre with which to conclude our study of the Theatre Royal's engagement with Liverpool's complex and evolving civic identity. By the mid-nineteenth, century Liverpool's global and national importance reached new heights thanks to its international trading status and the 1850s marked the beginning of "a great maritime age, in which its port city character was forged" (Milne "Maritime Liverpool" 257). Liverpool's impressive maritime status had cemented its position as an important, individual trading port that offered reputation and glory for Britain as "one of a global network of major port cities" (Milne "Maritime Liverpool" 257). I believe that the mid-century stability of the Theatre Royal and its new-found confidence in producing regular, popular productions designed to heighten civic pride and self-importance offers us a firm indication of the end to Liverpool's conflicted sense of identity and the beginning of a new, great maritime era for the North West port.

Epilogue

In January 1857 a new publication entitled *The Liverpool Year Book for 1856* asserted that Liverpool was “now the most musical and theatrical town in Great Britain, after London” (52). The text compares Liverpool to its northern provincial neighbour Manchester, with “but two theatres and two concert rooms”, to support this bold statement (52). Despite the obvious bias and intent of this locally compiled and published text, this assertion typifies the fierce pride and desire for superiority prevalent within the town from the 1770s to the mid-nineteenth century. Whether Liverpool was, or was not, the most theatrical town outside London in 1857 is difficult to “prove” in any scientific way, but the fact that this text publicly declared it so tells us that the town was still eager to promote its cultural prosperity to the nation. Although this thesis ends its journey through Liverpool’s theatrical landscape at this point in time, it is worth touching briefly on the future fate of the Theatre Royal in order to ascertain whether it tells us anything further about the nineteenth-century cultural and civic identity of the town (soon to become a city).

By the late 1850s the theatre’s management once again began to change hands with increasing regularity and 1860 saw the Theatre Royal face substantial criticism in relation to its performance standards and managerial decisions. Despite *The Liverpool Year Book’s* boastful assertion that Liverpool’s theatrical landscape had never looked better, other critics tell a different story. One article in *The Sunday Times* described theatrical business in Liverpool as “dull”, “indifferent” and “not [...] overwhelming” and also notes that the Theatre Royal and Amphitheatre were now forced to share a pantomime across the two venues (30 Mar 1856, 3). Broadbent cites an article in the newly established Liverpool journal, *The Porcupine*, which is rather forcefully entitled “Reform Your Theatres”. The original article claimed that Liverpool’s four theatres and circus are “a disgrace to us, and totally unsuitable for the purposes for which they are used” (*The Porcupine* 1 Nov 1860). The writer of the piece refers explicitly to the Theatre Royal and Royal Amphitheatre at this point and, somewhat ironically for a port that had always emphasised its global outlook over any

domestic ties, condemns the theatrical standards in the town when compared to those in the thriving international centres of Paris, Brussels, Berlin, New York and Melbourne (*The Porcupine* 1 Nov 1860). This assertion is supported by a damning description of the physical condition of the two theatres:

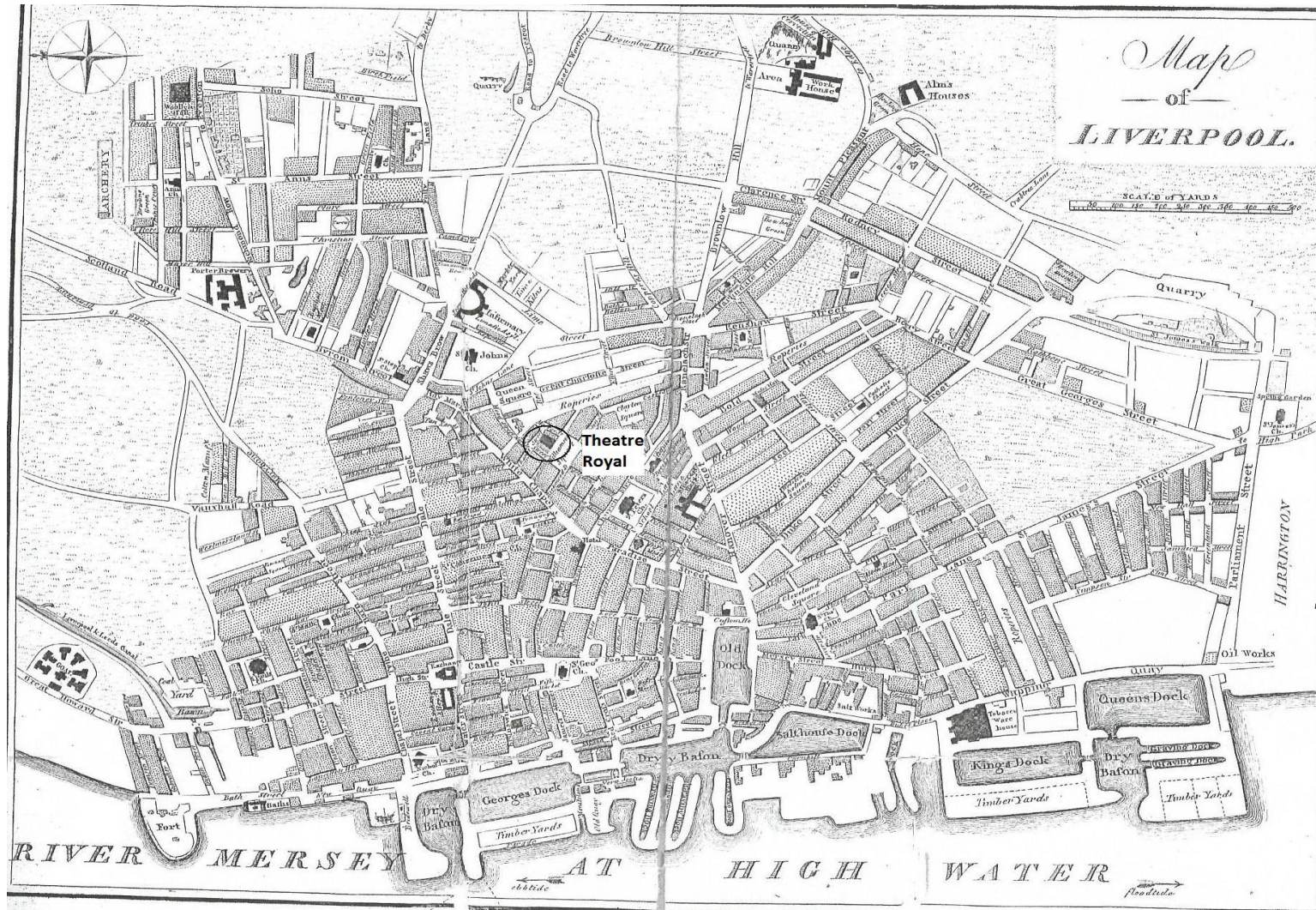
Every sense is offended as the visitor approaches them. The stench from market refuse and close, dank, reeking streets are even dangerous to health, while the sight and sounds are so offensive that hundreds of ladies are denied the pleasures of theatrical entertainments in consequence of the certainty of having their eyes and ears polluted in a manner which will be well understood by mere allusion [...] What can be shabbier, meaner, or more unsuitable to our two principal theatres? (*The Porcupine* 1 Nov 1860).

This distinctly negative review indicates that the Liverpool Theatre Royal was struggling once again and its cultural supremacy in the flourishing port seems distinctly compromised. It could not compete with the grandeur and architectural elegance of St. George's Hall (opened 1852) and the William Brown Library (opened 1860), seeming tired and shabby in comparison. The Theatre Royal decided to renew its royal patent in August 1859 but it had been allowed to lapse since 1849, indicating that following the changes in theatrical law a patent was no longer necessary or desirable. In his review of Liverpool theatre, Harold Ackroyd notes that the theatre came under stiff competition from the opening of the neighbouring Star Music Hall and Alexandra Theatre in 1866 and eventually closed its doors to re-open under the direction of Harry de Frece as the Theatre Royal Palace of Varieties in 1871 (19). In 1880 the royal patent expired for the final time and the theatre was used as a circus venue until it was purchased by the Liverpool Corporation and used for cold storage in 1890 (Ackroyd 19).

Ackroyd believes that the decision not to renew the patent "marked the end of the Royal's once powerful influence in the presentation of drama in the year when Liverpool became a city" (19). Whilst it is true that the Theatre Royal was no longer vital as an emblem of cultural prestige once Liverpool had achieved city status, it seems clear that the theatre's cultural influence and

position within the port had altered and slowly declined for several years previous to this decision. Whilst the city's maritime industries flourished as Liverpool revelled in the security and success of its global identity and national reputation as a solid, valuable port, the Theatre Royal was no longer needed as a cultural medium through which to express its insecurities or, equally, to highlight its own achievements. The commercial and cultural outlook of the port had evolved and, in turn, the theatre lost its dramatic significance. However, of course, to fully understand the cultural identity of Liverpool during the last phase of the Theatre Royal's existence requires a further examination and contextualisation of the condition of the global port in the late nineteenth century.

This thesis provides the first analytical study of Liverpool's theatrical history from 1772 to 1855 and I hope that future research will follow its suggestions. I believe that its predominantly chronological analysis of Liverpool's complex and continuously evolving cultural identity provides fascinating opportunities for sustained research. I hope that by focusing on the unique position of the Theatre Royal within the town as a medium through which to explore Liverpool's multifaceted character, I have offered a new, significant contribution to theatrical research. A cultural and theatrical study of this key port in its prime is vital if we are to build a more complete national picture of British theatre in the nineteenth century.



Appendix 1 1797 Map of Liverpool

Appendix 2 Calendar of Performances at the
Theatre Royal Liverpool, 1773-4

1773

Company: Messrs. Mattocks, Quick, Thompson, Wild,
Holtom, Baker, Kniveton, Palmer
Mesdames. Mattocks, Baker, Barrington, Hopkins
Misses. Day (Dayes), Besford

Days of Playing: Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat

04-Jun	The Beggars Opera The Contrivances	02-Aug	King Henry V; or, the Conquest of France The Coronation with the Ceremony of The Champion in Westminster Hall
11-Jun	Love in a Village Catharine & Petruccio	04-Aug	The Clandestine Marriage
18-Jun	The Rival Queens; or the Death of Alexander the Great The Intriguing Chambermaid	06-Aug	Elfrida The Reprisal; or, The Tars of Old England
25-Jun	The Rival Queens; or the Death of Alexander the Great The Englishman in Paris	07-Aug	She Stoops to Conquer The Englishman in Paris
02-Jul	The Merchant of Venice Cross Purposes	09-Aug	All for Love; or, The World Well Lost
09-Jul	King Lear The Country Wife	11-Aug	The Chances
10-Jul	The Merchant of Venice Comus	13-Aug	Romeo & Juliet Cross Purposes
16-Jul	King Richard III The Coronation with the Ceremony of the Champion in Westminster Hall	16-Aug	Lionel & Clarissa
23-Jul	The Jealous Wife The Commissary	18-Aug	The Inconstant; or, The Way to Win Him
24-Jul	The Maid in the Mill	20-Aug	A Bold Stroke for a Wife The Citizen
26-Jul	King Henry V; or, the Conquest of France The Coronation with the Ceremony of the Champion in Westminster Hall	21-Aug	King Henry V; or, the Conquest of France The Coronation with the Ceremony of The Champion in Westminster Hall
28-Jul	Elfrida	23-Aug	Timanthes
30-Jul	The Fop's Fortune Comus	24-Aug	The Brothers
31-Jul	The Albion Queens; of the Death of Mary Queen of Scots	27-Aug	The Jovial Crew; or, The Merry Beggars The Devil to Pay
		28-Aug	The Albion Queens; or the Death of Mary Queen Of Scots The Coronation and the Ceremony of

	The Champion in Westminster Hall		
30-Aug	The Mourning Bride	18-Jun	The West Indian High Life Below Stairs
01-Sep	Timanthes	20-Jun	King Henry II; or, the Fall of Rosamund The Country Madcap
03-Sep	Rule a Wife and Have a Wife Comus	24-Jun	The Fair Quaker; or, The Humours of the Navy The Anatomist
04-Sep	The Rival Queens; of the Death of Alexander the Great The Apprentice	25-Jun	Hamlet
06-Sep	The Countess of Salisbury	01-Jul	The Fair Quaker; or, The Humours of the Navy The Padlock
08-Sep	Love for Love; with the Humours of Ben The Sailor	02-Jul	The School for Wives
10-Sep	The Siege of Damascus Midas	08-Jul	All for Love; or, The World Well Lost The Irish Widow
11-Sep	King Lear The Coronation with the Ceremony of the Champion in Westminster Hall	09-Jul	The Committee; or, The Faithful Irishman
13-Sep	The Foundling	11-Jul	The School For Wives
		15-Jul	The Man of Business The Irish Widow
1774		16-Jul	Othello The Royal Chase; or, Harlequin Skeleton
Company:	Messrs. Mattocks, Wroughton, Younger, Thompson, Wild, Quick, Kniveton, Hollingsworth, Barnshaw Mrs. Mattocks, Hopkins Miss. Pearce, Hopkins	22-Jul	Romeo & Juliet The Note of Hand; or, a Trip to Newmarket
Days of Playing:	Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat	23-Jul	The School for Wives The Royal Chase; or, Harlequin Skeleton
30-May	Tancred & Sigismunda The Contrivances	25-Jul	A New Way to Pay Old Debts
3-Jun	Love Makes a Man; or, The Fop's Fortune Lethe; or, Aesop in the Shades	29-Jul	The Fashionable Lover The Note of Hand; or, a Trip to Newmarket
10-Jun	The Stratagem The Upholsterer	30-Jul	A New Way to Pay Old Debts
11-Jun	Love in a Village The Citizen	05-Aug	The School for Wives The Padlock
13-Jun	The Merry Wives of Windsor Miss in Her Teens; or, The Medley of Lovers	06-Aug	The Fair Quaker; or, The Humours of the Navy The Pantomime of Harlequin Skeleton
17-Jun	Cymbeline Cross Purposes	12-Aug	The Drummer; or, The Haunted House

	The Padlock
13-Aug	The Provok'd Husband; or, A Journey to London
17-Aug	Douglas
19-Aug	The Spanish Friar; or, the Double Discover Thomas and Sally; or, the Sailor's Return
20-Aug	The School for Wives
22-Aug	Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion
24-Aug	The Country Lasses; or, The Custom of the Manor
26-Aug	She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not; or, The Kind Imposter The Musical Lady
29-Aug	The Roman Father
31-Aug	The Funeral
02-Sep	As You Like It Neck or Nothing
03-Sep	The Fair Quaker; or, The Humour of the Navy Representation of the Grand Naval Review The Royal Chase; or, Harlequin Skeleton
05-Sep	The Conscious Lovers
07-Sep	The Isabella; or, The Fatal Marriage
09-Sep	The Royal Convert The Man of Quality
10-Sep	The Fair Quaker; or, The Humour of the Navy The Royal Chase; or, Harlequin Skeleton
12-Sep	All in the Wrong

Appendix 3

Maritime Afterpieces at Theatre Royal 1783-4

1783

14-Jun	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
16-Jun	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
21-Jun	The Reprisal; or, Tars of Old England
26-Jun	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
30-Jun	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
19-Jul	The Choice of Harlequin; or, The Indian Chief
28-Jul	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
02-Aug	The Choice of Harlequin; or, The Indian Chief
09-Aug	The Choice of Harlequin; or, The Indian Chief
11-Aug	A Medley; or, The Sailor's Return to Liverpool
13-Aug	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
15-Aug	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
18-Aug	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
22-Aug	Buxom Joan; or, The Sailor's Return
27-Aug	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
03-Sep	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
06-Sep	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars

**Season opened on 7 June and finished on 18 September.*

1784

09-Jun	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
14-Jun	Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday
26-Jun	The Reprisal; or, Tars of Old England
30-Jun	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
09-Jul	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
12-Jul	Yeo! Yea!; or, The Friendly Tars
	The Reprisal; or, Tars of Old England
25-Aug	The Waterman; or, The First of August
01-Sep	The Sultan; or, A Peep into the Seraglio
06-Sep	Tony Lumpkin's Adventures in a Trip to Liverpool
13-Oct	The Flich of Bacon
15-Oct	The Grand Naval Review Before His Majesty at Spithead
20-Oct	The Grand Naval Review Before His Majesty at Spithead
28-Oct	The Waterman; or, The First of August
17-Nov	The Flich of Bacon
29-Nov	The Dutchman Trick'd; or, Harlequin's Return from Guinea
01-Dec	The Grand Naval Review Before His Majesty at Spithead
13-Dec	The Elopement; or, The Liverpool Welcome
17-Dec	The Waterman; or, The First of August

**Season opened on 9 June and finished around 20 December (uncertainty as to exact date).*

Appendix 4 A Rough Guide to the Managers of Theatre Royal 1772-1855

The table below gives a rough idea of the management changes at Liverpool's Theatre Royal from 1772 to 1855. However I use the word approximate advisedly as it is dependent on playbills and editorial notices listed in the local newspapers, as well as the often inaccurate findings of R.J. Broadbent in his work, *Annals of the Liverpool Stage*. It is not always easy to follow when and to who the management of the theatre changed hands and this table thus acknowledges missing information and uncertainties.

For clarity, I have also focused on management during the main theatrical seasons and have not included temporary circus and concert managements during the winter months

- 1772 Joseph Younger & George Mattocks
(Younger d.1784; Mattocks sole lessee)
- 1787 Francis Aickin
- 1789 Francis Aickin & John Philip Kemble
- 1792 Francis Aickin
- 1802 William Thomas Lewis & Thomas Knight
(Lewis d.1811; Knight sole lessee)
- 1817 Thomas Knight, Thomas Denison Lewis & John Banks
(Knight d. circa 1820)
- 1841[?] Robert Clarke
- 1842 J.H. Anderson & W.J. Hammond
- 1843 Benjamin Webster & Madame Celeste
- 1845 Mercer H. Simpson
- 1847 Henry Coleman
- 1851 W.R. Copeland
(Simultaneously managing the Amphitheatre)

Appendix 5

Calendar of Performances at Theatre Royal 1793-5

1793

Days of Playing: Mon, Wed, Thurs & Fri

17-Jun	Love in a Village Rosina		The Sons of Anacreon The Village Lawyer		05-Aug	Inkle and Yarico Comus
24-Jun	Robin Hood The Quaker	24-Jul	Everyone Has His Fault The Pad The Irishman in London		07-Aug	Douglas The Midnight Hour
26-Jun	The Road to Ruin Flich of Bacon	26-Jul	Wild Oats; or, The Strolling Gentleman All in Good Humour The Farm House		08-Aug	Columbus; or, a World Discovered A Westerly Wind; or, All Safe in Port Modern Antiques; or, The Merry Mourners
01-Jul	The Castle of Andalusia Sailor's Festival; or, All Alive at Plymouth The Son-in-Law	29-Jul	Columbus; or, a World Discovered That's Your Sort; or, Goldfinch in His Element The Agreeable Surprise		09-Aug	Romeo and Juliet The Genius of Liverpool
08-Jul	Hamlet The Prize	31-Jul	How To Grow Rich The Farmer		12-Aug	Everyone Has His Fault That's Your Sort; or, Goldfinch in His Element Ways and Means The Relief of Williamstadt; or, The Return From Victory
15-Jul	Richard III The Deserter	01-Aug	Everyone Has His Fault Village Lawyer		14-Aug	A Trip to Scarbro' The Sailors Return to Liverpool All in Good Humour The Sultan
17-Jul	Everyone Has His Fault Three Weeks After Marriage	02-Aug	The Rivals The Festive Board Hartford Bridge; or, The Skirts of Camp		15-Aug	How to Grow Rich
18-Jul	The Battle of Hexham; or, Days of Old Catharine and Petruccio					
22-Jul	Venice Preserv'd					

	The Surrender of Valenciennes The Pannel	04-Sep	The Brothers Barnaby Brittle; or, A Wife at Her Wits End Warlike Preparations; or, A Glorious Victory Over the French	1794 Days of Playing: Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat	
19-Aug	The Road to Ruin That's Your Sort; or, Goldfinch in His Element Peeping Tom of Coventry				23-Jun Effusions of Loyalty; or, The Glorious First of June The Road to Ruin Spoil'd Child
		05-Sep	George Barnwell; or, The London Merchant The Prize		
21-Aug	Alexander the Great; or, The Rival Queens True Blue; or, The Press Gang The Poor Mariner The Devil to Pay	09-Sep	Hamlet The Banditto; or, Maternal Love Edgar and Emmeline; or, The Disguised Lovers		30-Jun Fair Penitent The Deaf Lover
		11-Sep	Everyone Has His Fault Three Weeks After Marriage		07-Jul Effusions of Loyalty; or, The Glorious First of June George Barnwell; or, The London Merchant The Tars of Old England; or, The Reprisals
22-Aug	Such Things Are Barnaby Brittle; or, A Wife at Her Wits End Robinson Crusoe				21-Jul The Castle of Andalusia Three Weeks After Marriage
		16-Sep	George Barnwell; or, The London Merchant Poor Mariner The Devil to Pay		28-Jul Fontainville Forest The Deserter
23-Aug	The School For Arrogance That's Your Sort; or, Goldfinch in His Element Thomas and Sally; or, The Sailor's Return	18-Sep	The Clandestine Marriage The Waterman; or, The First of August		30-Jul Lionel and Clarissa The Midnight Hour
26-Aug	All in the Wrong The Shipwreck; or, French Ingratitude	23-Sep	The Man of the World The Padlock		04-Aug A Bold Stroke For a Wife The Prize; or, 2, 5, 3. 8
28-Aug	Jane Shore Modern Antiques	25-Sep	School For Scandal The Critic; or, A Tragedy Rehearsed		11-Aug The Jew The Children in the Wood
30-Aug	Wild Oats Peeping Tom of Coventry	27-Sep	King Henry the Fourth Love A-La-Mode		18-Aug The Box Lobby Challenge The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar Peeping Tom of Coventry
02-Sep	Douglas The Mariners; or, The Female Sailor The Banditto; or, Maternal Love				20-Aug Fontainville Forest

22-Aug	The World in a Village The Sicilian Romance; or, The Ghost of the Mountain		Siege of Belgrade; or, The Turkish Overthrow Robin and Margareta; or, The Continuation of No Song, No Supper	1795 Days of Playing: Mon, Wed, Thurs & Fri
25-Aug	Fontainville Forest Barnaby Brittle; or, A Wife at Her Wit's End The Death of General Wolfe	29-Sep	The Deaf Lover My Grandmother	29-Jun The Earl of Essex; or, The Unhappy Favourite Crotchett Ladde
27-Aug	Such Things Are Effusions of Loyalty; or, The Glorious First of June The Pannel	01-Oct	The Prize; or, 2, 5, 3, 8 Better Late Than Never Next Door Neighbours	06-Jul The Wheel of Fortune Crotchett Ladde
01-Sep	The Way to Keep Him British Gratitude and Hibernian Friendship; or, An Escape from France Sprigs of Laurel Harlequin Dr. Faustus	03-Oct	Love's Frailties The Children in the Wood The Liverpool Prize; or, An Offering to Britannia	13-Jul The Deserted Daughter Barnaby Brittle; or, A Wife AT Her Wit's End
03-Sep	Columbus High Life Below Stairs William Tell	08-Oct	The Earl of Warwick Auld Robin Grey	20-Jul The Deserted Daughter The Midnight Hour
05-Sep	The Comedy of Errors Animal Magnetism Britain's Glory; or, A Trip to Portsmouth			27-Jul England Preserv'd The Midnight Hour
08-Sep	Inkle and Yarico No Song, No Supper			03-Aug England Preserv'd Follies of a Day Robinson Crusoe
15-Sep	The Jew Comus			10-Aug England Preserv'd Crotchett Ladde
22-Sep	Richard Coeur de Lion Next Door Neighbours			17-Aug The Town Before You Animal Magnetism The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar
				19-Aug The Deserted Daughter The Pannel The Death of Harlequin

20-Aug	Zarinski Lovers Quarrels; or, Like Master Like Man The Shipwreck, or, French Ingratitude	14-Sep	Lionel and Clarissa The Deserter
24-Aug	Mysteries of the Castle The Camp; or, Martial Glory The Sailor's Lamentation; or, The Death of Captain Faulkner	21-Sep	Inkle and Yarico The Doctor and Apothecary No Song, No Supper
26-Aug	Life's Vagaries Modern Antiques Death of Harlequin	28-Sep	As You Like It The Agreeable Surprise
31-Aug	Hamlet The Adopted Child; or, The British Tar The Elopement; or, Harlequin's Holiday	05-Oct	Isabella; or, The Fatal Marriage The Rival Queens; or, Alexander the Great
02-Sep	The Bank Note; or, A Lesson For the Ladies The Poor Sailor; or, Little Bob and Little Ben The Shipwreck, or, French Ingratitude A Grand Encampment	08-Oct	The Mayor of Garrat
04-Sep	The Mountaineers The Follies of a Day The Death of General Wolfe	09-Oct	Inkle and Yarico The Pannel
07-Sep	Measure for Measure The Poor Sailor; or, Little Bob and Little Ben The Shipwreck, or, French Ingratitude The Grand Encampment		
10-Sep	The Siege of Belgrade The Secret Tribunal Cymon		

Appendix 6 Section of Davies's Map of Liverpool circa 1855



Appendix 7

Productions in Liverpool
1830

1830	Theatre Royal	The Liver Theatre	Sans Pareil	Liverpool Amphitheatre
08-Jan			One Thousand Crowns; or, The Fete of La Rosiere Yes!	Assaniello; or, The Fisherman of Naples Death of Nelson Punch, Physic and Fun The Attack of the Diligence
11-Jan	Sweethearts and Wives The Happiest Day of My Life		The Wildman; or, The Adventures of Don Quixote	
12-Jan	She Stoops to Conquer Snakes in the Grass		The Wildman; or, The Adventures of Don Quixote	
13-Jan	Paul Pry The Illustrious Stranger		The Wildman; or, The Adventures of Don Quixote	
15-Jan	Rob Roy Snakes in the Grass		The Wildman; or, The Adventures of Don Quixote Cherry Bounce; or, The Farmer's Dose	The Spirit of the Waters Panoramic Naval Tableau of the Death of Nelson Sadi of Baghdad, Or Want and Superfluity
16-Jan	Paul Pry XYZ The Happiest Day of My Life		The Wildman; or, The Adventures of Don Quixote Cherry Bounce; or, The Farmer's Dose	The Spirit of the Waters Panoramic Naval Tableau of the Death of Nelson Sadi of Baghdad, Or Want and Superfluity
22-Jan		The Valet de Place; or, Englishmen in Paris Presumptive Evidence; or, The Fatal Prophecy Bachelor's Torments	Dumb Girl! Or, The Mountain Devil The Mad Politician	The Spirit of the Waters The Siamese Youths' Archetype
29-Jan			The Flying Dutchman; or, The Spectral Ship	The Cataract of the Ganges James of Scotland

			The Statue; or, Music and Marble	
05-Feb	The Home Circuit; or, London Gleanings Before Breakfast		Wallace the Hero of Scotland Wives By Advertisement	Sally in Our Alley The Devil's Ship; or, The Money Diggers and the Pirate of a Charmed Life
12-Feb	The Home Circuit; or, London Gleanings Before Breakfast	Luke the Labourer The Recruits; or, Who'll Serve the King? The Floating Beacon; or, The Norwegian Wreckers	Juan Fernandez; or, The Shipwrecked Tar and his Faithful Monkey Uncle Too Many	Forty Horses The Egyptian Pyramids
16-Feb	The Spring Meeting Laughs at Bailiffs		Bameylde Moore Carew; or, The Gypsy of the Glen	
19-Feb	The Spring Meeting Love Laughs at Bailiffs	Thirty Years of a Gamblers Life! 56 Ranelagh Street, Liverpool The Pilot; or, A Storm at Sea	Descart The French Buccaneer Monsieur Pirouette; or, Le Contre Danse	The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire Fiend
26-Feb			Perplexities of a Wedding Day The Floating Beacon; or, The Norwegian Wreckers Demon of the Desert	The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire Fiend Jack in the Box; or, Harlequin and the Princess of the Hidden Island
02-Mar	The Follies of Fashion A Dead Shot The Blind Girl			The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire Fiend
06-Mar		A Dead Shot A Sailor's Hornpipe The North Pole; or, The Frozen Regions The Law of Bramah; or, Buried Alive	Silver Mask! or, the Desperado of the Cavern How to Win a Husband; or, My Country Cousin	The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire Fiend Jack in the Box; or, Harlequin and the Princess of the Hidden Island The Guerrilla Chief and his Daughter
12-Mar			Net Maker; or, the Sultan's Son Laws and Lions	
15-Mar				St George and the Dragon The Royal Elephant of Siam and the Fire

			Fiend The Bold Dragons
19-Mar	The Dumb Orphan; or, the Torrent of the Valley Black Eyed Susan		
22-Mar		Wraith of the Lake; or, the Brownie of the Brig Black Eyed Sukey; or, All in the Dumps	
26-Mar		St George and the Dragon	Falls of Niagara Banditti of the Steel Castle
29-Mar		Forest Oracle Marriage of Grildrig; or, Harlequin in Lilliput	St George and the Dragon Banditti of the Steel Castle Black Knight and His War Horse

 *Venue closed / missing playbills*

Appendix 7 contd.

1838 Theatre Royal

08-Jun	School for Scandal Naval Engagements	24-Aug	Wives As They Were and Maids as They Are The Stranger
15-Jun	The Bengal Tiger My Young Wife & My Old Umbrella		Jane Shore The Miller and His Men
22-Jun	Lady and the Devil The Child of the Wreck The Blue Devils St. Mary's Eve	31-Aug	The Poor Gentleman Englishman in India
29-Jun	T'was I A Mother's Love The Child of the Wreck		
06-Jul	The Indian Girl Open House The French Spy		
13-Jul	Lady of Lyons Rural Felicity		
20-Jul	P.P., or, The Man With the Tiger Il Barbiere di Siviglia		
27-Jul	Amilie The Miller and His Men Naval Engagements		
03-Aug	La Sonnambula Love in a Village Englishman in India		
10-Aug	Henry IV Three Weeks After Marriage Harlequin in Sicily		
17-Aug	The Hunchback Three Weeks After Marriage The Liar		

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