

Henry Lloyd's Rhapsody and the Crisis of 1779

Supervisor: Dr. David Zimmerman

by


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B.A., University of Victoria, 1998


A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of


MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard


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or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisor: Dr. David Zimmerman. The sad fact was that Great Britain in late 1779 was neither effectively mobilized nor guided; one must view the suppression of Lloyd's Rhapsody as just another symptom of the country's unpreparedness for war, and the misjudgments of the government which had reduced the country to such a sorry state.


Abstract

The Rhapsody of Henry Lloyd, written in 1779, was composed at a time of extreme military and political crisis in Britain, when the government of Lord North seemed on the verge of collapse and the country as a whole faced invasion. Written in direct response to this atmosphere of danger, and intended to diagnose the particular military and political ills which afflicted Britain, the Rhapsody provoked a dramatic government response: Lloyd was convinced to abort publication, and to destroy whatever copies had already been produced.


This thesis will consider Lloyd's Rhapsody in its historical context, examining the main themes which dominate the work, and how the relationship between circumstances and content made the Rhapsody so dangerous a prospect to the British government of the day. Relying on published collections of contemporary correspondence as well as more recent secondary studies, this thesis will consider the life and character of Henry Lloyd himself, whose story is inseparable from that of his Rhapsody; the dominant features of Britain's military predicament in 1779; and the character of political events to which the Rhapsody was ultimately to fall prey. In addition, an examination of previously unpublished letters preserved in the British Public Record Office has made it possible to trace Lloyd's movements during the momentous summer when the Rhapsody was conceived, as well as the exchanges between Lloyd and the British commander-in-chief Lord Amherst which determined the Rhapsody's fate. As such, this thesis will be the first study to chronicle in detail the process which led to the suppression of the original

Rhapsody in the last weeks of 1779. The sad fact was that Great Britain in late 1779 was neither effectively mobilized nor guided; one must view the suppression of Lloyd's Rhapsody as just another symptom of the country's unpreparedness for war, and the misjudgments of the government which had reduced the country to such a sorry state.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Dr. David Zimmerman, for encouraging me to pursue graduate studies when I was still an undergraduate, for pointing me in Henry Lloyd's direction when I was in search of a research topic, and for his continuing assistance and suggestions over the years that have followed. I would be remiss if I did not also thank Jeanne, Richard, and Sharron Wing for being such wonderful hosts during my stay in England. However, I reserve my most profound thanks for my parents, Keith and Serafina Lowe, without whose patience and support this thesis would never have been written.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Joan Alfreda Nourse, who passed away December 3, 2001.

The author of the above quotation is unknown. Unfortunately for history, and for reasons no longer recoverable, he chose to leave his elegant inscription unsigned. Yet this mysterious, tantalizing paragraph is a thoroughly fitting preface to the little book in which it was scribbled some two centuries ago: A Rhapsody on the Present System of French Politics, of the Projected Invasion and the Means to Defeat It, written by Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd in the year 1779.

Few men in the eighteenth-century lived a life as varied and unpredictable as that of Henry Lloyd. Writer, rebel, soldier, military theorist and philosopher, bold critic of Frederick the Great, apparently even a spy, Lloyd was a quintessential maverick who began life as the son of a clergyman and somehow ended up as a major-general in the army of the Tsar. Born in a tiny village in northwestern Wales sometime around 1720, his ever-restless spirit would carry him from one end of Europe to the other, to France, Portugal, Italy, Russia, the Balkans, and most of the major states of Germany. During the infrequent periods when he was not on the move or on the run, Henry Lloyd assumed the role of author, producing the serious works of literature which would prove his most enduring legacy. Yet even in these writings, he was somehow incapable of escaping controversy altogether. Indeed, "controversial" is perhaps the most innocuous label one

Introduction

This tract is very scarce. It was printed at the Time when an Invasion was daily expected, but it was never published, for the Author having been advised to communicate it to Government, almost at the moment it was ready to appear, the Ministry thought it might convey to the Enemy so much Information, that it would be better to suppress it, & accordingly a Sum of Money was given to prevent its publication: all the Copies were to be destroyed, & it is certain that very few were preserved. This was put into my hands at the time it was sent to the first Minister & to the then Commander in Chief Lord Amherst.

The author of the above quotation is unknown. Unfortunately for history, and for reasons no longer recoverable, he chose to leave his elegant inscription unsigned. Yet this mysterious, tantalizing paragraph is a thoroughly fitting preface to the little book in which it was scribbled some two centuries ago: A Rhapsody on the Present System of French Politics, of the Projected Invasion and the Means to Defeat It, written by Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd in the year 1779.

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might apply to his Rhapsody.

The Rhapsody would have a long and storied life on the bookshelves of Britons during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. The original 1779 edition, published in London by William Faden, was followed by a second, slightly revised edition (T. and J. Egerton, 1790) which included a new introduction and a short account of Lloyd's life by his old compatriot John Drummond. This version was reissued again, essentially unchanged, by the London publisher J. Debrett in 1792, in 1794, 1795, and 1798. If the Rhapsody achieved considerable renown in Great Britain, it was destined to make a similarly great impact on minds in continental Europe, where it would be published in French, German, and Italian editions at the turn of the century.¹

Nevertheless, no subsequent edition would manage to achieve the somewhat infamous distinction of the 1779 English original. Composed at a time of extreme military and political crisis in Britain, when the government of Lord North seemed on the verge of collapse and the country seemed almost naked in the face of a threatened French invasion, the Rhapsody would provoke a government response which was, at least by British standards, unusually extreme. Lloyd was convinced to destroy virtually every copy before public distribution could take place. As a result, and as the anonymous author of the quote which opens this thesis suggested, the original Rhapsody became an extremely rare book. Only eight copies are known to have survived to the present day, of which two are stored at the British Library; and by some happy quirk of historiographical fate, one copy would ultimately fall into the possession of the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, Canada. It is this special book, enlivened by the inscription which was quoted at the beginning of this introduction, which provided the inspiration for the following thesis and upon which many of its judgments ultimately rest.

The story of the suppression of Henry Lloyd's Rhapsody in 1779 is an extraordinary example of how any nation, even one with so strenuously asserted a belief in individual liberty and freedom of speech as eighteenth-century Great Britain, can cast its ideals to the winds if faced with a sufficiently threatening storm. The story is, indeed, inseparable from the political and military circumstances of 1779, without which the Rhapsody would never have been written, but to which it was also ultimately to fall prey. Nor, indeed, is it possible to understand the fate of the original Rhapsody without understanding the extraordinary travels and compelling personality of the man whose creation it was.

To place the fate of the original Rhapsody in its historical context will be the focus of this thesis. It will begin by providing a more detailed account, insofar as the surviving literary and archival evidence allows, of Lloyd's conduct during the season of crisis from which the Rhapsody emerged, and of the process which ultimately determined the Rhapsody's fate. The next task will be to consider the life and character of Henry Lloyd himself. With the nature of Lloyd's background established, the thesis will proceed to an examination of the twin crises, military and political, with which Britain was grappling during the year of the Rhapsody. And finally, using the text of the Rhapsody itself as both a framework for analysis and a guiding thread for argument, the thesis will undertake a broader consideration of the themes which dominate the work; the sort of information deployed by Lloyd to support these themes; and the extent to which these themes and information reflect both the man and the circumstances from which they emerged. The overriding goal is to show how this relationship, between content and circumstances, made the Rhapsody so dangerous a prospect to the British government of the day.

It is one of the many ironies of Henry Lloyd's character that, even though he was a prolific writer, apparently never hesitating to hold forth on the most grandiose military and political controversies of his era, his own existence should remain in too many respects clouded in mystery. He is as elusive in history as he was in life. There are no "Lloyd Papers"; there are precious few references to Lloyd in surviving archival collections of British government correspondence from the eighteenth-century; with a few notable exceptions to be mentioned presently, he seems to have been largely forgotten by modern historians. To search the major journal indices for his name is to set oneself up for disappointment and no small amount of surprise at the meagerness of the result. Particularly in the English language, the muse of history has not been noticeably kind to Henry Lloyd.

The starting point for any investigation into Lloyd's life must be his own various military memoirs. In particular, his History of the Late War in Germany between the King of Prussia and the Empress of Germany and her Allies, first published in 1766, and its 1781 sequel, Continuation of the History of the Late War in Germany between the King of Prussia and the Empress of Germany and her Allies, provide an unequalled first-person account of Lloyd's movements and activities during the Seven Years War, and equally important passing glimpses into other notable periods of his life, such as his service in the Russo-Turkish campaign of 1774.² It would be dangerous, of course, to take the accuracy of such memoirs for granted, and Lloyd was never a man to underestimate his own impact on the events which he described. It is also worth noting that the purpose of these two works was not simply to chronicle Lloyd's life, but also to advance his personal philosophy of war and society, and his interpretation of the key figures he encountered; arguably the enduring popularity of the two volumes, which were

translated and repeatedly reissued across Europe, owed far more to his trenchant opinions of Frederick the Great than to any interest in Lloyd's own life.

Fortunately, Lloyd's fame after his death became such that editors of posthumous editions of his various writings thought it worthwhile to preface these publications with biographical remarks. Arguably the most important of such biographies was also the earliest, or at least the earliest to be written in the English language: entitled "Mr. Drummond's Letter to the Editor", this formed the preface to the 1790 edition of the Rhapsody.³ John Drummond, the son of a staunchly pro-Stuart Scottish noble family, was one of the closest friends of Lloyd's youth, and though his account is sadly very short, it provides an excellent overview of Lloyd's Jacobite connections between 1744 and 1748. Equally important, Drummond's few sentences about Lloyd's activities during the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War serve to corroborate the basic outlines of what Lloyd himself wrote in the aforementioned memoirs. Unfortunately, as Drummond himself admitted, his path and that of Lloyd diverged in the final two decades of Lloyd's life, so that Drummond has almost nothing to relate about the period in which the Rhapsody was born. Neither villain nor hero, the Henry Lloyd remembered by Drummond seems little more than an unusually talented rogue.

A similar biographical vignette was written much later by Lloyd's own son, Hannibal Evans Lloyd, as an introduction to the 1842 edition of the Rhapsody.⁴ Hannibal was barely thirteen years old at the time of his father's death, but if he lacked the elder Lloyd's taste for military pursuits, to which, indeed, his own first name was testament, Hannibal seems at least to have inherited his father's literary ambitions. His account of Henry Lloyd's early life to 1756 differs little from that of John Drummond; the similarities, not just in content but in phrasing, are sufficiently striking to suggest that

Hannibal may have borrowed directly from the earlier version penned by his father's comrade.⁵ On the other hand, Hannibal provides insight into periods of Lloyd's life which Drummond was either unable or unwilling to describe, such as the circumstances of Lloyd's childhood, the reasons for his decision to leave Wales in early adulthood, and his post-1756 wanderings through Europe. Hannibal's memoir is also a priceless source of information about the Rhapsody, shedding particular light on the chain of events which led to its resurrection in 1790. Unfortunately, Hannibal could hardly be described as a neutral authority. There is a strong whiff of hero-worship hanging over his account, and on more than a few occasions, Hannibal's latent affection for his father bubbles to the surface; successes are emphasized, while disappointments, such as the suppression of the Rhapsody, are invariably downplayed.⁶

Though Drummond and Hannibal Lloyd are the standard and perhaps best known published sources of information about Henry Lloyd's life, they are not the only ones. The popularity of Lloyd's writings in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France spawned biographical vignettes in the French language. The earliest of these, written by the French soldier Romance de Mesnon, actually predates Drummond's 1790 "Letter" by six years. On the basic outlines of Lloyd's career as general and author, Mesnon adds little to what Drummond and Hannibal Lloyd would write in the English language; his chief contribution to the story of Lloyd lies in his account of the strange happenings which evidently succeeded the general's death. Mesnon's attitude towards his subject is respectful, even affectionate, and his enthusiasm raises the suspicion that the two men may well have encountered each other at some point in Lloyd's travels. Yet if they did in fact share some sort of relationship, Mesnon betrays no details. And his willingness, for instance, to dispute the more fantastic myths about Lloyd's death which were evidently

current at the time speaks well of his general approach to the recording of history.⁷ In concert with Drummond and Lloyd's own memoirs, Mesnon would seem to have been the essential source for Henry Lloyd's entry in La Biographie Universelle Ancienne et Moderne, first published in Paris in 1819 and subsequently reissued in 1870.⁸ Published by Michaud, the contributors to La Biographie relied heavily on anecdotes to paint their picture of Lloyd, and the result is unquestionably evocative. Lloyd emerges as brilliant but mercurial, capable of great deeds to be sure, but fundamentally untrustworthy. And, notwithstanding the fact of his Welsh heritage, a proud "Englishman": Lloyd, La Biographie records, once rebuked a Prussian general with a ringing declaration that he had been "born English... and so I am free to give to whom I would like my sword and my heart."⁹ Such strident patriotism, if it is to be believed, is not necessarily apparent in the portraits sketched by Drummond and Mesnon.

The direct historiographical descendent of all these earlier writings about the life and achievements of Henry Lloyd was his entry in the Dictionary of National Biography, published by the Oxford University Press in 1937.¹⁰ Like Michaud's La Biographie, this source is most useful as a condensation of what others much closer to Lloyd had already recorded. For Lloyd's early career as a Jacobite and French agent, the D.N.B. author relied most heavily on Drummond; for Lloyd's activities during the Seven Years War, Lloyd's own writings were the essential source; for the odd happenings at the time of Lloyd's death, La Biographie is cited. Yet in addition to these secondary sources, the author also consulted primary sources in search of answers to questions which earlier chroniclers had either failed to settle or simply left vague, such as the exact date of Lloyd's birth, and the true nature of his government pension.

Such was the rather unsatisfactory extent of knowledge about Henry Lloyd until

well into the twentieth-century. However, an additional and indispensable source of relevant information has more recently been recognized by the scholar Franco Venturi. A historian specializing in the Italian Enlightenment, Venturi's examination of the personal correspondence of Pietro Verri, an immensely cultured Italian thinker and writer of the mid-eighteenth-century who met Lloyd on a German battlefield in 1759, has served to shed a whole new light on the private character of the Welshman, his movements across Europe during the decade of the 1760's, and the evolution of his political and military thinking. Venturi elaborated these findings in Rivista storica italiana, in a paper entitled "Le avventure del Generale Henry Lloyd", and though spanning fewer than seventy heavily footnoted pages, the result is without question the single most comprehensive chronicle of Lloyd's life ever published, integrating the information present in the letters exchanged between Lloyd and Verri with generous extracts from Lloyd's philosophical tracts, his military narratives, the chronicles of John Drummond, Romance de Mesnon, and Hannibal Lloyd, and, in certain key episodes, from relevant papers lodged at the British Public Record Office.¹¹

Yet the fact remains that this thesis is not merely, or even principally, the story of Henry Lloyd's amazing life, but of the twin crises, political and military, which greeted the Rhapsody in 1779 and ultimately led to its demise. Any investigation into Britain's predicament at this time must begin with the correspondence of contemporary figures of note. The Correspondence of King George III, published in five volumes and edited by Sir John Fortescue, is an excellent source of information about the views and concerns of the monarch and his chief ministers, including Lord North, the Earl of Sandwich, Charles Jenkinson, and Lord Jeffrey Amherst. These volumes are supplemented by The Correspondence of King George the Third with Lord North, compiled in two volumes by

W. Bodham Donne. The peculiar challenges faced by the Admiralty find blunt expression in The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich, edited by G.R. Barns and J.H. Owen for the Navy Records Society and published in four volumes. A useful chronicle, as expressed in their own words, of the very public political battles that raged between government ministers and the leaders of the opposition in Parliament during the course of 1779 is The Parliamentary History of England by William Cobbett, whose role in preserving a record of eighteenth-century parliamentary debates was analogous to the achievement of the Hansard family during the nineteenth-century. Other, albeit more idiosyncratic, first-hand accounts of the mood of this period include Nathaniel Wraxall's Historical Memoirs of My Own Time and Horace Walpole's voluminous Letters.

There is still no better study of Britain's military predicament in the year of the Rhapsody than The Other Armada, written by A. Temple Patterson and published by Manchester University Press in 1960. Beginning with a comparison of the diverging trajectories of British and French military fortunes in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, Patterson's goal is to explain how the great Franco-Spanish invasion scheme of 1779 was conceived, the manner in which it was conducted, and the reasons it was ultimately stymied, in spite of the apparent strength of the Bourbon fleet, and the undeniable frailty of the British defences, particularly on land but even at sea. His work is an extremely detailed source of information concerning the state of British "strongholds" such as Plymouth and Portsmouth, the lamentable quality and dismal size of the British garrisons scattered across southern England, and the strikingly poor judgment exercised by leaders at almost every level on both sides of the English Channel. Subsequent histories of the 1779 invasion scare, such as Frank McLynn's Invasion (1987) and Norman Longmate's Island Fortress (1991), are by their own admission heavily in Patterson's debt for their

facts and their interpretations. Alongside Patterson, there are several other texts relevant to the military crisis of 1779. Jonathan Dull's The French Navy and American Independence (1975) provides a more detailed examination into the revival of French naval power during the 1770's, without which the invasion attempt would never have been possible – a theme also echoed by E.H. Jenkins in his History of the French Navy (1973). Navies, Deterrence, and American Independence by Nicholas Tracy (1988) looks at the issue of the naval balance of power in the 1770's from the British side; Tracy's account of the tenure of the Earl of Sandwich at the Admiralty more or less reinforces Patterson's essentially sympathetic portrait of the First Lord who led the Royal Navy through one of its most frustrating periods. John Tilley's The British Navy and the American Revolution (1987) is another useful consideration of the weaknesses of command, particularly at the flag level, which typified the British naval response to the events of 1779. The personal and professional character of Lord Jeffrey Amherst, the man at the very center of British military preparations on land, and not coincidentally one of the key figures in the suppression of Lloyd's Rhapsody, is given scholarly treatment by Lawrence Mayo's Jeffrey Amherst (1916) as well as J.S. Long's Lord Jeffrey Amherst (1933). Neither Mayo nor Long make any attempt to hide their admiration for their subject, and at times Long in particular seems rather too anxious to explain away Amherst's flaws; but both of their respective works are the product of deep and heavily referenced forays into the important archival sources relating to Amherst's career on both sides of the Atlantic. Finally, no investigation into the military realities underpinning the Rhapsody can be complete without Piers Mackesy's classic The War for America (1964), which still remains one of the few accounts to emphasize the extent to which British military

strategy throughout the American conflict was dictated by the insuperable geographical, logistical, and financial limits of British power, and the constraints of contemporary political arrangements.

As for the particular political crisis which overtook Britain in 1779, the single most vivid study of these events remains Sir Herbert Butterfield's George III, Lord North and the People, 1779-1780, published in 1949. Butterfield, concerned to rescue King George and Lord North from the opprobrium bequeathed by generations of Whig-inspired historians, proclaims his determination "to put the evidence of enemies with the evidence of friends"; the result is a reasonably well-balanced portrait of events, drawing on the correspondence of all the major figures in government and opposition.¹² Moving from the broader themes of political and social change which dominated this period, such as the rise of extra-parliamentary opinion, to the day-to-day skirmishes between ministerial factions, his chronicle of the progressive enfeeblement of North's government through the summer and fall of 1779 is as riveting as any work of fiction. Yet for all its virtues, Butterfield's account continues to be clouded somewhat by the prejudiced influence of earlier historians such as Sir George Otto Trevelyan. A more thoroughly modern introduction into the political issues of this era is provided by Britain and the American Revolution (1998), a collection of essays edited by H.T. Dickinson, which provides an antidote to Butterfield's occasional excesses. Moreover, several of the works cited in Dickinson's collection served as key sources for this thesis: Frank O'Gorman's The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs, 1760-82 (1975) as well as his more recent The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History, 1688-1832 (1997), John Derry's English Politics and the American Revolution (1976), Keith Perry's British Politics and the American Revolution (1990), and Philip Whiteley's Lord North: The

Prime Minister Who Lost America (1997). Other noteworthy accounts of eighteenth-century British governance include the second edition of Sir Lewis Namier's classic England in the Age of the American Revolution (1961), John Brooke's King George III (1972), Ian Gilmour's Riot, Risings and Revolution (1992), and I.R. Christie's Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform (1962).

Finally, it would have been quite impossible to unravel the events surrounding Henry Lloyd and his Rhapsody in 1779 without the invaluable insight provided by certain unpublished contemporary documents held at the British Public Record Office. Of most vital importance were the public and private correspondence of Lord Jeffrey Amherst, written in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the British Army.¹³ Though it could hardly be said that Henry Lloyd figures prominently in these documents, the vast majority of which are letters exchanged between Amherst and other key political and military figures of the day, they contain enough information to reconstruct the broad outline of Lloyd's movements during the second half of 1779, and the nature of his contacts with Amherst at the very moment when the Rhapsody was due to be released.

"Genl. Lloyd, whom I believe your Majesty knows, came from Brussels yesterday morning," Jenkinson reported. "He sent to desire to speak to Me... and I should have doubted whether I ought to have sent it to your Majesty, if it had not been for the Character of Genl. Lloyd and the very earnest and confident manner in which the Genl. delivered this Intelligence."¹⁶

There is no doubt that Lloyd's return to London at the beginning of August involved a series of contacts with men at the highest levels of power. In a letter to Lord North, dated 10 August 1779, Robert Clerk, the British lieutenant general to whom Lloyd would pay such effusive tribute in the first pages of the Rhapsody, referred to a very

Chapter One: The Genesis of Lloyd's Rhapsody

The suppression of Henry Lloyd's Rhapsody was merely the final act in a drama which had begun several months earlier, in the tumultuous, war-darkened summer of 1779. "The earliest intelligence of the sailing of the combined fleets [of France and Spain] from Brest was brought to England by general Lloyd, who being at Boulogne and well informed of the proceeding of the French, embarked on board of a neutral ship and came to Portsmouth. Having given this important news to the governor of Portsmouth, general Lloyd immediately posted to London to acquaint the ministry."¹⁴ So his admiring son would write in 1842; but here we must forgive Hannibal a certain amount of exaggeration, or at least misunderstanding of what had really occurred. Lloyd's return to England did not occur until the last week of July, whereas news that the French Brest Fleet had sailed reached the government no later than 16 June.¹⁵ On the other hand, the notion that Lloyd did indeed have some intelligence to impart at the moment of crisis seems corroborated by a surviving message from Charles Jenkinson, the Secretary of War, to King George III. "Genl. Lloyd, whom I believe your Majesty knows, came from Brussels yesterday morning," Jenkinson reported. "He sent to desire to speak to Me...and I should have doubted whether I ought to have sent it to your Majesty, if it had not been for the Character of Genl. Lloyd and the very earnest and confident manner in which the Genl. delivered this Intelligence."¹⁶

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recent occasion on which Lloyd and the prime minister had met to discuss Lloyd's views on the possibility of arranging an alliance between Britain and Russia, a subject upon which Lloyd was held to have special insight.¹⁷ Less than a month later, at the very height of the invasion scare, Lord North was recommending Lloyd to Lord Jeffrey Amherst, the commander-in-chief. "I know very little of the gentleman myself, and, if I knew him perfectly well, should certainly not be able to judge of his military sentiments," North admitted, "but I have heard him well spoken of as an officer...Perhaps, it may be worth while to send to him, and learn whether he has any useful information to give...His information may be of considerable use to the gentlemen entrusted with the defence of the Western Counties and of Plymouth."¹⁸ To this Amherst replied that he had already received a paper "containing Gen. Lloyd's remarks upon the defence of certain situations in the West of England."¹⁹

Yet if Lloyd's name was indeed on the lips of Britain's masters at this moment of grave national danger, he was not content to remain in the capital, nor did he intend to limit himself to pondering Britain's plight in the abstract. The "remarks" to which Amherst alluded were the product of a personal reconnaissance of the endangered coasts of southern England which Lloyd carried out during the month of August. As North remarked to Amherst at the beginning of September, "I heard two or three days ago that General Lloyd had been to survey the country in the neighbourhood of Torbay".²⁰ Travelling in secret and reportedly in disguise, he had sought out those places, such as Portsmouth and Plymouth, which he deemed the most likely targets of French attack, examined their defences, noted their vulnerabilities, and in general satisfied himself as to the chances of an invasion succeeding. He had then returned to London again, with a strong desire to communicate what he had learned.²¹ Amherst, for his part, while

protesting to North that he had “received much fuller and better remarks” from other concerned gentlemen, nevertheless thought it worthwhile to forward Lloyd’s appraisal to the local commander in the west of England.²²

Lloyd was not satisfied, however, to limit his warnings to the government. He decided to inform a far wider section of British society of the gravity of the situation, and drawing on the insights he had gleaned from his covert inspection, began composing the pamphlet which would become famous as the Rhapsody. It is clear from the text of Rhapsody that it was written in the autumn of 1779. Lloyd writes firmly in the past tense of “the appearance and force of the combined fleet” – a clear reference to the huge Franco-Spanish fleet, under the command of the French admiral D’Orvilliers, which appeared off Plymouth in mid-August 1779, and which did not return to Brest until mid-September.²³ There are allusions to the widespread controversy provoked by the apparent unwillingness of Admiral Hardy, the commander of the British Channel Fleet, to engage the superior Franco-Spanish fleet during these weeks when a French invasion of southern England seemed most likely, and his decision instead to withdraw his own numerically inferior force eastwards up the Channel.²⁴ And most striking of all are Lloyd’s unambiguous references to the lateness of the season.²⁵ All of this, taken with Lloyd’s proclamation of how it was probable that the enemy “may not think it eligible to attempt an invasion of England for the present”, serves to place the composition sometime after the middle of September, when the Bourbon fleet departed the English Channel and returned to its base at Brest.²⁶

By the beginning of December, the Rhapsody was complete and had been sent to its publisher, William Faden of London. Indeed, copies had already been printed, since Lloyd had already begun to distribute a few copies among his friends.²⁷ It may well have

been one of these friends who advised him to submit his work to the ministry before it was released to the public at large; in any case, Lloyd was ultimately persuaded to seek an opinion on what he had written from Lord Amherst. Upon this point several different sources, including the editor of later editions of the Rhapsody, and Lloyd's own son, are agreed.²⁸ Yet the best and most conclusive evidence of the process which led to the suppression of the original Rhapsody, and of the personalities who were involved, can be found in War Office documents from 1779, preserved today at the British Public Record Office.

Lloyd began by appealing to a Lieutenant Roberts of the First Foot Guards. "I wish you would wait on Lord Amherst," Lloyd wrote, "and inform him my intention in writing this Pamphlet was to be useful to His Majesty's service."²⁹ His tone was certainly not challenging, and he made his willingness to be cooperative clear from the start: "if...contrary to my Intentions the book contains anything which may give Offence, I will suppress it."³⁰ Amherst replied to Lloyd directly and in friendly terms, acknowledging receipt of the Rhapsody and "thanking General Lloyd for the favour he had done him in sending a copy of it to him."³¹

Three days later, on 9 December 1779, Amherst handed down his verdict.

I have carefully perused the work, you was pleased to send me by Lieut. Roberts, and, as you permit me to give my opinion as to the publication, I must say it appears to me, that the fourth Chapter will give such intelligence to the Enemy, as may be of use to them, more especially as it will be probably known, that it comes from an Officer of Rank, experience in the service and known abilities; I should therefore wish, in the present Situation of this Country, and the avowed intention of the Enemy, that the publication of that Chapter might be suppressed for the present.³²

Lloyd's son professed to believe that his father, "attaching but little weight to his essay", acceded to Amherst's wishes without reservation.³³ Whether Lloyd was really

so nonchalant is open to question. He had enjoyed a regular government pension since the mid-1760's, and at all times he must have been acutely conscious of his financial dependence on the state. "I feel every instant I owe to [King George III's] goodness the Bread I eat," he had candidly admitted in his covering letter to Lieutenant Roberts.³⁴ It is therefore not particularly surprising that in the reply which he wrote to Amherst he betrayed no trace of defiance. "I took the liberty to present my pamphlet to your Lordship, with a view to be guided by your opinion: accordingly in obedience to you commands, I have given the strictest orders to suppress it."³⁵

At the same time, if Lloyd was conscious of his vulnerability, he was also aware of the unease his pamphlet had provoked within the ministry, and of the leverage which such unease gave him. He wasted no time in giving Amherst a sense of what he expected in return for his cooperation. "My journey from Flanders to London, and from thence to Plymouth...have occasioned no inconsiderable expense, which I am really little able to bear."³⁶ Such effort demanded some sort of reward. "I hope therefore your Lordship will not think it unreasonable if I presume to solicit some indemnification for my trouble, expenses, and loss, sustained by the suppression of the book, and to implore your protection herein."³⁷

Amherst agreed. During the last week before Christmas 1779, after raising the matter with Lord North in person, he forwarded his copy of the Rhapsody to the prime minister.³⁸ Several weeks of inactivity seem to have followed; Amherst did not even bother to inform Lloyd of the status of his request for compensation until the middle of January.³⁹ Yet there is no question that Lloyd's demands were ultimately met. In return for his agreement not to distribute the remaining copies of the edition which had already been printed, the author received a lump sum payment of five hundred pounds.⁴⁰ And

with that, the Rhapsody was dead.

Or so the government imagined. In its effort to bury Lloyd's pamphlet, as in so many other respects, the North ministry proved far less efficient than it should have been. Most copies of the original Rhapsody were indeed destroyed, leaving only a very few for posterity to admire. But as early as 1783, when Lloyd died, the renown of the work was such that a nobleman was said to have paid one hundred guineas for a single copy.⁴¹ The authorities who passed judgment on the Rhapsody also made a fundamental error in allowing Lloyd to retain possession of the copper plates used by his printer. They trusted that these would pose no danger as long as Lloyd lived, and his loyalty to the terms of his agreement with the ministry evidently never wavered; but upon his death, the general's agent in London proved far less scrupulous. This individual informed the government that the plates had been misplaced and had defied all subsequent attempts to find them.⁴² Yet a comparison of the edition of the Rhapsody which was published in 1790 with the aborted edition of 1779 reveals a striking similarity of format and pagination; certainly Lloyd's heirs were sufficiently convinced that the original plates had been used by the new publisher that they felt it necessary to assure William Pitt, the prime minister of the day, that they were entirely innocent in the matter.⁴³ Regardless, in the short term at least, the original Rhapsody effectively disappeared, just as Amherst and North desired.

Though the correspondence of Lord Jeffrey Amherst effectively reveals the process which led to the suppression of the Rhapsody in 1779, the question remains of why this man and the government of which he was a member should have placed so great a priority on the task of keeping Lloyd's book out of public view. In order to begin to answer this question, this thesis will now turn to an examination of the peculiar

background of Henry Lloyd himself. For as Amherst had admitted in the most revealing of his letters to Lloyd, one of the most potentially dangerous aspects of the Rhapsody was that it came, and would be widely known to have come, “from an Officer of Rank, experience in the service, and known abilities”.⁴⁴

shire, sometime around 1720. Since the parish registers of Llanbedr only extend as far back as 1745, the exact date of his birth is not clear. The Dictionary of National Biography suggests it was “probably in 1720”, but Franco Venturi concludes it was more likely 1718.⁴⁵ In any case, his origins were decidedly modest. His father John was an Anglican clergyman; and though from a very young age his own inclination was toward a military career, Henry lacked the money needed to purchase a commission in the British Army. So he was sent off to Jesus College at Oxford in order to prepare him to follow in his father’s footsteps as a member of the clergy. The sudden death of John Lloyd shattered all these plans, however. Hannibal Lloyd would recall, over a century later, that his father “appears to have had some unpleasant reminiscences of this part of his life, respecting which he was extremely reserved”.⁴⁶ Indeed, Henry Lloyd’s subsequent split with his family was bitter. As the middle-aged Lloyd told Pietro Verri, he left Wales in disgust after his widowed mother chose to remarry, and chose his old tutor as her new husband.⁴⁷

Lloyd’s retrospective confidence to his Milanese friend is the only surviving source of information about his movements in the years immediately following his departure from Wales. It is a fantastic tale, and the extent to which Lloyd may have embellished the bare truth is not clear. Nor can Verri’s memory necessarily be relied upon: it should not be forgotten that his recollection of Lloyd’s story was not set down on paper until almost twenty years after the first meeting between the two men.⁴⁸ In any event, we read that young Lloyd passed through Berlin, fell in love with a ballerina,

Chapter Two: The Life and Character of Henry Lloyd

Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd was born at a remote farmhouse at Cwmbychan, in the north Wales parish of Llanbedr, Merionethshire, sometime around 1720. Since the parish registers of Llanbedr only extend as far back as 1745, the exact date of his birth is not clear. The Dictionary of National Biography suggests it was “probably in 1720”, but Franco Venturi concludes it was more likely 1718.⁴⁵ In any case, his origins were decidedly modest. His father John was an Anglican clergyman; and though from a very young age his own inclination was toward a military career, Henry lacked the money needed to purchase a commission in the British Army. So he was sent off to Jesus College at Oxford in order to prepare him to follow in his father’s footsteps as a member of the clergy. The sudden death of John Lloyd shattered all these plans, however. Hannibal Lloyd would recall, over a century later, that his father “appears to have had some unpleasant reminiscences of this part of his life, respecting which he was extremely reserved”.⁴⁶ Indeed, Henry Lloyd’s subsequent split with his family was bitter. As the middle-aged Lloyd told Pietro Verri, he left Wales in disgust after his widowed mother chose to remarry, and chose his old tutor as her new husband.⁴⁷

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became embroiled in unspecified troubles and left for Venice. The debts which he amassed and failed to pay soon made his position in Venice untenable as well; but for whatever reason the Jesuits came to his rescue, settling with his creditors, and sending him to an English college in Rome where he dedicated himself to study. Upon finishing the term, Lloyd returned to Venice, having been recommended to the Spanish ambassador. The ambassador found him charming, gave him a job as a secretary, and later sent the bright young Welshman off to make his fortune in the service of the Marquis La Mina, the famed governor of Catalonia.⁴⁹

Lloyd lived very well during his time in Barcelona with the marquis, and again began to entertain hopes of finding employment as a soldier. But this once again proved unrealistic. Instead, he relocated to Madrid, where he was recommended to "Watt", the cabinet secretary to the king of Spain. His work attracted as much favourable comment in Madrid as it had in Barcelona. Unfortunately, it was not enough to ensure further promotion. Disappointed and more than a little resentful at his treatment, Lloyd abandoned Madrid, returning to Barcelona and the marquis who had such a high opinion of his talents. And at long last, he obtained an official post in the army, being assigned to a corps of military engineers. Delighted to have realized his ambition, he now dedicated himself completely to the study of war. There was no author on the subject whom he did not examine, and in the course of his readings Lloyd gained a profound knowledge of tactics, artillery, and fortifications.⁵⁰

Such, at least, is Pietro Verri's version of Lloyd's earliest adventures. If nothing else, the story does not conflict with what is known about the individuals whom Lloyd supposedly encountered. The Spanish minister whom Verri remembered as "Watt" was most likely Riccardo Wall, an expatriate Irishman who was already in Spain in 1718 and

was destined to serve as Minister of War to King Charles III during the Seven Years War.⁵¹ The career of the marquis of La Mina is even more well known. Entering the Spanish army in 1705 at age sixteen, La Mina had played a key role in the south Italian campaign that put Charles Bourbon on the throne of Naples in 1735, and had earned the Order of St. Gennaro for his service. He was subsequently named general of the Spanish royal dragoons; and for a short period between 1740 and 1742, before going on to command Spanish forces in north Italy during the War of the Austrian Succession, La Mina was indeed entrusted with the government of Catalonia.⁵² It was in this period of relative repose, when the marquis was busying himself with various projects to improve Barcelona's harbour and sewers, that Lloyd would have met him. Resolute, brave in battle, generous in peace, imbued with a respect for reason, La Mina was a true man of the Enlightenment, and as such a worthy mentor to the young and as yet unknown Welsh expatriate. It is entirely understandable that Lloyd should have rediscovered his adolescent interest in the art of war under the patronage of such a man.

Nevertheless, his sojourn in Spain did not last long. By 1744 at the latest he was already in France, having somehow become "a lay brother in some religious house".⁵³ As his comrade John Drummond would recall, Henry Lloyd told him that he "had received a liberal education...before he went to France. His aim then was the army, but having no friend to procure him a commission, he was persuaded by some British priests to take the habit of novitiate or monk".⁵⁴ In spite of his new religious garb, the science and techniques of war continued to be his dominant passion. He was able to teach "geography and field engineering", subjects in which he had already proven "of superior talents to some Scottish and Irish officers in the French service".⁵⁵

Doubtless this was not the first occasion on which Lloyd had encountered exiled

partisans of the Stuarts during his wandering across Europe. Rome, where he had taught under the aegis of the Jesuits for a time, was of course the home of the Stuart court-in-exile, and as such had evolved into a natural hub for anti-Hanoverian machinations.⁵⁶ It is also a fact that north Wales, where Lloyd had been born and raised, was widely considered a hotbed of Jacobite sentiment.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is no surviving evidence to indicate why this particular Welshman, unlike the vast majority of young Welshmen who never lifted a hand against the Hanoverians, should have taken the bold and dangerous step of offering his services to the enemies of the British government. It may simply have been yet another expression of that taste for adventure which had led him out of England; Lloyd would not have been the first restless young man of as yet imperfectly formed political views who allowed himself to get sucked into the superficially exciting world of Jacobitism.⁵⁸

Whatever his particular motives, by the middle years of the 1740's Lloyd had thrown in his lot with those who sought to overthrow the reigning Hanoverian dynasty of Britain, becoming yet another of those pro-Stuart expatriates who were so numerous and active in the armies of contemporary continental Europe. For him, the religious habit and the military uniform had assumed the same political significance. On 11 May 1745, he took part in the Battle of Fontenoy, where the French, with a sizable contingent of Jacobites at their side, faced off against the British Duke of Cumberland. This would serve as Lloyd's baptism of fire, "the first actual [military] service he ever saw."⁵⁹ But more importantly, Lloyd's insightful sketches of the terrain and villages around Fontenoy attracted the notice of Richauard, the commanding engineer in the French army, who obtained permission from the great Marshal Maurice de Saxe for Lloyd to accompany the army as a mounted draughtsman, with the rank of sub-ensign.⁶⁰

It was not long before Lloyd joined the small nucleus of soldiers who were preparing the expedition which would land young Charles Stuart in Scotland. Appointed third engineer, with a captain's commission from Prince Charles himself, Lloyd was on board the *Elizabeth*, and sustained a severe wound in his right shoulder during that vessel's celebrated engagement with HMS *Lion*.⁶¹ Once safely ashore, he followed the prince as far as Carlisle, where the rebel army arrived in early November 1745. He was then entrusted with a secret and extremely delicate mission. Adopting the guise of a wandering cleric, he set off alone to contact so-called "friends" of the Pretender in northern Wales, where it was generally assumed that a rising against the government was imminent.⁶² This rising failed to materialize, however, and so Lloyd proceeded to his next assignment, reconnoitring Milford Haven, Bridgwater, Barnstaple, the approaches to Plymouth, and the Kentish coast from Dover to London. All of this, an ironic prelude to the survey he would undertake three decades later, was done in the expectation of a French landing in Britain.⁶³ As John Drummond would write, "No man ever was more correct with his eye; he saw at once the advantages of ground, and his remarks were made with so much penetration and judgment that all his observations were to be depended upon."⁶⁴

In London, disaster struck. Lloyd's activities finally aroused suspicion and he was arrested. His friend Drummond, taken to the capital in the winter of 1746 after Culloden and the ruin of the Stuart cause, found him in the custody of a "king's messenger" named Carrington.⁶⁵ Fortunately, it seems that British authorities were unaware that Lloyd had actually served with the rebels in Scotland; it is likely that he had adopted a pseudonym, since his real name is absent from the lists of "prisoners in charge of messengers" kept by the Home Office.⁶⁶ Drummond, protected by his French

commission, managed to free himself, and by appealing to a high-ranking relative in London, succeeded in having Lloyd freed. They went back to France together.⁶⁷ Lloyd, promoted to major, went on to distinguish himself as an engineer in the campaign against Holland in 1747, gaining particular acclaim for his role at the siege of Bergen-op-Zoom.⁶⁸

How he occupied his time in the years immediately following the 1748 Peace is not clear. Lloyd's son, following almost verbatim the account written by Drummond, states that "after the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle he was induced by his friend Marshall Keith to enter the Prussian service, in which he continued till 1754".⁶⁹ Yet by no later than 1754 he was back in France. Another continental war was brewing, and Paris was once again abuzz with projects and plans to invade England. The Marshal de Belleisle, Minister of War and the chief advocate of a French strike across the Channel, asked Lloyd "to re-survey the British coast, and report thereon".⁷⁰ As Drummond remembered, "Lloyd's former knowledge of the British coast, the exactness of his descriptions, and his genius as a spy accorded him great advantages on this occasion". As before, he travelled in disguise: "having nothing of a military look he went where he pleased as a trader".⁷¹ When he returned to France, though, he argued that it would be extremely difficult for an invasion of England to succeed – the very conclusion he would reach twenty-five years later, in the *Rhapsody*. Indeed, Drummond claims that it was principally due to Lloyd's reports that the French ministry was convinced to abandon Marshal de Belleisle's project of invasion.⁷²

Lloyd resumed his wandering life, always in search of action. By now the Seven Years War had erupted, with France, Austria, and Russia ranged against Britain and Prussia. He could have found no better opportunity "to enlarge his knowledge of the art of war".⁷³ *On the recommendation of Prince Liechtenstein, Lloyd obtained a commission*

as aide-de-camp to the famed Austrian commander Count Lacy, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.⁷⁴

It was during this period of dramatic new responsibilities that Lloyd first encountered Pietro Verri. "It happened," Verri would write in his diary under the date of 15 September 1759, "that I met with a hungry officer who, having been on the move all day long, was eating; there was nothing singular about his figure, but the three or four statements he made, and the reasonable and ingenious tone in which he spoke, impressed me."⁷⁵ And so their friendship began. Verri would always remember Lloyd as an exceptional man, of "singular intellect, surprising knowledge...full of courage, decisive, humane."⁷⁶ Most striking of all was the impression of being in the presence of a true character. "I ride through town or past the army and he gives me ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of the positions in which we find ourselves...Then we rush to examine the terrain between us and the enemy, we visit the advance posts, and he goes into particulars with a clarity and knowledge that lifts my soul."⁷⁷ Lloyd's passion for war seemed inexhaustible; and yet at the same time Verri never ceased to wonder at the profound generosity of this quintessential soldier of fortune. Despite the esteem in which Lloyd was held by his superior, Count Lacy, who made frequent use of his expertise in the erection of fortifications, Lloyd eschewed most of the trappings of his new rank. "He would carry the fascines, use the shovel, travel alongside the soldiers who were his subordinates, and call them brothers."⁷⁸

Even with the onset of winter, Lloyd and Verri remained together, sharing various patrols and skirmishes in the frozen fields around Dresden, and allowing their friendship to deepen. Soon, however, their respective ambitions would divide them. Lloyd himself states that he was entrusted with "a very considerable detachment of cavalry and

infantry, with orders never to lose sight of the Prussian army, which I punctually complied with, and was never unfortunate.”⁷⁹ But, ostensibly on the grounds that he had been denied a deserved promotion for his efforts, Lloyd suddenly chose to quit the Austrian service altogether. He would fight the final campaigns of the Seven Years War on the Anglo-Prussian side.⁸⁰

In so doing, Lloyd had taken the first step towards making his peace with Hanoverian England. Once the Seven Years War ended, he did not hesitate to insert himself deeper into the affairs of both Britain and Germany, which the military and diplomatic events of recent years had done so much to intertwine. Indeed, the whole situation in Europe had changed. France had been humiliated, as had Spain. England had emerged triumphant. And Lloyd, pragmatic as ever, saw no reason to stand on old and increasingly obsolete loyalties. He remained at the court of Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, who had evidently been instrumental in luring him away from the Austrian army, and to whom the first volume of his account of the war would be dedicated.⁸¹ And it was in his capacity as one of Ferdinand’s chief advisors that he became involved in the negotiations that preceded the marriage of Ferdinand’s son and Augusta, sister of King George III of Britain. This mission, successfully concluded, earned him the pension which he would draw from the British government for the rest of his life. He was now fully reconciled with the House of Hanover.⁸²

Nonetheless, Lloyd did not yet have any intention of returning to Britain. For the moment, he preferred to resume his wandering life. In 1765 he set his sights on Portugal, a kingdom still struggling to suppress the demons unleashed by the Franco-Spanish invasion which had occurred three years earlier. The country was split between the partisans of Count Wilhelm von Schaumburg-Lippe, who had led the Portuguese army to

its miraculous victory over the Bourbons and who was determined to see his broader military reforms through to their conclusion, and the native Count of Oeiras, a powerful minister who had reforming ideas of his own. In September 1764 Schaumburg-Lippe had returned to Germany, but he remained one of the Portuguese government's chief military advisors; and so it was perhaps natural that Lloyd should have approached him before beginning his journey south.⁸³

Lloyd's intent was not to wring some sort of job from the great Count, or at least so he pretended. He presented himself merely as an admirer who had reflected on Portugal's future and come to certain conclusions which he thought might be of some use. This Memoir on the present state of Portugal, as his reflections would subsequently be published, saw Lloyd's penchant for unconventional thinking on full display. There was no doubt in his mind that whatever the terms of the Peace of Paris, France still nourished hopes of attacking and dividing Portugal, and that the Spanish were far from unenthusiastic about the idea. Drawing on the experience of the recent war, Lloyd decided that the essential problem was not the defence of Portugal *per se*, but the vulnerability of Spain to French manipulation and the resulting ability of the French to operate directly in the Iberian Peninsula. The rejection of a war of position; the fundamental importance of denying supplies to the enemy, the emphasis on trickery and deception; the central value of the port of Cadiz: these formed the principal elements of Lloyd's counsel to Schaumburg-Lippe. And whatever else it might signify, Lloyd's analysis of the vicious Portuguese campaign of 1762 reads like a premonition of the horrors of the Peninsular War fifty years later.⁸⁴

On the other hand, Henry Lloyd was in other respects still very much a man of the eighteenth-century. His military projects were subordinated to the programme of

commercial and political development which he had devised for Portugal, and he certainly did not advocate the sacrifice of civil society to the military power. What mattered most, he judged, whether it be in Portugal or France or even England, was the effort to nourish the economic health of the country. For this reason, excessive military efforts ought to be avoided as much as possible, and the numbers of the military limited to a small but well-trained and professional force. The mass popular armies of the French Revolution and the era of Napoleon were nowhere present in Lloyd's calculations.⁸⁵

With peace more or less restored in Europe after 1763, and with his Iberian adventure concluded, Lloyd resettled in England, and dedicated himself to rethinking all of the military and political lessons of the great war in which he had played so unusual a role. Thus was born The History of the Late War in Germany between the King of Prussia and the Empress of Germany and her Allies, the first volume of which would be published in London in 1766. From the first page, the author was remarkably unafraid to dispute notions of war which were current at the time, preferring to cast his field of vision as far back as Polybius, Caesar, and Arrian, "who had not only seen, but executed great things".⁸⁶ He did not bother to hide his disdain for modern theorists: "men of learning", he sniffed, who were "utterly unacquainted with the nature of military operations".⁸⁷ To Lloyd, real battles were much more interesting than the imaginary, the exact technical description of combat far superior to a literary one. Here again was Lloyd the quintessential man of action, fearless in his opinions, ready to slay even the most sacred cows. Indeed, his criticisms of Frederick the Great's generalship during the Seven Years War caused a veritable sensation in military circles, both in England and on the Continent, and served to ensure the book a wide circulation.⁸⁸

Probably at about the same time as the first volume of the History of the Late

War was published in 1766, Lloyd also composed, in French, some general conclusions about humanity and the state, which he grouped together under the title Essai philosophique sur les gouvernements. Exactly when he began these particular writings is not known; we cannot even say when he proceeded to have a portion of them translated into English. They do, however, contain enough hints of contemporary happenings to prove that they emerged from the second half of the 1760's.⁸⁹

The Essai constituted a characteristically audacious and insightful investigation into the roots of human society, with detours into the source of intellect, the limits of reason, and the true nature of mankind. In the process, Lloyd elaborated his own version of the stage theory of human development, popular at the time, which held that given enough time, all peoples inevitably passed through hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial phases.⁹⁰ And yet, even in the most abstract phases of his writing, Lloyd's will to act was never far from the surface. His quest "to examine the principle of change in man" was a function of his practical interest in how human behavior might be more efficiently directed; or, to borrow his own typically pragmatic metaphor, "it is impossible to adjust a watch...without understanding the parts".⁹¹

Such were the thoughts which were preoccupying Lloyd upon his return to the Continent, in the second half of 1767. A British passport issued to him at this time describes him as "Mister Lloyd, major-general, subject of His Britannic Majesty"; and it seems clear that he had now unreservedly placed his talents for subterfuge at the disposal of the British government.⁹² It was a time of strong political tensions in Catholic Europe. The Jesuits, with whom Lloyd shared a considerable and generally rewarding history, had recently been ejected from Lisbon and Madrid; and the wrangling between Pope Clement XIII and various secular princes over the age-old question of Church authority was again

coming to a boil.⁹³ On his way to Lombardy, Lloyd could not help but be impressed by the depth of anger towards the Curia. The “opinions favourable to the Roman court were universally discredited”, he would report to his old friend Verri. Rome’s only hope of diffusing the crisis, he suggested, was “to make reforms to itself”, because if it failed to do so, “these reforms the princes would make themselves, and as usual go even farther.”⁹⁴

Arriving in Milan in January 1768, Lloyd enjoyed a joyous reunion with Pietro Verri, who found him as magnificent a character as ever. “He talks with vigour, with an air of discovery and with a manner so luminous of political and military topics that at times he seems a Montesquieu and an Alexander.”⁹⁵ His adventures during the eight years since their last meeting seemed to Verri the stuff of legend. And it did not take long for the outspoken general to make a major splash in Milanese social circles, earning the “high esteem” of the local ruling family, at whose court he was often invited to speak.⁹⁶

Lloyd’s own explanation of his reasons for making this trip to Italy struck Verri as typical of the man. “Lloyd is always animated by the same vivid passion for glory, to which he gives everything; he wants to command and eject the corrupt from positions, replace them with merit and make the nations happier.”⁹⁷ More specifically, he hoped to place his talents at the disposal of Austria, and work to see that the Empire derived the maximum possible benefit from the growing conflict between the Papacy and the Catholic states of Europe. He intended to deprive the Bourbons of the diplomatic initiative and pass it instead to the young emperor Joseph II, of whom “he spoke with enthusiasm”.⁹⁸ All that was required was somehow to reconcile Austria and Prussia. If this could be achieved, Vienna would have little difficulty in acquiring those parts of Italy it did not already possess and in expelling the Ottomans from Europe altogether. It was, Lloyd explained airily, “an affair of two or three campaigns”, so long as they were conducted

with enough vigour to prevent the Bourbons from intervening before the aims were achieved. He had already drawn up the strategic plan; its supporting points were established, the time and number of engagements already calculated. At its conclusion, the Pope would be trundled off to the island of Elba, reduced to a figure little more important than the Grand Master of Malta.⁹⁹

As a plan of action, this programme which Lloyd dangled before a dazzled Verri may well strike the modern reader as hopelessly romantic, if not downright absurd. Yet it must also be admitted that beneath the fantastic schemes, Lloyd's political instincts deserved to be taken seriously. During the 1770's and 1780's, Vienna, just as Lloyd had hoped, would effectively seize the initiative in the struggle against the prerogatives of the Catholic Church, in a new policy that would come to be known, after the young emperor whom Lloyd admired so much, as Guiseppepinismo. But in the late 1760's, with Austria still under the sway of Maria Theresa, who was suspicious of the anti-clerical movement, Lloyd's vision ought to have seemed unrealistic at best.¹⁰⁰

There is, in fact, a good possibility that all of Lloyd's grandiose speeches about the realignment of Catholic Europe were nothing more than a cover for the real reason he had come to Italy at this particular moment. It is no coincidence that Lloyd found himself in Lombardy in early 1768, just as the island of Corsica was on the verge of being transferred from Genoese to French control. Under the leadership of the wily and charismatic Pasquale Paoli, Corsica had been in open revolt against Genoa since 1755, but it was unlikely to deflect a French invasion unless it received substantial aid from another major European state. Great Britain had a considerable strategic interest in keeping Corsica out of French hands; and it was also the only power which had the capacity, if it so chose, to frustrate French designs on the island. For the moment, the British

government preferred to avoid another open clash with France. Instead, it intended to support the rebels only with supplies, and only in secret.¹⁰¹ This was the mission with which Lloyd had departed England in late 1767.¹⁰²

Though Lloyd was apparently careful not to reveal his official mandate, he made no effort to hide his interest in Paoli. When he left Milan for Turin and Genoa on 8 February 1768, his friend Verri wondered if “maybe he was tempted to visit Paoli”.¹⁰³ As it happened, he made no attempt to do so on this occasion, returning to Milan after barely a week in Piedmont. His urge to roam was undiminished, however. Employing the Lombard capital as his base, he told Verri that he intended to travel between “Genoa, Corsica, and Tuscany”.¹⁰⁴ From the middle of March to the beginning of April he was in fact at Genoa. By May he was back in Milan once more. In June, Lloyd decamped for the countryside around Vaprio, where he spent his time musing about the philosophical principles of Elvezio and Montesquieu. Verri admitted to being perplexed by his behavior: “I could not predict when he is going to leave; his resolutions are always improvised.”¹⁰⁵ Yet Lloyd was merely biding his time until the situation in Corsica became more clear. When the war heated up again during the summer, Lloyd returned to his appointed task without delay.

We can follow his movements in some detail because he sent regular updates back to his friend at Milan. Writing from Livorno, on the Italian coast directly opposite the northernmost tip of Corsica, Lloyd displayed little confidence in the military conduct of the “patriots”, who for all their spirit were faring badly against the professional soldiers of France. It seemed to him that the only way for the Corsicans to avoid defeat was for them to adopt the same style of warfare he had urged on the Portuguese earlier in the decade: a war of small detachments and brief encounters, relying heavily on surprise, and

the denial of supplies to the invader.¹⁰⁶ Yet Paoli preferred to fight on French terms, and had consequently suffered an escalating series of defeats. Conscious of the urgency of the situation and without pausing too long to consider the risks of what he was about to do, Lloyd decided he had to go to Corsica himself. He adopted an alias and boarded a Danish vessel headed for the island. But for once his luck as a spy deserted him. He was picked up at sea by the French, who were evidently sufficiently suspicious to send him back to Tuscany at once.¹⁰⁷

Stymied at every other turn in his effort to aid the Corsicans, Lloyd resorted to participating, along with many other Englishmen who happened to be in Tuscany, in a subscription which raised several thousand pounds for Paoli's cause. This done, the general decided that little more could be achieved by remaining in the area. From Florence he moved on to Parma and returned to Milan in the final month of 1768. The only hope for Corsica, Lloyd had now concluded, was for Austria to intervene and attempt the complete transformation of the political situation in Italy – which, of course, had been a recurring theme of his discussions with Verri since they had been reunited at the beginning of the year.¹⁰⁸

Lloyd remained at Milan for the winter, until, as Verri reported to his brother, he was recalled to London by the “minister of war” in March 1769.¹⁰⁹ Verri provides no further details, and in the absence of corroboration by other sources, we can do little more than wonder if there is more to the story. The England to which Lloyd returned was in the throes of political and social unrest, precipitated by the clumsy effort of the ministry of Lord Grafton to invalidate John Wilkes' election to Parliament.¹¹⁰ It was, in fact, just the sort of backdrop which should have appealed to the Welshman, who liked nothing better than to be at the center of dramatic events, and whose passion for politics and

liberty was effectively unquenchable.

So then why was it that within six months he was back in Milan yet again? Not for the first time, his sudden and unexpected sorties made Pietro Verri uneasy. He continued to admire Lloyd and to listen to him with great interest, but even Verri had to admit that the man could be profoundly unsettling.¹¹¹ On the other hand, Lloyd's second sojourn in Lombardy, between September 1769 and February 1770, did ultimately serve to reconfirm their friendship. Certainly the international situation continued to worry both of them. Russian power seemed to be spreading inexorably toward the Mediterranean; and after the revolt of San Remo, relations between the Hapsburgs and Genoa had reached a dangerous new low. Indeed, no sooner had Lloyd returned to Italy than he was burning "with the desire to go and attack the Genoese", whom he was convinced were little more than the corrupt lackeys of Bourbon France and Spain.¹¹²

This impulse, like so many of Lloyd's impulses, did not last long. After spending the autumn and winter in Lombardy, he was once again on the road north, unable to resist the lure of tumultuous events in Britain. He had an overpowering desire to participate, to put forward his own ideas on how England might emerge from the political crisis which had nearly paralyzed the country during his absence. Accordingly, as soon as he was back in London in the spring of 1770, he rushed to send the king a summary of his "plan...for the management and government of Great Britain, Ireland, and America". To his considerable disappointment, he failed to receive any answer whatsoever; it is indeed doubtful if George III even saw his proposal. Such official apathy merely spurred him to take his case directly to the public.¹¹³

Lloyd's lively Essay on the English Constitution was the result. Published in 1770 by the celebrated radical editor John Almon in 1770, it was only one of many

treatises which sought to diagnose and suggest possible cures for the ills that afflicted the British constitution during these years.¹¹⁴ Lloyd was perhaps less alarmist than others. Having travelled far and seen the autocracies of Europe at work first-hand, he took a fairly bright view of what he called the “monarchico-aristo-democratic” constitutional framework of Britain. The House of Commons, he judged, was “intimately connected with the people, and in general, rich and well instructed in what regards their rights and privileges.”¹¹⁵ In stark contrast to the situation in so much of Europe, there was no danger of repression at the hands of the army, since “the military in England belongs to the nation, who pays them, and by no means to the king, who is only their chief.”¹¹⁶ Nor honestly did he think it fair to accuse George III of despotism; even though the effort to extend the royal prerogative had given rise to great evils in the past, the machinations of George paled in comparison to the example of Henry VIII, Elizabeth, or Charles I. Certainly Lloyd was reassured by the knowledge that in Britain there was no torture or life imprisonment, and that justice was rapid and public.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, he was uneasy. There were many ways, he judged, to bring slavery to a free nation, and for Lloyd the most dangerous trend in British politics was the distribution of favours and jobs for purely partisan purposes. “Though these principles of distributing employments to many persons are quite republican,” Lloyd wrote, “yet, in a mixed government, they tend to arbitrary power.”¹¹⁸ To him, the first and most efficient defence against creeping autocracy depended upon preserving the rights of Parliament, upon protesting in every way against schemes of the kind which had seen Wilkes excluded from his rightful place in the Commons.¹¹⁹ Like the radicals of his time, Lloyd advocated wholesale electoral reform, which would have included a redistribution of constituencies on the basis of population, the introduction of the secret ballot, and the

return of a triennial Parliament.¹²⁰ It was also vitally important that religious tolerance should be defended against every interference of the established clergy; and he was “not sorry” to hear of the success obtained by the evangelical preaching of men like George Whitefield, since “severity of morals is always conducive to civil liberty”.¹²¹

There is no doubt that the Essay ranged over many fields. On the subject of the increasingly restive American colonies, Lloyd advised restraint: “Why,” he asked, “must a poor American pay more than the most opulent Englishmen?”¹²² Yet he was not optimistic about the outcome: “They will soon be alienated from the mother country”.¹²³ On Ireland, he professed bewilderment at the government’s policy: “No nation ever drew less advantage from a great and powerful province than England does from Ireland.”¹²⁴ And he drew a series of unfavourable comparisons between Britain and France, concluding that while “the nature of our government is more calculated for the peace and domestic happiness of the subject”, that of the French “is more so for action and conquest”.¹²⁵

Nor was Lloyd’s burst of literary energy in the early 1770’s exhausted by the preparation of this particular tract. In its opening pages he promised another great work “on the different governments established among mankind” – in other words, a new English version of his earlier Essai philosophique sur les gouvernements.¹²⁶ This was not immediately forthcoming, but in the following year, 1771, he did publish, again with John Almon as his editor, An Essay on the theory of money, in which he emphasized the central role of money and credit in shaping human relations.¹²⁷

Lloyd’s outlook, then, was in many respects characterized by a desire for reform that should have made him a natural ally of men like Wilkes and other would-be reformers who were so critical of the political status quo.¹²⁸ But as was so often the case with the

Welsh wanderer, he seems to have been hesitant to commit himself wholly to any one cause or to any one faction. If there was one thing which he valued above all others, it was his independence. It is fitting that he should have chosen, without any obvious trace of sarcasm, to dedicate his essay on money to Lord North, the prime minister and one of the chief targets of all reformers and radicals during those years.¹²⁹ After all, for all his faults as a leader, North had an exceedingly keen grasp of the issues of national finance: his success in managing the British national debt and later in raising funds in order to fight the American Revolutionary War were a tribute to his financial and fiscal acumen.¹³⁰

None of the usual sources for Lloyd's life gives any indication of how he occupied himself during the two years which followed the publication of the 1771 Essay. Yet it seems that by the winter of 1773-74 he had come to desire some sort of respite from the interminable political debates which had enlivened his return to London in 1770. An opportunity presented itself in Russia. "The Russians being at war with the Turks, and the campaign of 1773 not having been so favourable to their arms as they hoped, the empress Catherine wrote an autograph letter to general Lloyd, inviting him to take the command of one of the two armies employed against the Turks."¹³¹ Or so at least his son would remember in the 1840's. That the year 1773 had proven distinctly unkind to the military fortunes of Russia in the Balkans was certainly true. Field Marshal Rumyantsev, the Russian commander-in-chief, had been driven back from Silistria in late June; during the autumn which followed, he was forced to divert a considerable portion of his army to the relief of southern Russia, where a vast swath of territory had suddenly exploded into rebellion against St. Petersburg. And for the soldiers who remained on the Turkish front, the logistical situation was nothing short of horrendous.¹³²

In short, the prospects for the 1774 campaign were decidedly grim. Yet Henry

Lloyd found the opportunity to intervene in this difficult situation quite impossible to resist. He was confident that an energetic and decisive course of action might yet salvage victory from a conflict which had dragged on hopelessly for years; and he was convinced that it was up to him to show Russia the way.¹³³ “He accordingly, after some preliminary concessions had been made to him, repaired to St. Petersburg, where he was most graciously received by the empress, who desired him to prepare a plan for the next campaign.”¹³⁴

Whether Lloyd’s intervention in Russo-Turkish War was really so straightforward as he and his son both asserted in print is uncertain. Did he go because he was solicited by the shrewd empress Catherine, or was there perhaps some intervention by the British government? The answer to the latter question seems to be negative. Though the Russian war effort had begun with the support of Britain, which had proven decisive in the early naval engagements, London had subsequently lost interest.¹³⁵ By the first months of 1774, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, Robert Gunning, was frankly contemptuous of Russia’s political and military predicament. His dispatch from 11 February, detailing the discussion that took place at the tsarist court regarding the next campaign on the Danube, makes no reference to Lloyd.¹³⁶

Lloyd’s first appearance in Gunning’s dispatches came in June, in the context of an effort to recruit other English officers to the Russian war effort. “The court having understood that the general Lloyd had prevailed upon several English officers of distinction to accompany him to the Russian army, orders have been sent to prince Galitzin at Vienna to acquaint them that it had been resolved to receive no more volunteers among the Russian troops.”¹³⁷ This obstacle, it seems, was soon overcome. “I understand,” Gunning would subsequently report, “that the English officers who

accompanied general Lloyd are arrived at the army and were received in the most polite manner by marshall Romanzow [Rumyanchev], from whom they have met with every possible attention.”¹³⁸ The confusion surrounding the admission of English officers was characteristic of the atmosphere of uncertainty which Lloyd would have found upon his own arrival at the Russian camp. There were few men in this army who believed that their predicament would be resolved any time soon.¹³⁹

In the second volume of his military memoirs, Lloyd was happy to take credit for the strategy which turned the tide of war in 1774. Lloyd wrote that it was he who had maintained “the necessity of passing the Danube as the only means of obtaining an honourable peace, which a battle or two at most would procure. The plan was adopted and had the most complete success.”¹⁴⁰ The reality, as ever, was far more complicated. Certainly Lloyd took an active part in the operation that saw the whole Russian army push south across the Danube; and he seems to have played a particularly key role at the battle of Silistria, fought in the second half of June, which would decide the outcome of the campaign and indeed the war.¹⁴¹ Yet he was merely one of the generals of the Russian right flank. In any case, after Silistria the road to Constantinople was open, and the Turks therefore felt compelled to sue for peace in early July.¹⁴²

Of course by this time Lloyd’s enthusiasm for the Russian cause was fading fast. The haste with which the Russians agreed to the treaty of Kjukuk-Kajnardzij disturbed him: “Had not some political reason and the interior disturbances of Pugacheff interfered, the Russian army might in a few weeks have been in possession of Constantinople.”¹⁴³ Nor did Lloyd have any illusions about his future in the army of a land such as Russia, the inherent weaknesses and unreliability of which he had now observed at close range. The infighting that characterized life at the imperial court at St. Petersburg, to which he

returned after operations in the Balkans ceased, served merely to confirm his doubts. It is a measure of Lloyd's contribution to the victory against Turkey that the empress, working through her great minister Panin, made an effort to keep him in her service. Yet Lloyd could not be convinced. Instead, on the grounds that he had been refused the Order of St. Anne because of his plebeian birth, he suddenly quit Russia, renouncing what little material rewards he had won, and took off in search of adventures elsewhere.¹⁴⁴

Hannibal Lloyd claims that the suddenness of his father's departure from Russia also had much to do with the fact that "his presence was required in England on important business".¹⁴⁵ What this business might have been he does not say. The younger Lloyd was content simply to note that after his father returned, he once again lived in England and, after 1778, "occasionally in France and in the Netherlands."¹⁴⁶ Regardless, Henry Lloyd's movements immediately after leaving Russia, insofar as they can be reconstructed, betrayed no obvious sense of urgency. Rather than return to England at once, he headed south, revisiting Italy, Spain, and then Portugal. It was also said that he visited Gibraltar just before the beginning of the famous siege, holding long discussions with Governor Elliot and offering advice on how the British bastion might be most effectively defended.¹⁴⁷

What is certain is that by this time, in early 1779, events were drawing Lloyd back to England. The war which had erupted between Britain and its restless American colonies had evolved into a global war with France and Spain, and Britain itself was now facing invasion. It was a situation which seemed to cry out for men of imagination and intelligence. And once more, after forty years of drama, Henry Lloyd simply could not resist the lure of a crisis. The result, of course, was the Rhapsody, with consequences which have already been recounted, and upon which this thesis is based.

In the aftermath of the aborted publication of the Rhapsody, Lloyd returned to the Continent.¹⁴⁸ Now entering his seventh decade, Lloyd would spend his remaining few years in a modest house near Huy, in modern-day Belgium, occupied exclusively with literary endeavours. In 1781, he published a second volume of his history of the Seven Years War, together with a reissue of the first volume which had appeared in London fifteen years earlier. He dedicated this history to George Augustus Frederick, the Prince of Wales and future King George IV, in the hope that the young prince would remember that “the abilities, courage, and activity of the monarch of a single country” could, like Frederick the Great, “resist the efforts and baffle the views of many hostile nations”.¹⁴⁹

The publication of the Continuation marked the effective end of Henry Lloyd’s career as a public figure. Two years later, on 9 June 1783, Henry Lloyd died. But even in death, the old Welsh rogue proved a magnet for drama. His contemporary French translator, the Marquis de Mesnon, recorded that on his death, “a man was presented without any other right or title than the protection of the English government and he seized, on the pretext of financial claim, all of his books and papers”.¹⁵⁰

For a final reckoning of the character of the genial, brilliant, bewildering adventurer who was Henry Lloyd, one can do no better than to recall a portrait left by the person who perhaps knew him best, Pietro Verri:

He has great ideas on legislation and politics, and especially on war. He is a good mathematician and has great esteem for geometry. He speaks excellently and writes Italian, French, and Spanish apart from English. He can speak enough German to be understood. He has a great memory for the finances of every sovereign and can be so detailed that it is amazing...I do not know a man so seductive and capable of organizing a system to reach his goals. But to follow him does not last a month; it seems that his native ferocity scorns bending and breaks every thread...His morality is not clear; his first impulse is the ambition to lead; he is too distant from the real world and that is what embarrasses me infinitely. He is capable of compromising anyone...He is a man of many merits, but has not been able to keep a friend in the whole world through which he has

passed.¹⁵¹

Contradiction and complexity were indeed the only constants in Henry Lloyd's life. Though a lifelong critic of the Catholic Church, he had maintained close relations with the Jesuits. He had spied for the Stuart Pretender, but ended his literary career by warmly dedicating his final book to a Hanoverian Prince of Wales. He despised absolutism, but spent much of life in the service of distinctly illiberal regimes. He was sympathetic to English radicals, but seems to have cultivated intimate ties with some of the most senior members of the government they despised, and was content to accede to its instructions on more than one occasion. The man who had begun his military career advising the French on the most efficient way to invade England ended it by using much of the same information to advise the English on the most effective way to keep the French at bay.

By modern standards Lloyd's life of far-flung military adventure and ambiguous loyalties may well seem outlandish. But by the standards of his own time, it was hardly unprecedented. The eighteenth-century was an age in which true national loyalties were as rare as war and political corruption were common, and as such it was easy for men of one country to serve with distinction in another.¹⁵² Some, like Captain Peter Drake, initially went abroad because they would not or could not serve under their native sovereigns; Drake, an Irish Jacobite, served as a professional soldier in Dutch, Spanish, and French armies during the early years of the century, on account of which he was briefly jailed in an English prison. Yet, just as Henry Lloyd ultimately made his peace with Hanoverian Britain, a final shift of allegiance took Drake into the British Army, where he fought with distinction in the Duke of Marlborough's last campaign in Flanders.¹⁵³ Drake, like Lloyd, was a man of relatively humble origins. But the ranks of

eighteenth-century soldiers-of-fortune also included figures of the most exalted ancestry. Maurice de Saxe, under whom Lloyd actually served during the War of the Austrian Succession, was the illegitimate son of the Polish king Augustus II and the Countess Aurora von Konigsmarck; notwithstanding his Polish origins, and the fact that his earliest memories of combat were of fighting the French at the battle of Malplaquet, he ended his life a marshal of France, having proven himself one of the most talented and successful military commanders in the history of the French Army.¹⁵⁴

What distinguishes Lloyd's life from other contemporary soldiers-of-fortune is the sheer extent of his travels: to have served so many different causes, in so many different armies, and to have journeyed from an obscure village in northern Wales to such distant and diverse locales as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Russia. He was, in short, a man of experience sufficiently vast to be taken seriously, but sufficiently varied to prevent trust. And through his wars and his writings he had established a reputation for military competence which would have made it difficult, even at the least threatening of moments, for his public meditations on the security of Britain to be ignored. In the military context of 1779, it proved altogether impossible. *By other time in history, not even when Napoleon's army lay encamped at Boulogne, was the French navy so near its oft-dreamt-of goal, the invasion of England.*¹⁵⁶

The sixteen years which had elapsed since the Peace of Paris in 1763 had not been kind to British power. Though seemingly invincible in the years immediately following the victories of the Seven Years War, Britain had managed to squander its imperial gains with remarkable speed. What had begun as a taxation squabble had degenerated into an all-out war with the American colonists, whose stubborn resistance to British attacks had emboldened the French to pursue their own, long-postponed plans for revenge.¹⁵⁷ By

Chapter Three: The Military Crisis of 1779

“While the terrors of an invasion and its consequences hang over our heads, it is the duty of every man to contribute with his person and advice to the support of the state.”¹⁵⁵ Thus did Henry Lloyd open the fourth and central chapter of his *Rhapsody*, and the urgency of his words was genuine and justified. Indeed, it is impossible to understand this statement, the contents of the chapter which it opened, and the decision to suppress the book in which it was found, without an appreciation of the extraordinarily perilous military predicament of Britain in the second half of 1779. It is true that the invasion crisis of 1779 has generally been overshadowed in the popular imagination by more famous moments of danger, such as 1588 or 1805 or 1940. Yet the fact remains that in the year 1779 Great Britain was denuded of most of its professional troops and a considerable portion of its navy, even as a superior enemy fleet sailed up the English Channel and a French invasion force assembled in Normandy. It is no exaggeration to state that this was one of the most dangerous moments in modern British history. As the French historian Lacour-Gayet wrote, “Never at any other time in history, not even when Napoleon’s army lay encamped at Boulogne, was the French navy so near its oft-dreamt-of goal, the invasion of England.”¹⁵⁶

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1778, France had declared decisively for America and against the British, putting a further enormous strain on the already overextended military resources of Britain. The French declaration of war also augured a renewal of hostilities between Britain and the other Bourbon power, Spain; and though Charles III of Spain characteristically hesitated for several more months, the prospect of avenging past humiliations was ultimately too strong for him to resist. And so, on 16 June 1779, the Spanish declared war on Britain as well.¹⁵⁸

Rarely had Britain been as thoroughly isolated as it was at this instant. As Lord Sandwich lamented to King George III, "we have no one friend or ally to assist us, on the contrary all those who ought to be our allies, except Portugal, act against us in supplying our enemies with the means of equipping their fleets."¹⁵⁹ It is worth noting that at this moment the British were also confronted by a sharp deterioration in their fortunes in Ireland; the local "Volunteer" companies, formed during the previous year to defend the island against feared American raids or French landings, had begun to drift out of government control, as additional units formed spontaneously and often with republican overtones.¹⁶⁰ As the British government at Westminster dithered in the face of these developments, statesmen across Europe awaited Britain's defeat with a mixture of impatience and satisfaction, and a distinct lack of sympathy.¹⁶¹

Much of the contemporary blame for Britain's embarrassing military predicament was directed towards the First Lord of the Admiralty, the afore-quoted Earl of Sandwich. Much of this was probably unwarranted. From the start of his latest stint as head of the fleet in 1771, Sandwich had been hampered by the legacy of his predecessor, Sir Edward Hawke, a superb commander at sea who had proved an administrative disappointment on land. The paper strength of the Royal Navy had continued to be impressive throughout

Hawke's tenure at the Admiralty. However, the encouraging number of vessels in service could not alter the fact that too many of these so-called "ships of the line" mounted less than seventy guns, and that many of these lightly armed vessels had been built too quickly, with insufficiently seasoned timbers. To a certain extent such shortcomings could be attributed to the pressures of the Seven Years War, when many of the ships had been constructed; but some of the vessels built after 1763 proved just as unreliable.¹⁶² Furthermore, vital naval stores had been neglected to the extent that by the beginning of the 1770's the principal naval dockyards each had less than a year's supply of timber on hand.¹⁶³ In short, only eight years after the Peace of Paris had confirmed British command of the seas, the Royal Navy was in dire need of an overhaul.¹⁶⁴

Repairs began almost immediately upon Sandwich's return to the Admiralty. While many ships were rebuilt, some of the least useful and most inadequately gunned vessels of Hawke's fleet were scrapped or converted to storeships.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, steps were taken to replenish the depleted naval stores as quickly as possible. In this last task, however, the First Lord was confronted with an array of particularly stubborn challenges. The rebellion which swept through the American colonies in the mid-1770's had the effect of depriving the Royal Navy of its principal sources of timber; and even as supplies dwindled, the Admiralty had to compete with the East India Company, which was committed to its own enormous shipbuilding programme, for what timber remained available. Sandwich's response to this predicament was twofold. First, he sponsored new legislation which would set a strict limit on the quantities of timber which the East India Company could purchase over the course of a year. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, he took pains to revive the old Baltic timber trade, fostering the importation of logs via the port of Stettin to replace the lost supplies from America.¹⁶⁶ His success

was such that by 1779 he was able to report to Parliament that there was enough timber on hand to last three years, enough hemp for five years, and an abundance of iron, pitch, and tar.¹⁶⁷ Sandwich was similarly instrumental in ensuring that the navy benefited from advances in technology, such as the new practice of coppering ships' bottoms in order to prevent worm damage and increase sailing speed. Furthermore, it was Sandwich who grasped the devastating potential of the carronade, a short but heavy-calibre gun designed specifically for short-range combat, which was invented in early 1779 and which, at the behest of the First Lord, was added to the armament of every class of vessel by the end of the year.¹⁶⁸

On account of these tangible achievements, so long overlooked by hostile Whiggish historians, Sandwich's reputation in scholarly circles has received a dramatic boost over the last few decades. The same man whom W.M. James once scorned as the author of "a long story of administrative jobbery and corruption" is now routinely lauded as "an exceptionally dedicated and inventive First Lord", who "understood more about the Navy and its administration than any civilian...since James II."¹⁶⁹ If the Royal Navy remained relatively unready for the challenges of a new global war against the Bourbon powers, the fault lay far less with Sandwich than with the head of the ministry, Lord North. As early as 1775, when it became clear that the American colonies were prepared to fight in defence of their "liberty", the First Lord had argued that the perennial difficulty of finding enough seamen to bring the fleet up to full strength made it imperative that the Admiralty should be permitted to begin preparing for a French declaration of war without delay. This, unfortunately, was too much for North to countenance: the prime minister was fearful of antagonizing France and Spain, and in any case thoroughly alarmed by the monetary cost of heeding Sandwich's advice.¹⁷⁰

Still, Sandwich's tenure at the Admiralty was hardly beyond reproach. The fact that the opposition tended to exaggerate the depth of corruption within his administration does not alter the fact that the First Lord, following the standard practice of politicians in power at the time, did not hesitate to use his position to advance the careers of his friends.¹⁷¹ Yet the single most glaring blemish on Sandwich's record as head of the Admiralty was that under his regime the Royal Navy was invaded by politics to such an extent that its very efficiency as a fighting force was undermined. The infighting had its origins in the atmosphere of mutual recrimination which followed the indecisive battle of Ushant in 1778, and the quarrel which had erupted between Admiral Keppel and his subordinate Vice-Admiral Palliser over who deserved the greater share of blame for the failure to defeat the French fleet. Exacerbating the two men's professional differences were their contrasting political allegiances: Keppel was the opposition's designated naval hero, while Palliser was an adherent of the North ministry and a particular protege of Sandwich. Sandwich's inability or unwillingness to prevent the successive courts-martial of the feuding admirals served to split the Navy into two hostile factions, soon immortalized as the Montagus, after the First Lord's own surname, and the Capulets, from "Keppelites".¹⁷² Too often in the years which followed, proven ability would count for less in determining the trajectory of an officer's career than whether he was a Montagu or a Capulet. When the bitterness was most intense, as in the winter of 1781-82, a navy captain could write how "the navy is torn about by dissension...Now party, disunion, mutual jealousy, and want of confidence are universal."¹⁷³

Admittedly the situation was not yet quite so dire in 1779. But the potential for disaster had already become clear by March 1779, when Keppel, having lost all respect for the government, chose to resign the command of the Channel Fleet. For days, the

Admiralty was unable to find anyone to replace him; the two most likely candidates, admirals Howe and Mann, were both Capulets, and they were unwilling to serve.¹⁷⁴ Treading ever closer to complete humiliation, the government was ultimately compelled to accept an offer of service from a man who had not commanded at sea for twenty years, the sixty-four year old Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Hardy. Hardy had made his most notable mark as a second-in-command, first to Boscawen at Louisburg in 1758, and then to Hawke at Quiberon Bay in 1759. He had not otherwise distinguished himself, however. On the other hand, his age and his easy manner seemed well-suited to the task of soothing tempers and reconciling the Montagus and Capulets who would serve under him.¹⁷⁵ And insofar as Hardy was not an ideal choice to command the Channel Fleet, the government thought it could compensate for his weaknesses by providing him with a thoroughly capable flag-captain: Richard Kempenfelt. Though very nearly as old as his new superior, Kempenfelt had won acclaim for championing new, albeit French-inspired, tactics as well as improved methods of signalling; even more importantly, he was an officer "much respected by all parties and one well qualified to heal all little breaches."¹⁷⁶

Besides Sandwich, the chief influence on British military operations and preparedness in 1779 was the same man who decided the fate of Lloyd's Rhapsody: the commander-in-chief of the army, Lord Jeffrey Amherst. Born in Kent in 1718, to a family of comfortable but modest means, Amherst's great opportunity had come in 1758 when he was given command of the army sent to besiege Louisburg. Frequently over-cautious and somewhat plodding in style, but also methodical, unflappable, and determined, as commander-in-chief in America he had played an invaluable role in moderating the natural impetuosity of his subordinate James Wolfe, and after Wolfe's death at the Plains of Abraham, he successfully completed the conquest of French

Canada. In general, Amherst's campaigns during the Seven Years War were characterized by an aversion to taking risks and an emphasis, close to obsession, on achieving an overwhelming advantage before committing himself to battle.¹⁷⁷ Nor would the passage of time alter his meticulous approach to war: during an address to the House of Lords in early 1779, he stated that even if Britain could manage to field ten men for every one of the enemy, the nation ought to strive to make it twenty to one.¹⁷⁸ In the event, as indeed will become obvious in the pages ahead, neither ratio was even remotely feasible.

Yet it was Sandwich's navy, not Amherst's army, which remained Britain's first and most crucial line of defence against foreign attack, and the doctrines governing the conduct of the navy in the face of invasion were well-established. The experience of earlier invasion scares had made it clear that the Channel Fleet's proper role was to maintain the closest possible watch on the main French battle fleet, presumably based at Brest, and to seek a decisive engagement as soon as it appeared in the open sea. As for the transports which would be responsible for conveying French troops across the English Channel, there was little chance that these would dare put to sea in the absence of a major fleet escort; and the risk of a sudden sortie could be contained by stationing a loose flotilla of frigates and other lightly-armed warships off the French Channel ports. Such was the strategy which had foiled Louis XV's invasion plan in 1759, and which would consistently frustrate the designs of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France in the 1790's and early 1800's.¹⁷⁹

In 1779, however, the convergence of theory and practice left much to be desired. The close blockade of potential embarkation ports was handled competently by Rear-Admiral Drake's squadron, based on the Downs; but the much more critical prong of the strategy, the blockading of the French battle fleet at Brest, was not executed in time, the

victim of a crippling shortage of ships and men and, it has been argued, Sandwich's own lack of diligence.¹⁸⁰

By Sandwich's own reckoning, as expressed to the House of Lords in April, the Royal Navy could at that time muster seventy-nine active ships of the line, with ten more in port ready to join them, and another seven in sufficiently advanced stages of construction that they would enter service by the end of the same year.¹⁸¹ Unfortunately this formal estimate, while technically correct, was a poor measure of the numbers which could be called upon in home waters, since Britain's colonial interests in America, Asia, and the Mediterranean also required powerful squadrons for protection. It was therefore only by making the most strenuous exertions that the Admiralty was able to provide Hardy with a fleet of thirty of the line, which was the same number which had fought under Keppel and Palliser at Ushant a year earlier. Of course at Ushant, Britain had only had to contend with the French Navy; with Spain now on the verge of actively entering the war alongside France, the urgency of bringing more battle-ready ships into service was greater than ever.¹⁸²

Even when additional ships could be found, there remained the even greater challenge of obtaining crews to man them. Impressment, the prevailing method of recruiting sailors, was often conducted with the utmost ruthlessness, but it still did not work particularly well; given the harsh conditions of service and low pay, individuals would resort to the most extreme expedients to avoid or escape the press gang. Indeed, in any given year during this period, desertions cost the Navy nearly ten thousand recruits which it could ill-afford to lose.¹⁸³ The result was predictable. In March 1779, the ships of the line in home waters could muster only 19,200 seamen and marines, which was 5,600 short of their full complement.¹⁸⁴ Admittedly it was still early in the season; but

even at the end of May, after two more months of feverish effort, a survey of twelve battleships of the Channel Fleet still showed a shortfall of 1,416 men.¹⁸⁵

Another element which seems to have played a role in delaying the departure of Hardy's fleet was the French decision to attack the Channel Islands at the beginning of May. Five thousand enemy troops, commanded by the Prince of Nassau, descended on Jersey; and though local British forces quickly drove off the invaders, news of the French expedition seemed sufficiently threatening to Vice-Admiral Arbuthnot that he hastened to the scene with four ships of the line.¹⁸⁶ This sortie not only proved quite unnecessary, but it forced the postponement of Arbuthnot's intended departure for the North American station. By the time he again returned to Torbay, rumours that the French Brest fleet might already be preparing to put to sea convinced the Admiralty that Arbuthnot's little squadron could not sail for America without a more powerful escort, at least until it had reached the open ocean. Accordingly, ten ships of the line under Vice-Admiral Darby, Hardy's second-in-command, were instructed on 13 May to proceed to Torbay at once. But westerly winds prevented Darby from leaving Portsmouth until 21 May. It was 10 June before Darby, with his ships now in desperate need of resupply, rejoined the Channel Fleet.¹⁸⁷

In fairness, it was never Sandwich's intention that Hardy should keep the rest of the Channel Fleet in port until Darby's return.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, it seems that even as late as 21 May, when he was urging Hardy to "hasten his departure" regardless of Darby's delays, the First Lord had yet to comprehend that the Channel Fleet remained severely undermanned, and that to force Hardy to put to sea with his ships still so ill-prepared could be disastrous.¹⁸⁹ It was only after receiving Hardy's reply on 24 May, with its desperate pleas for more men, that Sandwich seems to have realized the gravity

of Hardy's situation.¹⁹⁰ By 10 June, when Darby rejoined the Channel Fleet, Sandwich had become convinced that there was simply no hope of satisfying Hardy's pleas for more seamen, except by resorting to the drastic expedient of abandoning some ships in port and using the displaced crews to bring the remaining ships up to full strength.¹⁹¹ Unfortunately, as Hardy was forced to admit to Sandwich, this had already been tried: the crews which the Admiralty had marked for dispersal were either so riddled with invalids and contagious disease that they were beyond use, or they had already been removed from their ships three weeks earlier, in order to give Darby a functional squadron.¹⁹² So the problem of manpower persisted. It would be another five days before Hardy finally scraped together enough warm bodies to set off for Brest, on 16 June 1779. And by that time, the French Brest Fleet had already escaped to the open sea.¹⁹³

The attempt to meet recruitment targets was a source of just as much frustration for the Royal Navy's counterparts in the British Army. In late 1778, Parliament had made provision for a grand total of 125,000 men under arms, a number which included 24,000 mercenaries imported from abroad. Given the demands of the American war, as well as various other colonial interests, the vast majority of these troops were stationed outside of Britain. The defence of Britain itself was entrusted to only 30,000 professional soldiers, three thousand of whom were so disabled that they were suitable only for manning fixed defences. Alongside these were sixty-seven battalions, amounting to 37,000 men, of English and Welsh militia; and three thousand Scottish fencibles, which could only be called upon for purely local duties.¹⁹⁴ Taken together, these numbers would more or less seem to vindicate Lord North's declaration in the Commons, on 21 June 1779, that there were "at present in the Kingdom 71,000 land forces, of whom 63,000 were effective men".¹⁹⁵

Even if taken literally, these were hardly reassuring numbers, and the reality was actually much worse than it seemed on paper. It is clear that by the summer of 1779, when the invasion scare was at its height, the number of regular soldiers upon whom Lord Amherst could call in the event of a French landing was no more than 20,000.¹⁹⁶ This inevitably increased the importance of the militia, and its actual strength of 30,000 was much nearer to the original estimates than was the case with the army. Unfortunately, militiamen were at best amateurs; patriotic fervour could not altogether compensate for inexperience and a relative lack of training. A longer period of service might have served to increase their military value; but the governing statute limited the term of service in the militia to three years, regardless of how long the war lasted, so that experienced men were constantly being discharged, and their places taken by novices. The only force in the British Isles which was both militarily reliable and close to full strength was the army in Ireland, which could field approximately 10,000 men.¹⁹⁷ Yet conditions in Ireland, where a French landing of some sort was widely expected and where local discontent was in any case rife throughout 1779, made it impossible to consider redeploying even a portion of this small force to England.¹⁹⁸

This profoundly unimpressive tally of soldiers was in spite of a law, passed by Parliament in January 1779, which had lowered the physical and age requirements for both volunteers and pressed men, increased the privileges accorded to volunteers upon discharge, and widened the class of men subject to impressment.¹⁹⁹ The number of volunteers did not significantly increase, while the press gangs still failed to meet their assigned quotas. And even when the press gangs were ostensibly more successful, other difficulties persisted. Too many of the men who were obtained for the army in this way were subsequently found to be legally exempt from the press or physically incapable of

service. Indeed, of the 1,463 men who had been impressed in England by October 1779, over three hundred had to be discharged. And from the eleven hundred which remained, only 726 were ultimately incorporated into units stationed in Britain itself. Given all the effort that had been expended, it was a rather pitiful number.²⁰⁰

The failure of the 1779 Act had become evident many months before October, however. With the Spanish declaration of war and the recognition, in late spring, that invasion was now a real possibility, the government was deluged with offers of assistance from members of the nobility and gentry, who expressed a willingness to raise new regiments for the army at their own expense.²⁰¹ Known as “raising men for rank”, this practice was not entirely unprecedented, having been employed on occasion during earlier wars. But the government had good reason to be wary. In most instances the regimental patron took it for granted that the command of the unit was an issue for him to decide, whether he chose to exercise it himself or bestow it on someone else. Similarly, the proposer almost always expected to be able to name at least some, if not all, of the remaining officers. The idea that birth and political influence, rather than experience or proven military ability, should dictate military advancement was hardly new to the British Army; but “raising men for rank” opened whole new opportunities for promoting utterly unworthy individuals to positions of leadership. Sometimes, it is true, the new regiments were entrusted to experienced, battle-hardened officers; yet such men tended to be drawn from established units, which were thereby weakened.²⁰²

With these disadvantages in mind, the North ministry initially decided against “raising men for rank.” Instead, once the Spanish declaration had been presented to Parliament, the government sought yet another expansion of the militia, introducing a bill that would have doubled the force. Yet the measure immediately ran into opposition, not

merely from the government's usual opponents, but even from some within its own ranks. Members of all political stripes expressed incredulity that anyone should think it feasible to continue recruiting the old regiments, raising new regiments, and acquiring more men for the navy, as Parliament had approved late in the previous year, while simultaneously doubling the militia. In the argument over which task should have precedence, the militia proposals were ultimately defeated.²⁰³

The government was therefore left with no alternative but to moderate its stance against the gentlemen who wished to organize regiments of their own. Over the months that followed, approval was given for a total of fourteen new regiments of infantry, two of light dragoons, and three of fencibles; three of these units were sent to reinforce the Plymouth garrison in October, and by November, "raising men for rank" had added nine thousand soldiers to the home army.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, it is doubtful if any of the new units would have been ready to engage the enemy had the French actually come ashore. And the North ministry continued to decline most of the offers to raise new regiments, even at the height of the invasion scare in August, on the grounds that these would interfere with the recruiting of the established regular units.²⁰⁵

It was not merely in numbers of men that the British land defences were deficient in 1779. Amherst's view was that given the lack of reliable intelligence about where the French intended to come ashore, the defence of the capital must supersede all other considerations. To this end, he resolved to assemble not one but two "armies" in the immediately vicinity of London in the course of June and early July.²⁰⁶ The first, at Coxheath in Kent, consisted of five regiments of regular infantry and fifteen of militia, totalling about ten thousand men, under the command of Lieutenant-General Peirson; this force was supplemented by a few more regiments of dragoons and militia which had been

dispatched under Major-General Sloper to Rye and Hastings, from where it was assumed they would be able to maintain a more direct watch on the Sussex coast. Yet the exact details of how Peirson and Sloper were supposed to interact in the event of a French landing were left vague. As late as 21 August, which was actually after the Bourbon fleet had been sighted off Plymouth, Peirson was still uncertain about whether, if Sloper's units came under attack, he should go immediately to their aid, or remain encamped at Coxheath until Amherst explicitly ordered him to do otherwise.²⁰⁷ Preparations at Warley in Essex, where the other of the two main forces defending London was stationed, were not much better. Here there were 6,300 troops, organized in four regular and ten militia regiments, under the command of Lieutenant-General Parker. Parker himself had little faith in the condition of his militia units; he complained that their weapons were in dire need of repair, while one of his subordinates was moved to protest that during one day of manoeuvres it was found that two-thirds of the muskets in his regiment were completely useless.²⁰⁸ And the "armies" at Coxheath and Warley were both dangerously short of cavalry.²⁰⁹

Still, for all their flaws, these two concentrations were far more imposing than any other force in the country. Indeed, a concern was expressed that though London might be more or less covered, the ports and dockyards were naked, to the extent that "the enemy may easily land 150 miles from a single soldier".²¹⁰ At Chatham, for instance, there were only two militia regiments, while Dover, Southampton, and Bristol were each entrusted to a single regiment.²¹¹ The defence preparations, or lack thereof, at Plymouth and Portsmouth were of particular importance, since these were the two most likely objectives of the enemy's invasion plan. It is clear that neither of these vital naval bases was adequately protected. Yet at Portsmouth, at least, the officer in command,

Lieutenant-General Robert Monckton, made vigorous and constructive efforts to improve the situation. After a discouraging report to Amherst on 20 July, which essentially admitted that little had been done since a visit by the commander-in-chief in the previous year, a frenetic programme of restoration and reinforcement was set in motion.²¹² By 1 August, Monckton was able to report that all magazines and stores were being replenished; the batteries at Fort Cumberland were being made fit for service; and the Gosport fortified lines were being overhauled and refurbished.²¹³ There was nevertheless a limit to what could be done in so little time and with so few resources at hand. Portsmouth's defenders could call upon four militia units, augmented by six more companies of the Forty-First regiment, composed entirely of invalids, but with the exception of a handful of artillerymen, absolutely no regular army soldiers.²¹⁴ In an attempt to illustrate the difficulties he was facing, Monckton told Amherst that two of his four militia regiments were so badly equipped, their weapons in such poor condition, that he had no other option but to raid the naval arsenal for replacement arms. At the same time, he asked for two additional militia regiments to expedite the work which he had already begun. Yet Amherst had no such units to spare.²¹⁵ was finally compelled to

Plymouth, lacking a commander of Monckton's competence, was in even worse straits. Located much further to the west than Portsmouth, its vulnerability to an attack from Brest or any of the other major French ports on the Bay of Biscay was judged sufficiently great to warrant the inclusion of regular troops in its garrison: Plymouth, under Lieutenant-General Sir David Lindsay, boasted two regular battalions, two more of militia, and three companies of the 41st invalids.²¹⁶ Unfortunately, given Plymouth's complicated geography, an invading force could choose between a variety of different angles of attack. To defend against all of these effectively, the garrison would have had to

disperse across a fairly wide area, portions of which had yet to be adequately fortified; even had the desired fortifications existed, there were simply not enough armed men to fill them.²¹⁷ The garrison's predicament cried out for strong leadership. However, in contrast to the situation at Portsmouth, Plymouth lacked a single military authority to whom members of all the services were ultimately responsible. The office of governor was held by Lord Waldegrave, but his refusal to leave London meant that Plymouth was forced to contend with three effectively autonomous chiefs: the naval commander Vice-Admiral Lord Shuldham, the dockyard commissioner Captain Ourry, and the garrison commander General Lindsay, none of whom had much regard for the others. Though Lindsay was appointed acting-governor in Waldegrave's absence, his two colleagues altogether refused to acknowledge his authority over them, and Lindsay proved totally incapable of pressing his claim.²¹⁸ The result was that even the most urgent projects for strengthening Plymouth's defences tended to be delayed by inter-service squabbling. Rather than take the decisive steps necessary to bring his subordinates to heel, Lindsay preferred instead to bombard Amherst with ever more elaborate tales of his plight and the scarcity of the resources at his command. To these Amherst was finally compelled to respond, with evident irritation, that while the garrison was undoubtedly in need of reinforcement, there were simply no further troops available.²¹⁹ The inescapable truth was that no part of the threatened southern coast of England was held by a force of sufficient strength in 1779, even as late as August, when the Franco-Spanish fleet, so long expected, actually entered the English Channel.²²⁰

With the wisdom of hindsight, it appears now that the emergency was not quite as desperate as it seemed to those who had the misfortune to live through it. Unbeknownst to the British, the Bourbon fleet which appeared off Plymouth on 16 August was already

close to disintegration. After slipping out of Brest with twenty-five ships of the line on 4 June, the French Admiral D'Orvilliers had wasted several priceless weeks in waiting for the Spanish Cadiz fleet to join him; by the time the junction was effected on 23 July, creating a huge force of sixty-six of the line, the combined fleet was already short of supplies and in the throes of an epidemic of disease.²²¹ Moreover, the sheer size of the armada rendered it unwieldy, so that it was only with the greatest difficulty that it was able to preserve something resembling a fighting formation. And all these troubles had the effect of inflaming the tensions which had already developed between the French officers and their Spanish counterparts.²²² It is certainly true that a few of the more sagacious British naval commanders sensed the hollowness of the enemy's display. Lord Mulgrave, one of Hardy's captains and a junior lord of the Admiralty, declared that thirty ships of the line were as great a number as could properly be brought to action, and urged his superiors to seek a battle as soon as possible.²²³ Similarly, the naval commander at Portsmouth, Sir Thomas Pye, had no doubt that the size of the Bourbon fleet would prove a real disadvantage against the smaller but more experienced and nimble British Channel Fleet.²²⁴

Yet as in so many other respects, 1779 was a year when wisdom fared badly in Britain, and such clear-headed military analyses were lost amid a rising tide of panic. The appearance of the Bourbon fleet off Plymouth on 17 August seemed to signal that invasion could occur at any moment; the alarm swept rapidly from town to town along the Channel coast and far inland, sending those who could afford to do so fleeing away from shores they imagined would soon be under fire.²²⁵ Nor was Admiral Hardy capable of taking those bold steps which might have pierced the prevailing gloom. He adhered to a much more cautious line of thinking about how to respond to the Bourbon fleet than

men like Mulgrave or Pye.²²⁶ Indeed, Hardy's conduct during the summer of 1779 would unleash a torrent of criticism against him and the government that had entrusted him with command. In fairness it must be admitted that the question of whether Hardy, with only 28 ships of the line, ought to risk a battle against the much larger enemy fleet was one upon which opinions were divided, and Hardy would have his defenders both within and beyond the Royal Navy.²²⁷ His own explanation was sensible enough: his progressive withdrawal up the Channel during last days of August, culminating in the arrival of the Channel Fleet at Spithead on 3 September, was a calculated ploy to draw the enemy fleet into unfamiliar waters, further and further from its own base at Brest, and nearer to those ports from which Hardy himself could expect to receive some sort of reinforcement.²²⁸ The general and lasting impression, however, would be that the admiral had run away in the face of the enemy, "abandoning a naked coast to their insults."²²⁹ Even those, like Kempenfelt and Captain Charles Middleton, who approved of the idea of withdrawal did not imagine that the retreat would extend as far as Spithead.²³⁰ Back in London, Admirals Keppel and Palliser, who were otherwise in disagreement on almost every personal, political, and professional issue, were united in their utter contempt for Hardy's conduct.²³¹

As it happened, the Bourbon fleet would be compelled to quit the English Channel regardless of Hardy's conduct, by forces beyond British control. Sickness, an increasingly severe shortage of provisions, uncooperative winds, and the technical shortcomings of his crews, particularly the Spaniards, made it impossible for D'Orvilliers to achieve his ostensible goal of bringing Hardy to battle.²³² On the very day Hardy reached Spithead, the French admiral was ordered to return to port, and a week later he and the combined fleet were back at Brest.²³³ Their return was not, at least initially,

intended to be anything more than temporary; but in the face of unanimous opposition from the fleet's senior officers, who were fearful of encountering autumn storms in the Channel, French ministers abandoned any remaining notion of making a descent on England before the following year.²³⁴ The fleet took up its winter stations, the troops waiting for embarkation in Normandy were dispersed into garrisons on 17 October, and the Spanish admiral sailed home on 9 November.²³⁵

It was, however, many more days before the authorities in Britain came to realize that not only had the Bourbon fleet broken off its pursuit of Hardy at the beginning of September, but that the enemy had actually returned to Brest. At Spithead, the ever-sluggish Hardy continued to be bombarded with messages from Sandwich urging him to get to sea again as soon as possible – which, incredibly, he did not do until 22 October.²³⁶ Well into the autumn, as Lloyd was preparing his Rhapsody for publication, no one knew that the French had resolved against making another attempt at a landing in 1779. As late as 29 October, Amherst wrote to John Robinson at the Treasury that though the season was well-advanced, “we must not talk of decamping and dispersing while our enemies are so prepared and their attempts feasible.”²³⁷ Thus, as long as there remained even the slightest chance of the French renewing their offensive, the garrisons were maintained and the assembled troops kept at their posts and in a state of readiness. It would not be until the second half of November that the government felt it was safe to begin moving regiments into winter quarters.²³⁸

When one reflects on the shocking inadequacy of Britain's military and naval resources, its haphazard and often ill-considered response to the threat of attack, and the size of the forces which had been marshalled by its Bourbon adversaries, the country had been very fortunate to emerge from the great invasion crisis of 1779 more or less

unscathed. Lloyd himself was less rattled by the events of the summer of 1779 than most of his contemporaries. Even Hardy's conduct, which left such a bitter taste in the mouths of most Englishmen, did little to dent his essential optimism: "When I consider [the enemy fleet's] immense superiority," he writes calmly in the Rhapsody, "I cannot help applauding those councils which tended to avoid it... Time and delays, at this moment, and at this season of the year, are a victory."²³⁹

Yet the fact remains that such calm was not typical of British public opinion in the fall and early winter of 1779. Not even when the Dutch had come up the Medway in the 1660's and their guns were heard in London had "a deeper political gloom overspread England", wrote Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, a noted commentator and intimate of ministers who was serving as a Member of Parliament during that fateful season.²⁴⁰ Though the country had avoided the disaster which at one moment during the summer seemed so likely, there was certainly no sense of elation, and even the sense of relief was tempered by the knowledge that some fifty enemy ships of the line remained concentrated at Brest. No sooner had it become clear that no invasion would be forthcoming in 1779 than fears shifted to the dangers which might emerge in 1780. So if the threat of invasion had been averted, it had not been altogether removed.²⁴¹ Profound and widespread trepidation – such was the mood that would have greeted the Rhapsody and its frank appraisal of Britain's vulnerability to invasion in December 1779. That is, if the Rhapsody had actually been released to the public.

Lloyd's Rhapsody had fallen prey to the very military crisis which he had sought to illuminate in its pages. Yet the fact remains that the decision to sacrifice his work was a political one, taken by men of government, whose motives were complex and whose priorities were moulded by more than simple military logic. There is no way to

understand the official response to the Rhapsody without examining the peculiar failings of the government itself. It is to these failings that this thesis will now turn its attention.

The last few months of the year 1779 and the early part of 1780 witnessed an extraordinary heightening of political conflict in Britain. Indeed, one historian has gone so far as to declare that towards the end of 1779, "the governing ministry of Lord North sank into a state of chaos and despair probably unparalleled in modern British political history."²⁴² It was with this profoundly unsettled political environment that Lloyd had to contend in the late autumn and early winter, when his Rhapsody was due to be published.

There is simply no way to separate the particular political crisis of 1779 from the broader and more prolonged crisis of the American Revolutionary War. Even before the end of the Seven Years War, relations between the British colonies in America and the mother country had begun to erode. Within a decade of the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, American resentment over British policies toward local self-rule, taxation, trade, territorial expansion and a host of other issues had so intensified that the colonies were on the brink of rebellion. The disturbances which accompanied the so-called "Boston Tea Party" in late 1773, where rioters attacked and boarded vessels of the East India Company as they lay at anchor in Boston harbour, had provoked the British government to pass a series of "Coercion Acts" in early 1774. Yet the attempt to restore order by force had led to an equally forceful colonial response, until by 1775 the two sides were actively at war. And by this time the contest with America had begun to dominate the British political scene.²⁴³

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Chapter Four: The Political Crisis of 1779

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In any consideration of British politics during the age of the American Revolution, it is important not to assume that the lurid world of parliamentary rhetoric, particularly

as it streamed forth from opposition speakers, was necessarily an accurate reflection of reality. This was an age characterized by a consistent, vicious, and sometimes even wilful misrepresentation of facts. Nevertheless, as John Derry has pointed out in his study of this period, what people imagine is happening, or what they fear may happen, is often a more powerful spur to action than what is really happening. Given the widespread conviction that fundamental issues were at stake in the struggle with America, the violence of the controversy that overtook British politics was natural.²⁴⁴

Among earlier generations of historians, such as Sir George Otto Trevelyan, it was fashionable to interpret the American crisis as a manifestation of the evils perpetrated by King George III. According to this view, the events in America were merely one aspect of a wholesale assault on the political and constitutional trends of eighteenth-century Britain. The formative years of this assault had occurred during the early 1760's, when the king systematically destroyed the power of prominent Whigs in order to reduce Parliament to obedience. All the disasters which followed – the collapse of one unstable ministry after another during the 1760's, the prolonged struggle between the government and John Wilkes, the march toward revolution in America, the mounting challenge to British authority in Ireland, and the clamour for economic and political reform which was so striking a feature of the end of the 1770's – were a direct result of George III's determination to reverse the verdict of the Glorious Revolution and reassert royal prerogatives at the expense of the established Constitution.²⁴⁵ This interpretation, which endured in various forms well into the twentieth-century and which even now retains a powerful hold on the popular imagination, is a tribute to the power of the Whig political tradition of the 1760's and 70's, from which it drew its inspiration.²⁴⁶

The forces of traditional Whig historiography have similarly immortalized the

eighteenth-century as the “classical age” of the British Constitution, the period when the forces which had produced the struggles of the seventeenth-century were at last harnessed by a balanced and stable form of government.²⁴⁷ This was certainly the theme of Henry Lloyd’s own Essay on the English Constitution, published in 1770; in applauding the “monarchico-aristo-democratic” constitutional framework of Britain, Lloyd was in agreement with many other contemporary commentators, such as Sir William Blackstone, whose Commentaries on the Laws of England famously claimed that the British Constitution embodied all the benefits of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy while suffering none of their faults.²⁴⁸ The three powers of the realm – Crown, Lords, and Commons – each acted as a check upon the others, automatically correcting tendencies towards political excess, and thereby ensuring the liberty of all. There is no doubt that the Constitution was a source of great pride for eighteenth-century Britons. Even when they demanded the reform of political institutions, as Lloyd himself was wont to do, they still rooted their arguments in the idea of the balanced Constitution.²⁴⁹

Of course, as more recent scholars have established, much of this was an illusion. Eighteenth-century Britain was as much a land of prejudice and mob violence as of reason, and the political conditions were far from static.²⁵⁰ Even as government and opposition engaged in an unrelenting, raucous, and often ruthless parliamentary war during the era of the American crisis, great changes in English society were beginning to change the character of politics, as a larger proportion of the population began to develop both an interest in national affairs and a desire to influence the political process at Westminster.²⁵¹ This had already been established by the feverish events of 1769-70, when the public had risen up against government attempts to invalidate Wilkes’s election to Parliament, and it would soon find even more dramatic expression in the “Petitioning

Movement" of late 1779 and early 1780.²⁵² There is no doubt that the issues and problems raised by the American war gave impetus to forces in Britain which were already seeking reform, and the older breeds of historian exemplified by Trevelyan were generally inclined to credit the members of the opposition at Westminster for their denunciation of Lord North's heavy-handed American policy.²⁵³ The indisputable fact that Lord North's policy failed makes it tempting to assume that those who advocated other policies must have been right. Yet the truth here, too, is surely more complicated. First, it is important to note that the parliamentary opponents of the government bore no resemblance to a united opposition in the modern sense. The followers of the Marquess of Rockingham, including such disparate personalities as the Duke of Richmond, Charles James Fox and Edmund Burke, may have imagined that they constituted a cohesive political force, but theirs was hardly the only voice of opposition to be heard at Westminster. Lord Chatham and his friends were independent of the Rockingham Whigs, preserving distinct positions on issues such as the propriety of organizing political parties. Most importantly, the Chathamites differed from the Rockinghams on the key question of the supremacy of the British parliament, and to what extent the theory of the British Constitution ought to be modified to reflect the reality of conditions in America.²⁵⁴ Pitt had supported the repeal of the Stamp Act by the Rockingham administration of 1765-66; but his belief that Parliament had no right to impose an internal tax upon the colonies went far beyond anything the Rockingham government of the day was willing to countenance, and led to his total and vociferous rejection of the principles expressed in Rockingham's Declaratory Act of 1766.²⁵⁵ The outbreak of war with the colonies in the mid-1770's did little to bridge the gulf of opinion on American issues which separated the followers of Rockingham and

Chatham. Its only real effect was to reverse their relative positions. By the time France had entered the war in 1778, the Rockinghams had accepted the reality of American independence, while the heirs of Chatham, now led by Lord Shelburne, remained opposed to any peace which altogether surrendered British sovereignty in America.²⁵⁶

The ironic fact is that during the earliest stages of the American crisis there had been little to distinguish the policy of those in the parliamentary opposition from that of successive governments. Indeed, from the beginning the Rockinghams' approach to the American problem had been ambiguous at best. Although their Declaratory Act had vigorously affirmed parliamentary sovereignty over the colonies, their simultaneous repeal of the Stamp Act seemed to confess the inability of Parliament to exercise that sovereignty. During the late 1770's the Rockingham Whigs would castigate North's ministry for its heavy-handed approach; but a decade earlier, during the initial stages of the dispute over Townshend's duties, they had been no less emphatic than their ministerial opponents in condemning the breakdown of law and order in the colonies, and had acquiesced in policies of coercion.²⁵⁷ After news of the Boston Tea Party reached Britain in early 1774, individuals from across the spectrum of British politics rallied around Lord North's coercive legislation: the only Rockingham Whig to oppose it outright was the Duke of Richmond. Certainly the opposition members, whether Rockingham or Chathamite, had no wish to be associated with the forces of rebellion and lawlessness in America.²⁵⁸

Fundamental to the behavior of British politicians of various stripes was their common belief in the supremacy of Parliament. As one scholar has concluded, "the political nation in general believed it needed to exert its authority over the American colonies and it believed it was constitutionally justified in doing so."²⁵⁹ Among major

politicians only Chatham was prepared to limit the sovereignty of Parliament and devolve power to the colonial assemblies. As late as November 1775, the Rockinghams refused to repudiate the tenets of the Declaratory Act which they had sponsored nine years before; but this inevitably left them vulnerable to the question of why a party which continued to endorse the Declaratory Act should insist upon opposing a war fought in defence of its principles.²⁶⁰ It was only with the calamitous defeat at Saratoga in 1777 and the subsequent intervention of France in 1778, events which made it more defensible to argue that the war against the colonies could not be won in any case, that the Rockinghams began to be released from their dilemma. Thereafter, following the lead of Burke and Fox, the party essentially abandoned the Declaratory Act. Yet even now the Rockinghams did not deny the constitutional merits of their original Act; they merely argued for a recognition that military developments had rendered it irrelevant.²⁶¹

Incapable of sustaining a coherent, unified campaign against the principles which inspired the government's American policy, the various factions of the opposition found it easier to criticize the incompetence with which the war was being waged. Here they were undoubtedly on firmer ground, given the embarrassing defeats suffered by British forces in America. As usual, though, the rhetoric of men such as the Duke of Richmond exceeded reality, and in so doing did more harm than good to the opposition's cause.²⁶² In a House of Commons of 558 members, out of which it could count perhaps about 170 as reliable adherents of its cause, the opposition's only hope of toppling the ministry was to persuade enough of the uncommitted members, the so-called "country gentlemen", that ministers were leading the country to disaster.²⁶³ But the vehemence and apparent pleasure with which opposition leaders dissected reports of the nation's disasters tended to repel the ordinary backbencher.²⁶⁴ Nor was the opposition's campaign to paint the

North administration as tyrannical and unconstitutional much more effective. The country gentlemen might have been impatient of the ministry's inefficiency and its lack of military success, but they tended to be suspicious of any proposal which seemed to encroach on the royal prerogative.²⁶⁵ In any case, recent scholarship has confirmed that there was no validity to the opposition's hysterical denunciations of King George's political influence; if George was willing to provide his chosen ministers with those resources of patronage necessary to stabilize support in the Commons, this was no more than a recognition of a reality which had long characterized British political life.²⁶⁶ Notwithstanding the paranoia of many contemporaries, the influence of the crown over Parliament was actually diminishing during this period.²⁶⁷

However, the fact that the old picture painted by Whig propaganda and perpetuated by men like Trevelyan is grossly unfair should not be allowed to obscure the very real inadequacies of the North ministry. Lord North had many admirable qualities. He was an unusually effective parliamentary speaker, rarely losing his temper in the course of a debate, courteous even to the most rabid of his opponents; and he could blunt the edge of a verbal attack with humour and charm.²⁶⁸ Such quiet charm proved an enormous advantage in the battle to secure the votes of the independent country gentlemen, upon whose support the survival of his ministry depended. His mastery of financial matters was legendary, and was particularly valuable at a time of war: not only was North successful in his efforts to finance the war, he simultaneously introduced improvements to the conduct of Treasury business which would be implemented by his successors.²⁶⁹

Yet in return for North's loyalty and rhetorical acumen, the king was obliged to endure an even greater number of shortcomings, which should otherwise have disqualified

the man from leading any ministry. North had a tendency to shirk responsibility, often declaring to the House of Commons that he only accepted such responsibility for legislation as he shared with every other member of Parliament.²⁷⁰ His laziness was renowned; and though this undoubtedly encouraged the king to intervene in government decisions more often and more directly than he might otherwise have done, the fact remains that North's neglect condemned far too many matters to a sort of administrative limbo where nothing at all was done. Certainly North's conduct provoked a blizzard of complaints, even from his own closest associates. Far too many trivial issues were referred to Cabinet, and when the Cabinet did actually meet, its deliberations were crippled far too frequently by a lack of adequate preparations. The result was that crucial decisions, however urgently required, would be postponed; on other occasions, the Cabinet's declared view of an item of business would be recorded so imperfectly that controversy would later arise over what had actually been decided. Given this imposing array of problems, it is perhaps understandable that North should have been prone to bouts of depression; yet his habit of abandoning himself to despair simply made everything so much worse. In general, it was said of him that he would give way to the danger that was immediate, failing to realize the greater difficulties which such a mode of conduct might store up for the future.²⁷¹

There is no question that King George recognized these flaws in North's character. But it was the king's own deliberate choice which, at least in part, kept this increasingly pathetic figure in office. After enduring the chronic ministerial instability of the 1760's, when a series of governments had formed and collapsed in relatively quick succession, the king was loathe to withdraw support from a man who had succeeded in establishing a durable administration.²⁷² Lord North's personality might have lacked the dynamism

that was otherwise expected of a wartime leader; but he was a proven parliamentary performer. Even at his most frustrated moments, George persisted in believing that if only North could be persuaded to fill the other great offices of state with more capable men, the government and the nation would have little to fear.²⁷³

Indeed, North's personal weaknesses made it more vital than ever that the ministry should have included other individuals who could command the respect of their parliamentary peers. Unfortunately, the question of who was to serve in his ministry would become something of a running political sore during the course of 1779, sapping the government's morale, and diverting its energies. Even before the year began, the opposition had been assailing the composition of the government. The focus of these attacks would come to rest upon three figures in particular: North himself, Lord George Germain, and Lord Sandwich at the Admiralty. Yet what made the opposition's assault so dangerous was the fact that even supporters of the government were far from satisfied with the performance of these leading men.²⁷⁴ In recognition of the increasing restlessness among members of parliament, attempts were made in the early part of 1779 to negotiate with members of the opposition for a reconstruction of the ministry on broader terms. These attempts, however, were doomed by the selfish machinations of William Eden, just back from an unsuccessful mission to America, who proved utterly unscrupulous in his efforts to extract a high price for his support.²⁷⁵ Then, in March, the death of the Earl of Suffolk left another gaping hole in the ranks of the government. This was the cue for another "ally," Lord Wedderburn, the Attorney General, to leap into the fray with his own veiled threats about abandoning the government. While George III urged firmness in the face of all such demands, North dithered. Here was a pattern which would be repeated again and again as the year unfolded.²⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the course of events in America continued to undermine the government's credibility. On 11 June, Sir William Meredith²⁷⁷ introduced a motion in the House of Commons in favour of peace with the American colonies.²⁷⁸ A few days later came the Spanish declaration of war. In the House of Lords, the Duke of Richmond, never one for understatement, declared that the crisis was the "most awful this country has ever experienced".²⁷⁹ And the deepening shadow of a Bourbon invasion only intensified the calls, now from almost all quarters, that the ministry was in dire need of reconstruction.²⁸⁰

The awesome scale of the military crisis did remarkably little to temper the ferocity of the government's foes, who were as determined as ever to extract the maximum political advantage from its failure. Opposition speakers lost no opportunity to observe how the ministry, having scattered Britain's maritime power in the service of an ill-conceived, unrewarding, and eminently avoidable conflict on the other side of the Atlantic, had so completely misjudged the Bourbon menace. "Whenever we have talked of a Spanish war, in addition to that of France and America, with what contempt have the ministry heard it," Edmund Burke scornfully reminded the Commons.²⁸¹ And had not Lord Sandwich himself, on many different occasions during the previous year, declared that "any first lord of the Admiralty, who had not always in readiness a fleet equal, if not superior, to the House of Bourbon, ought to lose his head"?²⁸² In fact the First Lord claimed that he had said no such thing; but even he had to admit that the declaration, however frequently and wilfully misquoted by leaders of the opposition like Richmond, had been so widely reported in newspapers and assorted pamphlets that the legend had become more important than the reality.²⁸³

It must be reiterated, however, that the country's plight was hardly a figment of

fevered opposition minds, nor was recognition of the danger confined to the melodramatic speeches of the government's parliamentary adversaries. North himself, writing to Sandwich on 22 June, was frightened to the core: "For God's sake make haste with your pressing [of sailors] for the national safety essentially depends upon it".²⁸⁴ A month later, as the Franco-Spanish fleet was lumbering up towards the Channel and Lloyd was rushing back from Brussels to warn Jenkinson of the danger, the atmosphere of fear had spread across England.²⁸⁵ Of course by now Parliament itself was in recess, and one of the government's own supporters was moved to complain that "half the administration [was] making hay in the country and nobody [was] left in Town to oppose the designs of Europe, Asia, Africa and America".²⁸⁶ The caution, or timidity, of Admiral Hardy in the face of the enemy fleet served only to exacerbate dissatisfaction with the ministry's handling of the crisis, and to reinforce the general sense of helplessness. Even the king, normally the least defeatist of personalities, was moved to lament that "no one can deny that the House of Bourbon have brought their united Navy to a degree of strength that no Englishman can see with ease".²⁸⁷ It is frankly impossible to imagine how the government could have gained less credit for Britain's escape from the threat of invasion in the summer of 1779, or how it could have emerged from the summer of crisis with a more complete appearance of ineptitude.

If there was any remaining doubt of the government's uncanny ability to incur the maximum political damage from any given situation, it was resolved by the rapidly deteriorating state of affairs in Ireland. Ireland, like England, was in the throes of a great upsurge of political consciousness, hastened by the example of the American colonists as well as the increasing economic distress caused by the American war.²⁸⁸ But from the spring of 1779 the situation in Ireland began to assume the character of a crisis far more

serious than anything which the North government had heretofore imagined possible. Petitions concerning the collapse of Irish commerce began to be succeeded by a series of non-importation agreements, as local Irish associations were formed for the purpose of encouraging native industry and preventing the importation of manufactured goods from Britain. And however ominous these non-importation agreements may have seemed to those already fearful for the future of British rule in Ireland, they were soon overshadowed by an even more menacing development: the uncontrolled proliferation of the Irish "Volunteer" companies. It was not long before nervous politicians in both Dublin and London began to wonder if these companies, which had ostensibly been raised to defend the country against the French, might not instead be evolving into a vehicle for armed resistance to British authority.²⁸⁹

The North ministry's response to these developments was, characteristically, to do nothing for several precious months. By mid-August, the king himself was pressing North to do something, anything, to soothe Irish grievances; but this was the period when all eyes were focussed on the imminent approach of the Bourbon fleet, and North's lethargy on all fronts was driving even his closest associates to despair.²⁹⁰ The faults of the government were summed up by one of its own most committed members in a letter of 11 August: "Nothing [was being] done, or attempting to be done, no Attention to the necessary arrangements at Home, none to Ireland, nothing to India, and very little to foreign affairs, a Cabinet totally disjointed...never acting with Union even when they meet".²⁹¹

As the autumn brought the new session of Parliament in sight, and the contending political parties began to prepare for its opening, the government's anxieties reached a fever pitch. Early in October it finally began to dawn on those connected with the

ministry that the situation in Ireland, which they had so disgracefully neglected, was about to explode.²⁹² The same men suddenly awoke to the fact that the summer recess had come and nearly gone without any attempt having been made to shuffle the ranks of the ministry. As if to underline the point, at the end of the first week of October one of the government's most powerful members, Lord Gower, signalled his intention to resign, ostensibly on the grounds that there was "no discipline in the State, in the Army, or the Navy, and that inevitable ruin must be the consequence of the present system of government".²⁹³ Even now it proved impossible to move North to take immediate and decisive action to strengthen his administration. After a further month of dithering, in early November his ministry suffered yet another blow, with the resignation of Lord Weymouth.²⁹⁴

Effectively immobilized by its internal divisions, with North quite literally resolving to proceed with a reshuffle of his ministers at one moment and reversing himself the next, the ministry was given no relief from the broader challenges of government. Frantic warnings continued to stream out of Dublin: the authority of the British in Ireland was now being openly questioned, and those who wished to uphold it were being intimidated into silence; in mid-November, armed crowds of "patriots" rampaged through the Irish capital, at one point besieging the meeting-place of the Irish Parliament itself.²⁹⁵ John Robinson at the Treasury sensed impending disaster: "For God's sake let something be done about [Ireland] soon or it will be lost, if French money, French Emissarys and French Supplies of Arms and Ammunition have time to get there".²⁹⁶ In retrospect it may well be obvious that the Irish disturbances were somewhat overstated by contemporaries; there was never much chance, for reasons of geography if nothing else, that the Protestant Ascendancy which ruled Ireland would ape the example of the

governing elite which had declared decisively for independence in America.²⁹⁷ Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Lloyd, composing his Rhapsody at this moment of mounting unrest on the island, should have viewed a descent on Ireland as the easiest, most effective way for France to strike a hammer blow at the British Isles.²⁹⁸

Given its poor performance at home and abroad, the North ministry had every reason to dread the reopening of Parliament on 25 November, since it was clear that the opposition was determined to launch an all-out assault on the government's record.²⁹⁹ Certainly everything that had occurred since June seemed to have validated the premonitions of doom which had been expressed before the summer recess. The string of catastrophes – the resignation of powerful ministers and the machinations of others, the near collapse of the government's influence in Ireland, to say nothing of Hardy's uninspiring conduct in the face of the Bourbon fleet – all offered a spectacular new source of ammunition for the government's critics. But potentially the single most explosive issue within reach of the opposition was the evident weakness of Plymouth during the weeks when invasion seemed imminent. Indeed, North's defeatism was never more apparent than after a cabinet meeting, held on the evening of 19 November, when he was presented with a full and unvarnished summary of the truth about Plymouth's defences. Notwithstanding the fact that none of this information was new, and that there was no excuse for him not being aware of the danger earlier, North's chief concern at this moment remained one of political survival: in a characteristically despondent letter to the king he went so far as to declare that if the opposition succeeded in their calls for an inquiry into the conduct of the national defence, the consequences for his ministry could be fatal.³⁰⁰ It truly was "one of the most alarming questions" that he could recall from his whole career in public life.³⁰¹

Events seemed to be moving inexorably towards a climax. Early in December the two main factions of the opposition announced, rather optimistically as it turned out, that they had now joined forces, forming a grand political alliance to rally opinion beyond Westminster against the supposed power of the monarchy. At the same time, as one scholar has written, "the public was suddenly a reality".³⁰² War with America and much of Europe, by disrupting the trade upon which British prosperity depended, had brought the country to the brink of economic crisis; unemployment was up, wages were down, and with the price of wheat having plummeted to levels rarely seen during the eighteenth-century, beleaguered landowners suddenly rediscovered their hatred of high taxation and strong central government.³⁰³ By the end of December, York would be the scene of a great gathering of gentry and freeholders, whose anger at the government's apparent abuse of public funds found expression in a series of passionate petitions against the unrepresentative character of parliament and the power of the Crown. The result was the formation of the famous "Yorkshire Association" with a permanent committee dedicated to political reform. Many other counties would soon follow the example of Yorkshire by organizing their own petitions, and often, particularly in the southeast of England, with far more radical programmes for reform.³⁰⁴

The immediate danger for the North government, however, was the extent to which the general public clamour for "economical reform" would strengthen the impending assault of the parliamentary opposition led by Rockingham and Shelburne. The parliamentary bombardment began in the House of Lords on the very first day of the new session, with the Duke of Richmond assailing the Admiralty in general and Admiral Hardy in particular for having "fled before a pursuing enemy", a spectacle "never before recorded to have happened in English annals".³⁰⁵ In the Commons, Lord John Cavendish

observed sourly that “with a fleet very much inferior” and “a defenceless coast”, the realm “must have fallen prey to our combined enemies, if they had thought it proper to attack”.³⁰⁶ From here the opposition proceeded to launch a concentrated offensive against Amherst and his perceived neglect of Plymouth. A poor speaker at the best of times, the commander-in-chief responded with a distinctly un reassuring claim that “he had given general directions that the proper measures of defence should be carried into execution, and if they were not, it was not his fault.”³⁰⁷ In reply, a member of the opposition who had visited Plymouth thundered that “there was not a man [there], professional or private, who was not persuaded, had the enemy attempted a landing on their first appearance, the place must have surrendered.”³⁰⁸ Another speaker, Temple Luttrell, raised pointed questions about Portsmouth, going so far as to suggest that there really had been nothing to prevent the landing of several thousand enemy soldiers near Gosport – the defences of which Henry Lloyd, writing in his *Rhapsody*, specifically castigated as useless.³⁰⁹

Of course it is true that, regardless of North’s fears and the fireworks of the debates in Parliament, the government once again managed to weather the storm. At least until April 1780, and the passage of Dunning’s famous resolution “that the influence of the crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished”, the ministry’s support among the cautious country gentlemen in the Commons remained sufficiently firm to defeat the opposition’s hostile motions.³¹⁰ And even Dunning’s resolution was far less of a victory for the opposition than it seemed: largely symbolic, it could not conceal the fact that the opposition’s proposal to bring royal finances under more direct parliamentary scrutiny had already failed. North’s ministry would survive another two years, until the verdict of Yorktown, by shattering the last residual hope that Britain

might yet reclaim America, finally deprived him of the support of the country gentlemen.³¹¹

Nevertheless, though their effects proved less than immediately fatal, the revelations about the state of Britain's defences in the face of invasion had done permanent damage to several key ministers, most notably Amherst himself, whose long-standing aura of competence had been tarnished. If the attack on his record subsided after the failure of the opposition motions, his share of responsibility for the country's weakness would not soon be forgotten: well into 1780, cartoonists would continue to lampoon him and the administration of which he was so central a part.³¹² And all of the ministers who had been attacked were acutely conscious of the likelihood that the opposition would subsequently choose to resume its assault, as indeed it did the following spring.

To sum up, the months and indeed years leading up to the end of 1779 had been characterized by the failure of British statesmanship on nearly every front. The ministry of Lord North continued in existence without even really believing in itself; by the last month of 1779, it was an administration so internally divided that it was only the determination of King George III, the enduring divisions of its parliamentary enemies, and the innate conservatism of the "country gentlemen" which prevented its collapse. Its weaknesses were many and so were its opponents, in Britain, Ireland, and abroad. Somehow, Britain had managed to escape the Bourbon invasion which had seemed so likely during the months of the summer. But the government was grimly aware of its culpability for the nation's predicament. The wonder is that such men as Lord North, who had managed to ignore or neglect far more urgent problems in the course of 1779, actually roused themselves to do something so decisive as to take action against Lloyd's

Rhapsody as they did.

Clearly, there must have been something exceptional about the content of this book. Indeed, as the editor of the 1790 edition of the Rhapsody remarked, "This publication, had it not been suppressed, might have given rise to a parliamentary and public scrutiny, and might well alarm those to whom the safety and defence of the nation was then entrusted." To understand why Lord Amherst and Lord North reacted in the manner in which they did, it is not enough to understand the prevailing military and political crises. Ultimately, it is necessary to appreciate what Henry Lloyd actually wrote, and how his words spoke to the negligence of the government in an area in which ministers knew no excuse was possible, and on account of which they had only just weathered a ferocious parliamentary assault a few weeks earlier. Accordingly, the final chapter of this thesis will undertake a more direct assessment of the content of the Rhapsody itself.

orthodoxy, quick to **Chapter Five: The Content of the Rhapsody** by a sharp strategic insight, and, above all, pragmatic and practical in outlook: this was the Henry Lloyd of 1779. Lloyd makes it clear, in the very first lines of the Rhapsody, that his emphasis throughout the ninety pages to come will be to illuminate the present. In Lloyd's stated view, the plight of Britain in 1779 is impossible to understand "unless we are acquainted with the political system, principles of government, and resources of the contending powers."³¹³ He therefore thinks it appropriate to begin with a fairly crisp survey of the political and military history of Europe since the mid-seventeenth century. Beginning with Cardinal Richelieu, proceeding through the various conflicts of Louis XIV, the War of Austrian Succession, and finally the Seven Years War, Lloyd's interpretation of this stormy era centers on the Bourbon-Hapsburg dynamic: until 1756, each individual war could be seen as merely one chapter in a far more enduring rivalry between the French and Austrian royal houses for mastery in Europe, a rivalry which transcended the identity of individual rulers and the shifting strength of the two states.³¹⁴ It was therefore all the more remarkable, given this longstanding rivalry, that France should have chosen to reverse the policy of a century and align itself with Austria against a rising Prussia during the Seven Years War. Lloyd does not attempt to hide his contempt for this *volte-face*. Notwithstanding French perceptions to the contrary, he suggests that their old Hapsburg foe had actually "increased in wealth, power, and above all, her administration" in the interwar period.³¹⁵ Besides, surely it was advantageous to France "that there should be Princes in Germany, able...to check the power of Austria."³¹⁶ Regardless of whether one accepts Lloyd's particular interpretation or not, these very early lines of the Rhapsody reflect most of the characteristics which will define the work as a whole. Concise to the point of over-simplification, unintimidated by

orthodoxy, quick to embrace a dramatic turn of phrase, inspired by a sharp strategic insight, and, above all, pragmatic and practical in outlook: this was the Henry Lloyd of 1779 and the Rhapsody.

Alongside the ever-present Bourbon-Hapsburg dynamic, Lloyd's Rhapsody identifies and illustrates another persistent theme in the long cycle of conflict which had gripped Europe since the seventeenth-century: the rise of Britain to world power. The political and military leaders who had directed British strategy over the course of the eighteenth-century had not merely stymied Louis XIV's dreams of empire, and similarly blunted the ambitions of his successors; in the course of their exertions they had stumbled upon an almost magical formula to advance British interests across the globe. Again and again, overwhelming naval and financial power, mobilized in conjunction with a continental military ally who could be counted upon to absorb the bulk of French resources, had "increased the power, glory, and political influence" of Britain.³¹⁷

It must be said that none of this analysis was particularly original. Many other figures of Lloyd's era, both in Britain and abroad, were well aware of the strategic and diplomatic lessons of previous Anglo-Bourbon wars. Though British interest in foreign alliances had understandably, if unwisely, diminished during the peaceful years of the early 1770's, the entrance of France into the American War in 1778 had propelled the North government into a rather frenzied search for an ally who might, as in earlier conflicts, prevent the French from projecting their power overseas.³¹⁸ Similarly, in France, the experience of the Seven Years War had convinced leading figures of the decade that followed, most notably Choiseul, that French strategy in the next war must shift from a primarily "continental" approach to a "colonial" one if Britain's record of victory were to be broken.³¹⁹

In any case, as much as Lloyd is inclined to applaud the strategic vision of earlier generations of British leaders, he shows no mercy towards that of more recent policymakers. Britain, he declares in the *Rhapsody*, had forgotten the foundation of its earlier success: "since we have abandoned the continental system, France has acquired an unlimited influence in the different courts of Europe... [and] has been enabled to direct the whole force of the House of Bourbon against England alone".³²⁰ Indeed his logic seems inescapable. By 1779, Britain was back at war with both France and Spain. Yet what separated this particular Anglo-Bourbon conflict from all the others which had come before was the fact that now, for the first time in the eighteenth-century, Britain was fighting alone, without a major continental ally such as Austria or Prussia to siphon off the military resources of its enemies.³²¹ And the results were, at best, profoundly unsettling. Britain simply did not possess the resources necessary to fight a global war with an undistracted France, especially while British forces were bogged down in America in a large-scale land war, just as French armies, in earlier wars, had been even more dramatically ensnared on the continent.³²² Writing in a Britain swirling with recrimination and premonitions of doom, Lloyd's overriding purpose seems to be to bring a measure of strategic clarity, not to cast blame or to deepen fear, but to rouse his countrymen to make the necessary changes before it is too late: "That we may avert the storm which hangs over our heads, and baffle the efforts of our combined enemies".³²³

Lloyd makes no pretence about being a thoroughly even-tempered analyst. Some of Britain's errors definitely seem to anger him more than others. He makes no attempt, for instance, to hide his irritation with the Peace of Paris of 1763, which had ended the Seven Years War. This treaty was routinely lauded by contemporaries, and not merely by war-weary government ministers; Andrew Anderson, writing a year after the Peace in

An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce, spoke for many moderates when he concluded that England had won “such advantages...as this kingdom never knew or experienced”.³²⁴ Even in more distant retrospect, the Peace of Paris has often been presented as a more or less unqualified triumph for the British, since it consolidated most of the territorial gains which had been made since 1756, and thereby cemented the hegemony of Britain in both India and North America.³²⁵

Yet Lloyd’s Rhapsody serves as a useful reminder of the controversy which had swirled through Britain when the treaty was presented to Parliament for approval. “Unhappily,” Lloyd laments, “we mistook entirely in the choice of our acquisitions.”³²⁶ Again, he is appealing for strategic clarity, a recognition of where England’s true security interests lay. “In forming treaties, a Minister should have the whole globe before his eyes, and by no means confine himself to this or that province, or branch of trade.”³²⁷ It was true that the British could not expect to receive everything they wanted from every treaty, but when they had “reduced the House of Bourbon so low, that we might have prescribed any terms of peace” in 1763, there was in his expressed view no good excuse for Britain’s acquiescence in the limits of the Peace of Paris.³²⁸ In all this he was essentially echoing the criticisms advanced by William Pitt, the ministerial mastermind of British strategy during the Seven Years War, who in 1763 had condemned the Peace as both strategically ill-conceived and unnecessarily generous to a beaten enemy.³²⁹ The only difference was that whereas Pitt’s interpretation had been a dark prophecy of things he believed likely to come, Lloyd was writing sixteen years later, in the full knowledge of how the world had changed in the aftermath of 1763.

Certainly, in fairness to Lloyd’s position, the Peace of Paris itself did little to impede a renaissance of French power. In America, France had received back the islands

of St. Pierre and Miquelon in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, with the right to fish upon the shores of Newfoundland; employing about fourteen thousand men a season, these have been described as the “nursery” of the French navy.³³⁰ Similarly, the decision to return to France such conquests as Martinique, Belle Isle, and St. Lucia, not to mention the single richest prize of the war, the sugar island of Guadeloupe, had left the French with an array of precious bases from which to conduct future operations against Britain in the West Indies.³³¹ Moreover, in their haste to conclude a peace the British had chosen to forget, or at least discount, the interests of their pivotal ally on the continent, Frederick the Great of Prussia. It was an oversight which, as Pitt himself had predicted in 1763, would prove disastrous in the longer term: Frederick never forgave Britain for what he chose to regard as an act of betrayal, and his resentment did much to ensure that when Britain became embroiled in yet another war with France fifteen years later, it was unable to enlist a much-needed continental ally, and left to fight on alone.³³²

Unfortunately, it must be admitted that Lloyd fails to acknowledge in any way the very reasonable case which the British proponents of the Peace of Paris had made in 1763. Beyond the basic fact of war-weariness, which was already widespread by 1761, and found its clearest expression in the growing drumbeat of criticism against continued British participation in German campaigns, there was the very real threat of bankruptcy. The campaigns against the Bourbon powers had been hugely expensive; though the relative maturity of the British financial system had enabled Britain to mobilize the savings of its people and foreigners alike, and allowed the nation to avoid the sort of fiscal calamities suffered by its enemies, the Seven Years War had almost doubled the national debt. By 1763 this stood at the phenomenal sum of £132,716,000, which required over 50 percent of British tax revenue just to service.³³³ Given Lloyd’s longstanding interest

in the link between financial strength and national power, as evinced in his 1771 Essay on the Theory of Money, it is disappointing that he should have so completely ignored the financial ramifications of pursuing more draconian terms of peace in 1763.

Regardless, even Lloyd does not pretend that Britain's predicament in 1779 could be traced back solely to the myopia of those who had negotiated and accepted the Peace of Paris. Much more dangerous in his view was the shift which had occurred in the balance of naval power during the decade which followed. Indeed, it was this development, seemingly more than any other, which earns Lloyd's unadulterated scorn in the pages of the Rhapsody. "Having abandoned continental connections, it became more than ever necessary to apply our resources to the fleet," he asserts in the Rhapsody. "I ask, why is it not superior to the fleet of the House of Bourbon?"³³⁴ Much of the problem, he admits, is a result of those changes which France had embraced in response to its humiliating defeats in the last war. Since 1763, "they have... attended to their marine alone; and have pursued this measure with such industry and activity, that a fleet has been raised by them which astonishes Europe."³³⁵

The French revival had indeed been striking. During the earlier part of the eighteenth-century the naval force of France had consistently suffered from the apathy of its political masters. The Bourbon kings had always been much more interested in Continental conquests, and therefore in their army, than in sea power, and so the powerful fleet which the great "Minister of Marine" Colbert had built up in the 1670's and 1680's had been starved of the funds necessary to maintain it. This meant that the number of ships of the line had not been kept up, and those which did exist had not been given sufficient cruises or training in fleet manoeuvres.³³⁶ However, the humiliating experience of the Seven Years War had strengthened the political hand of men like the Duc

de Choiseul, who recognized that Britain could never be humbled unless France could seize control of the seas.³³⁷ When the war ended in 1763, the French navy had been reduced to barely forty ships, of all types. Choiseul aimed at a target of eighty ships of the line and forty-five frigates, to be achieved in ten years; and though he would enjoy only seven more years in office, his success was such that by 1771 there were sixty-four of the line and fifty frigates in French service.³³⁸ Even more significant were those steps which he had taken to repair the deficiencies of the naval high command. Many senior officers who were little more than dead weight were dismissed, to be replaced by dependable, experienced men who had served elsewhere as artillerymen, captains in the service of the French East India Company, or even army officers.³³⁹ There is no doubt that the longstanding weaknesses of the French navy had not been entirely rectified; by British standards it remained, even in the wake of the reforming activity of Choiseul and, after 1774, his like-minded successor Gabriel de Sartine, a distinctly and dangerously inexperienced force.³⁴⁰ Yet it was thanks to Choiseul and Sartine that France embarked on a new war against Britain in 1778 with fleets of a size and quality which it had not known since the days of Louis XIV.³⁴¹

Such a pronounced revival of French naval power would have been a cause for British concern under any circumstances, but the fact that it coincided with a period of relative neglect of Britain's own armed forces only magnified the alarm. As this thesis has already demonstrated, by 1779 the challenges of a global war were stretching the Royal Navy to the very limit of its capabilities. Certainly it could not hope to match the numbers of the fleets of France and Spain mustered together.³⁴² These were the depressing facts gnawing at every informed Briton in the year of the *Rhapsody*, and Lloyd, as usual, does not mince words: "our very existence depends... that we should be

superior at sea; all our politics ought therefore to be directed to that object singly.”³⁴³

The question, of course, was whether there was still time. In reality, as Lloyd proceeds to remind his reader, an enormous inherent disparity existed between Britain and the Bourbon states “in point of inhabitants and revenues.”³⁴⁴ One of the goals of the Rhapsody is to explain the roots and the potential consequences of this disparity. Expanding on the ideas he had first explored in 1770 in his Essay on the English Constitution, Lloyd suggests that the most dependable way to assess the potential strength available to any given country in relation to another was to combine the size of its population with the sum of its annual commercial revenues.³⁴⁵ Thus the strength of France was effectively equal to “thirty-one”, the sum of its twenty million inhabitants and its revenues of eleven million; that of its ally Spain on the same scale, about fifteen.³⁴⁶ And how much could Britain hope to muster against the combined “forty-six” of the Bourbon coalition ranged against it? For once Lloyd is not specific, but his pessimism is nevertheless unmistakable. “God knows what may be the issue of this, I fear, unequal contest.”³⁴⁷ At his most melancholy moments in the text, he seems on the verge of outright despair: “If we are reduced to defend England,” he admits gloomily in one particularly memorable passage, “all is over.”³⁴⁸

A nation’s success or failure against its enemies, however, was not simply a function of demographics and economics. As he had demonstrated nine years earlier in the Essay, Lloyd had long been fascinated by the link between various forms of government and the capacity to wage war.³⁴⁹ Accordingly he addresses this subject at some length in the third chapter of the Rhapsody, beginning with a comparison of the relative merits of “despotism” and “monarchy”. A despotic regime, which by definition could operate without restraints, is likened by Lloyd to a river in flood, “extremely

violent but transitory” in its effect.³⁵⁰ Monarchy, by contrast, had a much greater capacity “to collect and exert the national forces”.³⁵¹ Indeed, Lloyd likens it to a “majestic river, which, if kept within bounds, and its waters judiciously distributed, embellishes and enriches the country”.³⁵² Yet the stability which, in direct contrast to despotic regimes, was the hallmark of monarchy was inextricably linked to a record of victory. Long defensive wars were potentially ruinous for any such regime. In the event of losses, its subjects “soon perceive they do not fight for themselves and feel only the miseries of the war, which they suppose is carried on to gratify the ambition and caprice of the sovereign or some favourite”.³⁵³

Alongside despotism and monarchy, there was a third relevant form of government with its own distinct strengths and weaknesses in the event of war. This was a republic. It too, in the watery lexicon employed by Lloyd in the *Rhapsody*, could be likened to a great river, but unlike despotism, its inherent strength derived from a multitude of converging tributaries. The key point here was that the republican form of government was fundamentally ill-suited to the stresses of war, especially offensive war. “It is certainly true,” Lloyd states, “that republics, unless forced by the immediate sense of danger, never have that unanimity and vigour necessary to carry on a war with any probability of success and therefore are proper only for a defensive war.”³⁵⁴ In this last case, however, “their efforts increase in proportion to the danger with which they are threatened, and if the motives arise from civil or religious principles, they generally become invincible.”³⁵⁵

Though intriguing enough in the abstract, this discourse was meant to be more than an exercise in rudimentary political science. Again, Lloyd’s utilitarian impulses are

never far from the surface of the Rhapsody. If Britain were to prevail in the war into which it had stumbled, it was vital that it should understand its enemies, and arguably the most intractable of these was a republic: the fledgling United States of America. Lloyd's insight into the characteristics of republican government finds support in the developments which had reshaped the American political scene in the 1770's. The struggle with the Americans had begun as an emotional but quite unrevolutionary dispute over the right of the Mother Parliament to tax its colonial subjects. As late as 1775, the congress at Philadelphia was dominated by moderates, nervous at the onrush of events and still hopeful for peace with Britain.³⁵⁶ There is no doubt that Lord North, too, was by nature a man drawn to conciliation, and commissions were sent out to America in 1776 and again in 1778 to seek some sort of negotiated settlement. Yet both missions were doomed by the ministry's earlier unsuccessful attempts to pursue a military solution. The first overture, for instance, only occurred after the dramatic reinforcement of the British army in New England in 1775, the battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill, and the passage of the Prohibitory Act forbidding all intercourse with the rebellious colonies in early 1776. It must be reiterated that the North ministry was hardly alone in its belief that such strong measures were needed to restore order in the colonies; the policy of coercion enjoyed broad support in the House of Commons, not merely among the government's committed adherents, but also among the independent country gentlemen.³⁵⁷ But regardless of its popularity within Britain, the policy of coercion served only to stiffen resistance in America, until even those who had heretofore been moderate became resolved on a complete break with Britain.³⁵⁸

Lloyd betrays no hesitation in declaring that if Britain would only come to its senses and recognize the unique but predictable tendencies of a republic, it was not too

late to turn looming defeat into victory. The key was to “cease to make those fruitless and unmeaning excursions in the American woods.”³⁵⁹ If the British instead restricted their efforts to holding the key naval bases of New York, Long Island, Rhode Island, and Philadelphia, the Americans, “no longer united by the sense of fear, would soon dissolve their confederacy, and a more favourable opportunity would offer of restoring peace and union between them and the mother country.”³⁶⁰ It is an enticing hypothesis, and perhaps not quite as outlandish as one might initially imagine: Amherst himself had told the king in early 1778 that the land campaign against the Americans was doomed to failure, and that all energies should instead be concentrated on a naval blockade which, by ruining American trade, would inflame the latent tensions between the different colonies.³⁶¹ In Lloyd’s defence it is also worth remembering that in the first years after 1783, when Britain’s recognition of American independence had deprived the colonies of their common fear of an external enemy, the ramshackle colonial union very nearly came apart.³⁶²

On the other hand, there were perfectly valid reasons why the North government continued to adhere to an offensive, land-based strategy in the years before 1783. If the counsel of men such as Lloyd and Amherst had been heeded, it would have effectively surrendered control of vast territories to the rebels and left the remaining American loyalists at their mercy; and though it might well have denied the rebels their victory, there was no guarantee that it would have resulted in the complete victory still sought by a majority of British politicians in the late 1770’s.³⁶³ There is no doubt that the strategy pursued by the North government absorbed a huge proportion of the men and material resources available to Britain, stiffened colonial resolve, and ultimately culminated in the debacle at Yorktown in 1781.³⁶⁴ But the failure of British strategy does not necessarily

establish that critics such as Lloyd were as perceptive as they claimed. Lloyd's alternative was never tried, and to that extent it can never be proved whether his confidence in it was well placed.

Though indisputably the product of an independent, unconventional, and outspoken personality, nothing about the first three chapters of Lloyd's Rhapsody was so explosive to merit or at least to render comprehensible the action taken against it by the government at London. Books critical of official British policy in a variety of arenas were all-too-common in late eighteenth-century Britain, and however disconcerting they might be to ministers or monarchs, any attempt at censorship tended to provoke a huge public outcry. Only a decade earlier, the government's clumsy attempts to silence John Wilkes, whose writings in the North Briton had denounced the corruption of George III and his ministers in the most vituperative terms, had caused a sensation and, after a long political and legal struggle, ended in the more or less complete public vindication of the author.³⁶⁵ What made Lloyd's Rhapsody different, as Amherst had confirmed in his letter to Lloyd on 9 December, was the sort of detailed military information which characterizes its fourth chapter, "Of the Invasion expected."

In his comparative analysis of various invasion scenarios, which constitutes the fourth chapter of the Rhapsody, Lloyd invariably begins by explaining what he believes to be the most likely French move. Nevertheless, he remains determined to consider all reasonable contingencies, even those which seem to him less realistic. Thus, taking the broadest possible view, he suggests that the French could strike directly at the British Isles in three basic ways: they might land an army in England to conquer the kingdom outright, they might land an army in England simply as a feint to draw off British forces from the rest of the globe, or they might land in Ireland. His own recommendation to an

invading army, were he anxious to see Britain's enemies triumph, would be the latter, a descent in force on Ireland. "The inhabitants of Connaught, equally poor and ignorant, might be induced to join them, and it would not be an easy matter to drive their army out of that country".³⁶⁶ Given the increasingly rebellious mood in Ireland at the time when Lloyd was writing, this was a realistic scenario; whereas any direct landing in England would be far more dangerous, especially as "the season being now far advanced, and next year we shall be much better prepared to receive them."³⁶⁷

Having made this point, Lloyd does not seem particularly concerned that an invasion of any kind will in fact take place. As long as a British fleet of any size remained intact in the Channel, "though we may, for a time, be forced out of the sea," he sees little chance that the French will risk sending an army to the British Isles.³⁶⁸ Yet the possibility that the Royal Navy might be defeated could not be discounted altogether, and in the event that it was, then England itself had to brace for an invasion. Where in England should an enemy landing be expected? Lloyd believes that the list of potential landing sites could be reduced to a mere handful by simple military logic. The French, after all, would need a place with very specific characteristics. First, it would have to be located "as near to their own coast as possible" with a "spacious harbour" to accommodate the combined Bourbon fleet, upon which the whole effort depended.³⁶⁹ Second, the spot would have to give easy access to a region sufficiently abundant to reduce if not remove entirely the invading army's need to import supplies from France. With these considerations in mind, Lloyd concludes that the most likely target of a French assault was Plymouth, a dependable maritime haven that was also relatively close to the great French naval base at Brest, and which was furthermore the gateway to the prosperous West Country of England. Even if the French took no other action on the

British mainland, with Plymouth as a base their fleet would be in a position to strangle the trade upon which Britain's prosperity ultimately depended.³⁷⁰ Commercial confidence would soon dissolve; as investors rushed to redeem their savings, British financial institutions would collapse, and economic and political chaos would ensue. The government would have no choice but to sue for peace, on even the most disadvantageous terms.³⁷¹

Plymouth was not the only feasible target for a French landing in England, however. The harbour at Portsmouth, though more distant from Brest, otherwise offered comparable advantages to an invader. Lloyd therefore proceeds to give a detailed description of the sort of defences which the French would have to overcome here. A direct attack on Portsmouth itself, he asserts, would be impractical: "the town and the dock on the land side are fortified, and cannot be taken without a regular siege" which would be very difficult even if "we had no ships to defend it."³⁷² Moreover, Portsea Island, upon which Portsmouth lay, could offer little material aid to a besieging army, and was easily isolated from the mainland by even a tiny force on the flanking Portsdown Hill. If the French were to have any hope of success, they would have to begin by occupying Gosport, the town which faced Portsmouth from across the harbour, and whose existing fortifications were, in Lloyd's scathing phrase, "of no use".³⁷³ Meanwhile, before they settled down on Portsea Island to besiege Portsmouth in earnest, the French should move quickly to establish themselves on the existing fortified line flanking Portsdown, which had been built to stop an enemy advancing against Portsmouth from the north, and which could thus be used to thwart any British attempt to raise the siege by land.³⁷⁴

Finally, if neither Plymouth nor Portsmouth appealed to French planners, there

was the possibility that they might choose to occupy the Isle of Wight instead. Though acknowledging the prevailing fear of just such a move, Lloyd clearly believes that this prospect has been vastly exaggerated: "Having lately examined it... I believe now that it is absolutely impossible."³⁷⁵ Still, in the unlikely event that the enemy was undaunted by the hazards, they would do best to make their landing at Brading Bay, opposite St. Helen's Road; every other stretch of shoreline, Lloyd proclaims, is either too open to the elements or too easily defended by even the most unpolished defence. He does note, though, that the channel between "the Needles" and Hurst Castle is safe for the largest naval vessels, and that the castle "does not seem sufficiently strong against ships of force."³⁷⁶

On the surface, it is easy to see how this sort of information could be misconstrued in the context of 1779. By the summer of that year, reliable intelligence reports had informed the British government that the principal objectives of the French were indeed Portsmouth and Plymouth, though subsequent reports from other sources had given ammunition to those like Lord Amherst who were inclined to view the extreme southeast as the more likely French target.³⁷⁷ Even as late as the fall of 1779, the British government was not only still confused about French intentions, but it remained uncertain about the extent of French knowledge of the state of England's southern defences.³⁷⁸ Just about the only thing of which the British were sure was their own weakness. As noted in the third chapter of this thesis, Amherst had been bombarded throughout the summer with complaints from the commanders at Portsmouth and Plymouth, both of whom were anxious for reinforcements which, notwithstanding the fact that a Bourbon fleet was at large in the Channel, were simply not available, nor likely to be available for the foreseeable future.³⁷⁹ The last thing which the nervous British government could

have wanted to do, in a situation that was already as perilous as it had ever been for Britain, was to risk giving the French planners any advice on how best to carry out their intended invasion, let alone such a detailed military survey as Lloyd had included in the Rhapsody.

Of course Lloyd makes it abundantly clear that whatever “advice” may be present in the Rhapsody, it is not meant for the French. “I have wrote the following discourse on the supposed invasion, and hope it may serve... to render it fruitless.”³⁸⁰ Again and again, his emphasis is on how to bolster England’s defences. Explaining the various methods by which intelligent French military planners might seek to invade, outlining the areas most vulnerable to invasion – these are the indispensable first steps on the road to stymying the enemy’s effort, and hardening the areas of British vulnerability.

Thus, one of Lloyd’s motives in declaring that there were, at most, only three areas where the French might successfully land, Plymouth, Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight, was to convince his readers of the folly of existing British troop dispositions. Since “no solid operation can... be executed but in the West”, it made no sense for the British to have stationed troops, as they had done, in a very thin line all along the southern coast.³⁸¹ “Our troops are much too scattered”, Lloyd complains.³⁸² Instead, he advocates a concentration of force at three points: at Portsdown in the center, at Haldon Hill beyond Exeter in the west, and at the border of Sussex and Kent in the east. Together these three reserves, working in support of garrisons restricted to a handful of vital ports, could cover any conceivable landing zone, and regardless of whether the French chose to attack Plymouth or Portsmouth.³⁸³

Nor is Lloyd’s advice restricted to the larger strategy of defence. Indeed, his counsel is often extraordinarily specific, a tribute to the intimate knowledge of local

conditions which he had gained through more than one clandestine survey of the British coast. To quote a particularly intricate example, he argued that if the French were as sensible as he imagined and they did come ashore at Plymouth, the British need not despair. "To remain there with any safety", Lloyd declares with typical conviction, the French must occupy "Mount Edgecombe, and the ground behind the King's Brewhouse, as well as all the ground between the Tamar [stream] and that branch of the sea which runs under Mr. Parker's garden".³⁸⁴ Yet to occupy all these points in such a broken countryside, the invader would be compelled to divide his forces; the British, keeping their own forces relatively concentrated, would then do best "to attack the corps placed at Mount Edgecombe, which being beat, the others must of course be destroyed".³⁸⁵ It followed from this that Edgecombe was "the key to Plymouth, and must be kept with care".³⁸⁶

As this thesis has noted, though Lloyd believed Portsmouth a less realistic target for the French, he had also pointed to its particular vulnerabilities. Again, this honesty had been necessary to justify Lloyd's suggestions for improvement. If the lines at Gosport were imperfect, then "a good fort should be raised on a rising ground, a few hundred yards off".³⁸⁷ If the enemy could land on Portsea Island, "a few redoubts must also be added before the front of the works which cover the dock."³⁸⁸ Similarly, on the Isle of Wight, Brading Bay could easily be closed to the invader: "there is a small creek between two very high hills, which being occupied, will prevent a landing".³⁸⁹ And the deficiencies Lloyd recognized in Hurst Castle could easily be rectified "if two considerable batteries were erected on the two points which project into the sea opposite the fortress".³⁹⁰

Furthermore, Lloyd had evidently given a considerable amount of thought to how,

should a shore-based defence fail, the British might yet prevail over a French invasion. The southwest of England offered a host of natural obstacles which he believed would work to a defender's advantage: "those mountains and hedges being occupied, an enemy cannot advance a step" is Lloyd's blunt appraisal in the Rhapsody.³⁹¹ Should the French venture out of Plymouth toward Exmouth anyway, there was not "a single place you may not attack the enemy in front, flank and rear, since the road is continually winding round the foot of the hills".³⁹² If the French sought to outflank such road-blocks by landing detachments further east, "the only proper places between Plymouth and Exmouth where ships can approach, are Dartmouth and Teignmouth; but as the entrance is very narrow, and entirely commanded by the mountains, a few battalions would easily prevent a landing".³⁹³ And so Lloyd's analysis proceeds, describing every road leading from Plymouth to Exmouth, from Exmouth to Exeter, from Exeter to Salisbury; describing the chief geographical features which could be counted upon to hinder an invading army; and indicating how, in light of these roads and other geographical features, British forces could be marshalled to achieve a decisive victory. Step by step, he imagines the most likely stages in a French advance out of Cornwall, and for each stage, he suggests a particular response, based on a deep and detailed appreciation of the terrain of southern England.

The overriding theme that emerges from all these musings about an invasion of England is how great were the odds against any invasion succeeding. Considered objectively from two centuries on, there seems little in the Rhapsody itself that might have served to encourage Britain's enemies. On the other hand, it is only fair to keep in mind that the threat of invasion, in a country long accustomed to invulnerability, would tend to cloud the mind and impede objective judgments. The detachment and lack of

emotion which characterizes Lloyd's assessment of invasion scenarios can be disconcerting, even two centuries later. Blunt statements like "if success should follow their operations, it is evident we must conclude a peace on any terms", read in isolation, would have served to remind the woefully ill-prepared North government of facts which some of its members in 1779 may well have preferred to forget.³⁹⁴ Amherst was less alarmist than most of his ministerial peers, but his innate sense of caution, his awareness of British vulnerability even at the end of 1779, and his continuing uncertainty about French invasion plans for 1780 made it impossible for him to accede to the publication of such explosive material.³⁹⁵ Even if there was nothing in the Rhapsody which the French planners, who had once been the direct recipients of Lloyd's advice, did not already know, there was also the danger that Lloyd's honesty would do further damage to morale within Britain, which was already low, and contribute to just the sort of political and commercial panic about which Lloyd warned.³⁹⁶

The irony of course is that this was just what Lloyd seems to have been trying to avoid. He asserts unequivocally that his aim is to "inspire government, as well as the nation in general, with that confidence which the situation of our affairs require".³⁹⁷ Even if the worst possibilities were realized, "we must not despair, nor by groundless fears facilitate the success of the invaders; a just and entire confidence in government is necessary to our preservation".³⁹⁸ And lest his readers still fail to recognize the essential optimism that characterizes his survey of the various invasion scenarios, Lloyd writes the following: "Though... our enemies enjoy some advantages over us, we possess so many over them in every other respect, that, if we avail ourselves of them, there can be no room left to fear the event".³⁹⁹

A further succinct summary of these reasons for confidence dominates the

Rhapsody's fifth chapter, "Observations on the Method of ranging the Troops, and of making War, &c." While admitting again that "the French army has no doubt some advantages" over its British counterpart, most notably in its discipline and its greater experience of combat, Lloyd was optimistic that the "close country" of southern England would serve substantially to even the odds.⁴⁰⁰ "The face of the country forces [an invader] to march in one column", he explains; the French would "have but little cavalry", "no heavy artillery", "not many field pieces", "no other provisions but what they bring with them", and "they can never have a sufficient number of horses and carriages" to meet their logistical needs.⁴⁰¹ And whereas the enemy would be confined to a single advancing column, the British, "availing ourselves of every cross road, and path, can without risk attack their whole line of march, and soon throw it into confusion."⁴⁰² In short, Lloyd was convinced that "no army, however numerous, will ever be able to penetrate forty miles into the country, if proper methods are taken to oppose it."⁴⁰³

Yet it was the question of whether such "proper methods" had been or could be expected to be taken which was precisely at issue throughout the second half of 1779. In the final analysis, the responsibility of ensuring that the country was prepared to meet the French threat, however it ultimately manifested itself, lay with the government of Lord North. And the leading figures of the government, as this thesis has demonstrated, were never more grimly aware of the extent to which they had failed to fulfil this responsibility than in early December 1779, when the fate of Lloyd's Rhapsody was being decided.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is hard to escape the feeling that the heavy-handed response of the British government towards the Rhapsody of Henry Lloyd speaks more to the failings of that government than to the content of the work itself. The Rhapsody is, without question, imbued with a spirit of unblinking honesty. Throughout, Lloyd makes it clear that he is not writing simply to satisfy his own intellectual curiosity; his goal is thoroughly practical, to illuminate the dangerous situation which Britain faced in 1779, and this could not be achieved were he to overlook uncomfortable facts. Thus he begins by surveying the recent history of international relations, to illustrate the formula which had made Britain great and which, having been abandoned, threatened to destroy the country's greatness altogether. He surveys the effective resources of the contending sides in 1779, showing the disparity with which an isolated Britain had to cope. And he thinks it worthwhile to consider how a nation's form of government might tend to influence its ability to wage war; if, particularly in regard to their rebellious American colonies, the British stopped to consider the essential nature of republics, they might gain a better understanding of why their offensive strategy had proven such a costly failure.

Lloyd's analysis of Britain's vulnerability to invasion takes this level of objectivity to new heights. He is unafraid to discuss how the French could best achieve their aims, and how southern England was as yet inadequately prepared. Writing in meticulous detail, a tribute to his long and storied experience of the realities of war, he dissects the condition of coastal bulwarks such as Portsmouth and Plymouth, which could expect to take the brunt of any French landing, and upon which Britain's very survival might depend. He is by no means a reflexive critic. Somewhat ironically, he

professes the most fulsome confidence in the military judgment of the commander-in-chief, Lord Amherst; and where fortifications seem adequate, or where a minor shift in the placement of troops might suffice to secure a position, he is happy enough to issue words of praise. Moreover, Lloyd's view of the overall military situation, even in the event of a successful French landing, is profoundly optimistic; geography alone, he often seems to suggest, will serve to shatter any French advance inland, and provide defending forces with a near-limitless array of opportunities to regain the initiative and drive the invader back into the sea. Nevertheless, having identified a weakness, Lloyd is quite merciless. Where a spot of ground seems insufficiently, inexplicably undefended, such as at Gosport, he does not hesitate to castigate current arrangements, to outline a comprehensive remedy, and to demand immediate action. His faith in his own military judgment never seems to waver.

Lloyd's self-confidence was the consequence of a lifetime of adventure, which had seen him travel across Europe and serve in the armies of every major power of his day – except, ironically, that of Britain. Particularly in his youth, as a young and penniless Welsh expatriate in search of military glory, he had been flexible in his loyalties; though later in life he proved a vociferous public champion of the British constitution, sympathetic to King George III, suspicious of Catholicism and continental absolutism, he served in the armies of the Jacobite Prince Charles in 1745, and reconnoitred the British coast on behalf of the French in the mid-1750's. Even after making his peace with the British government and being awarded a state pension for his services to the Hanoverian crown, his political views, as published in several of his pamphlets and books, marked him as a friend to the radicals of the 1760's and 70's who were so desperate for reform. He was rarely content to remain in one place or in the service of one master for very long.

The only constant in his life was his thirst for new vistas to explore, whether they be intellectual, as expressed in his writings, or tangible, such as his various military campaigns. Henry Lloyd was, in short, true only to himself. Such a man demanded enormous respect, but not necessarily trust.

Even under the most favourable circumstances, a man of Lloyd's background could be relied upon to ruffle at least a few political and military feathers at the highest level of British society. Yet the circumstances prevailing in the second half of 1779 were very far from being favourable to the reception of a work so fearless as the Rhapsody. For this was a moment when fear of invasion was running rampant through Britain as at few times in its history. Having stumbled into a disastrous war with its own American colonies, Britain had presented its old Bourbon enemies with an opportunity to exact revenge for previous humiliations. France had made the most of the years which had elapsed since the Peace of Paris of 1763; by 1779, thanks to the determination of its ruthless patron Choiseul, the French Navy was once again a force to be feared. The British, by contrast, preoccupied with an enormous national debt, had been content to rest on the laurels won during the Seven Years War, allowing their splendid navy to atrophy. The result of this neglect, coupled with an inability to secure allies on the continent of Europe, an absence of spirited leadership, a crippling shortage of manpower, and exhausting military commitments which spanned the globe, was that Britain in 1779 was closer to total defeat than at almost any other moment in its modern history. In the end it was only the greater ineptitude of the enemy, and a good dollop of luck, which saved the nation from invasion.

Meanwhile, even as the Franco-Spanish armada was lumbering up towards the English coast, the British political system was in crisis. The government of Lord North, a

man who nourished few illusions about his ability to fulfil the responsibilities with which he had been entrusted, proved completely incapable of inspiring the confidence of large sections of the public, the parliamentary opposition, or even many of its own adherents. Assailed on almost every side for its incompetence, its impotence, and its often bewildering inactivity in the face of even the most serious challenges, whether these be calls for political reform in England, demands for economic reform in Ireland, or the revival of the Bourbon powers abroad, the ministry seemed in imminent danger of collapse throughout the last half of 1779. And no issue seemed more likely to be fatal to North's ramshackle administration than its dismal handling of the invasion scare that dominated the summer, when a Franco-Spanish fleet had entered the English Channel and for a few weeks appeared even to command it.

Arguably it was this political reality, as much as the dire military situation, which was really the undoing of Lloyd's original Rhapsody. By the beginning of December, when the work was ready for public distribution, the immediate threat of invasion was widely believed to have passed. Yet the political fallout from the summer crisis, and the military weaknesses which that crisis had laid bare, was only then reaching a true climax, with the reopening of Parliament at the end of November and thunderous calls from the Opposition for a full public inquiry into the inadequacy of the coastal defences of southern England. It is true that in Amherst's personal appraisal of the Rhapsody, written to Lloyd in the middle of December, he expressed particular concern about the military value which France might derive from the text, particularly Chapter Four. Yet Amherst was also an important politician, a key member of North's cabinet, and perhaps most importantly of all, one of the Opposition's chief targets in its assault on the government's military record. Certainly Lord North, to whom Amherst forwarded

Lloyd's request for financial indemnification, was at this time quite literally terrified lest the government's parliamentary enemies learn the truth about how weak Britain really had been during the recent season of invasion.

Of course one might well argue that a close reading of the Rhapsody should have been a source of reassurance to anyone concerned for England's safety, for Lloyd, over and over again, drives home his firm belief that the nation, if adequately mobilized and guided, should have nothing to fear from an invasion. It was precisely this "if", however, which made all the difference. The sad fact was that England in late 1779 was neither adequately mobilized nor guided; one must therefore view the suppression of the Rhapsody as just another symptom of the country's shocking unpreparedness for war, and the chronic misjudgments of the government which had reduced the country to such a sorry state. The next generation would see the value of Lloyd's musings about invasion, and later governments, facing invasion scares of their own but led by calmer heads, would raise no objection to the publication of the Rhapsody.

Indeed, it is instructive to consider how a later, better prepared, and distinctly wiser government reacted to the prospect of the Rhapsody going public. In 1794, in the midst of the French Revolution and another, albeit somewhat less credible invasion scare, William Pitt the Younger, confident that the work could do no harm, raised no objection when an enterprising publisher endeavoured to release a new edition of the Rhapsody. His view, expressed in reply to an apologetic letter from Lloyd's surviving family, was that the release of the Rhapsody, at this moment of national danger, was likely to do more good than harm.⁴⁰⁴

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- 1 Memoire sur l'invasion et la défense de la Grande-Bretagne, par le général Lloyd (Paris: Barrois l'aîné, 1801); Ueber die Ausführbarkeit einer französischen Landung in England und deren Folgen, vom General Lloyd (1803); Memoria politica e militare spora l'invasione e la difesa della Gran-Bretagna, e riflessioni su l'invasione di Francia, del generale Lloyd (Milan: Presso Pirotta e Maspero, 1804).
- 2 Henry Lloyd, The History of the Late War in Germany between the King of Prussia and the Empress of Germany and her Allies (London: R. Horsfield, 1766); Henry Lloyd, Continuation of the History of the Late War in Germany between the King of Prussia and the Empress of Germany and her Allies (London: S. Hooper, 1781).
- 3 John Drummond, "Mr. Drummond's Letter to the Editor," A Political and Military Rhapsody on the Invasion and Defence of Great Britain and Ireland (London: T. and J. Egerton, 1790).
- 4 Hannibal Lloyd, Memoir of General Lloyd (London: Printed for private circulation, 1842).
- 5 For example, compare Drummond's version of the battle aboard the *Elizabeth* in "Mr Drummond's Letter to the Editor," p. xxxi; and Hannibal Lloyd's version in his Memoir of General Lloyd, p. 3.
- 6 See in particular Hannibal's contention that Lloyd attached "but little weight" to the Rhapsody: Hannibal Lloyd, Memoir of General Lloyd, p. 8.
- 7 Romance de Mesnon, writing in the preface to Introduction à l'histoire de la guerre en Allemagne en 1756 entre le roi de Prusse et l'impératrice-reine avec ses alliés ou Mémoires militaires et politiques du général Lloyd (Brussels: A.F. Pion, 1784). This summary of Mesnon's treatment of Lloyd is based on citations found in Franco Venturi, "Le avventure del Generale Henry Lloyd," Rivista storica italiana, 91 (1979), pp. 426-27.
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February 1, 2002

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Title of Thesis:

Henry Lloyd's Rhapsody and the Crisis of 1779

Author:



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February 1, 2002