

FREDERICK, PRINCE OF WALES, AND THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF ‘RULE, BRITANNIA!’*

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ABSTRACT. *The words and music of ‘Rule, Britannia!’ are synonymous with the expansionist, triumphalist, and imperialist Britain symbolized by fluttering Union Jacks on the Last Night of the Proms. This article explores the cultural and political contexts of the first performance of this important national cultural artefact as the finale of Alfred: a masque to suggest that this opening night served a very different purpose. The first audience was a court in exile from the metropolitan heart of London, popular amongst the general public, but without any prospects of government. Two of the most important members of this group of peers, politicians, poets and a prince had recently died, and with them any cohesive identity. Alfred is both a desperate plea for unity, a rallying cry which forcefully restated the key tenets of this group’s identity, and a delayed expression of patriotic celebration occasioned by Admiral Vernon’s capture of Portobello. Through addressing this performance, this article makes an important contribution to our understanding of Hanoverian political culture and highlights the continuing impact of Anglo-Saxon England on mid-eighteenth-century Britain.*

I

On 1 August 1740, the tenor Thomas Salway,¹ in character as a blind bard, strode out into the centre of a grass amphitheatre high above the River Thames

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* For comments and advice on earlier versions of my argument, I am grateful to Dr Hannah Smith and Dr Geoffrey Tyack. I have presented aspects of this research at ‘The making of a monarchy for the modern world’ conference, Kensington Palace and symposia at the Universities of Groningen, Oxford, Rutgers Centre for British Studies, and York. This article is much stronger for those audiences’ feedback and that of the anonymous readers of the *Historical Journal*. Thanks are also due to John and Virginia Murray who ensured archival work at 50 Albemarle Street was always a pleasure. The research for this article was completed with the financial assistance of the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University College Old Members’ Trust.

¹ ‘A new ode in honour of Great Britain, was sung by Mr Salway’, *Daily Advertiser*, 6 Aug. 1740. An alternative tenor, Thomas Lowe, has also had the honour claimed for him: E. R. Dibdin, ‘The bi-centenary of Rule Britannia’, *Music & Letters*, 21 (1940), pp. 275–90, at p. 285; M. Burden, ‘The independent masque, 1700–1800: a catalogue’, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 28 (1995), pp. 59–159, at p. 104.

at Cliveden, the home of Frederick, prince of Wales, in Buckinghamshire and started to sing:

When Britain first, at heaven's command,
 Arose from out the azure main;
 This was the charter of the land,
 And guardian Angels sung this strain:
 'Rule, Britannia! rule the waves;
 'Britons never will be slaves.'²

These words have become a touchstone of British national identity. *Alfred*, written by the Anglo-Scots David Mallet and James Thomson, has long been recognized as a political performance, and has traditionally been seen as a dramatization of the ideas contained within Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke's 'Idea of a Patriot King'.³ By reconstituting the masque and its first audience in the specific contexts of August 1740, this article argues that this performance was not simply an expression of Bolingbroke's political philosophy, but was an attempt to create a unified opposition to the men and measures of Sir Robert Walpole, and the prince's father, King George II. *Alfred* was a cultural expression of Patriot political thought designed to respond to the two problems which faced this group in August 1740: the deaths of William Wyndham and Earl Marchmont, and the successful conduct of war with Spain.

To understand how a ninth-century Anglo-Saxon king could be used as a powerful pedagogic tool during a time of schism and crisis within the Patriot Opposition to Walpole we need first to explore the emergence of this particular movement; second to understand their creative use of the English past throughout the 1730s; and third to understand why, by the summer of 1740, the Patriots were in crisis. Against this background, this article will use newly discovered eyewitness accounts to suggest a revised interpretation of *Alfred: a masque*.

II

To be a Patriot in the 1730s was to oppose vigorously Sir Robert Walpole's pursuit of a European peace at the expense of British trade and his use of

² D. Mallet and J. Thomson, *Alfred: a masque* (London, 1740), p. 42.

³ For the relationship between the ideas contained in Bolingbroke's treatise and Frederick, see I. Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his circle: the politics of nostalgia in the age of Walpole* (2nd edn, Ithaca, NY, 1992), pp. 33–5. Another approach has been to focus solely on 'Rule, Britannia!': W. H. Cummings, *Dr. Arne and Rule, Britannia!* (London, 1912); Dibdin, 'The bi-centenary of Rule Britannia'; R. Fiske, 'A Cliveden setting', *Music & Letters*, 55 (1974), pp. 385–97; P. Whiteley, 'Images of empire: James Thomson's "Rule Britannia"', *New Arcadian Journal*, 35/6 (1993), pp. 48–60; and K. McLeod, 'Ideology and racial myth in Purcell's King Arthur and Arne's Alfred', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660–1700*, 34 (2010), pp. 83–102. The best contextual study is M. Burden, *Garrick, Arne and the masque of Alfred: a case study in national, theatrical and musical politics* (Lampeter, 1994).

positions and placemen to control the House of Commons. It was also to oppose the expansion of the National Debt, the subsidy of foreign troops at the expense of British naval expansion, and to lament the corruption of the balanced constitution of King, Lords, and Commons. Patriots looked forward to achieving an end to party, through a broad-bottom alliance between disenchanted Whigs and Tories, and a thriving mercantile economy supported by an assertive maritime foreign policy, ready to be led by a future Patriot King, Frederick prince of Wales. These issues and aspirations were to provide the political inspiration for a series of cultural endeavours supported by the prince and his followers, which explains why Thomson and Mallet chose the life and reign of King Alfred as suitable for dramatization.

Thanks to Christine Gerrard's pioneering work it has become a scholarly commonplace to speak of the 'Patriot Opposition to Walpole'.⁴ However, as her work suggests, we must be wary of falling foul of the unifying images of an expansive mercantile economy and heightened imperialist ambitions presented in the pages of opposition newspapers, the plays and poems of authors such as Thomson, Mallet, James Hammond, and Gilbert West, and the landscapes of estates like Stowe, Cirencester Park, and Carlton House. That Walpole remained in office until 1742 was due to a combination of personal ambition, personal antipathy, and personal principles amongst the leading figures of the Patriot Opposition.

Frustrated, isolated, and, by autumn 1737, penniless, Lord Stair looked back over the uneven political terrain of the 1730s and identified four men and one event as crucial to the emergence of a Patriot Opposition in Lords, Commons, and out-of-doors. The duke of Montrose, the earl of Chesterfield, and Earl Marchmont 'were the Gentle-men that at the time of the Excise Scheme first Set up the Standard against S^r R's Measures, with the advice and assistance of another very worthy man . . . L^d Cobham'.⁵ These lords of the opposition were suspicious of the Excise Bill with its proposed provision of extensive search powers to customs officials, which threatened the sanctity of an Englishman's right to privacy in his own property.⁶ To the bill's opponents, Walpole's scheme promised to 'advance the power of y^e Crown to the prejudice of our Constitution' and be 'Destructive of the affection of the people to the King which . . . [is] the surest foundation upon which the Protestant succession is built'. Stair played an active role in opposing the bill, so as 'to give an Example of disinterest'd virtue to our fellow Subjects, that they might join w^t us to preserve our Constitution and the Liberties of our Country, both of which we Judged to be struck at by the Excise Scheme'.⁷ Throughout the crisis, the

⁴ C. Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: politics, poetry and national myth, 1725–1742* (Oxford, 1994).

⁵ Stair to Marlborough, [Nov. 1737], London, the British Library (BL), Blenheim papers, Add. MS 61467, fo. 31v.

⁶ P. Langford, *The Excise Crisis: society and politics in the age of Walpole* (Oxford, 1975).

⁷ BL Add. MS 61467 fo. 33v.

unwritten ancient constitution and the protean concept of English liberties were the building blocks of opposition rhetoric.

Walpole, however, dropped the Excise Bill before it came in front of the House of Lords. Deprived of their original target, the opposition peers fastened on a proposal for an enquiry into the use of lands forfeited by South Sea Company directors.⁸ As a consequence, Walpole removed seven peers from their positions, and in the process created a new opposition figurehead in Richard Temple, Lord Cobham. Removed from office, Cobham retired to his country estate at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, where he embellished the landscape with potent political symbolism, and 'became a recruiting officer of rising young talent for the opposition'.⁹ This group of young men, pejoratively labelled 'Boy Patriots' or 'Cobham's Cubs', included Cobham's nephews Richard Grenville and George Lyttelton; Lyttelton's brother-in-law Thomas Pitt, and his brother, future Prime Minister William Pitt; whilst others, such as Hugh Hume Campbell, Lord Polwarth, and Henry Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, eddied around this core.¹⁰ For those politicians and courtiers opposed to Walpole, the possibility of a politically active court centred around the heir to the throne provided not only respectability, but also the prospect of immense rewards when their heir became the king.

Frederick, prince of Wales, has suffered at the hands of historians who have struggled to escape the shadow of his premature death, nine years before his father, in 1751.¹¹ It is only in recent years that a full re-evaluation of the prince's political and cultural activities in life, and influence in death has revealed the crucial position he played in mid-eighteenth-century Britain.¹² Historians have finally moved away from a reliance on eminently quotable yet distinctly partial sources such as Lord Hervey's *Memoirs of the reign of King George II* and Henry Etough's *Free and impartial reflexions on the character, life, and death of Frederick prince of Wales*.¹³ In place of the 'Poor Fred' of previous generations,¹⁴

⁸ Langford, *Excise Crisis*, pp. 99–100.

⁹ A. S. Johnson, *A prologue to revolution: the political career of George Grenville, 1712–1770* (London, 1997), p. 27.

¹⁰ For Cobham and his circle, see L. M. Wiggin, *The faction of cousins: a political account of the Grenvilles, 1733–1763* (New Haven, CT, 1958), pp. 51–117; J. V. Beckett, *The rise and fall of the Grenvilles: the dukes of Buckingham and Chandos, 1710 to 1921* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 7–64.

¹¹ For the circumstances surrounding Frederick's demise, see R. Eagles, "'No more to be said'? Reactions to the death of Frederick Lewis, prince of Wales', *Historical Research*, 80 (2007), pp. 346–67.

¹² Gerrard laid the foundations for this re-evaluation in the chapter of her 1986 doctoral thesis, 'Frederick, patronage and poetry': 'The Patriot Opposition to Sir Robert Walpole: a study of politics and poetry, 1725–1742' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1986), pp. 46–71.

¹³ For Frederick's relationship with Hervey: H. Smith and S. Taylor, 'Hephaestion and Alexander: Lord Hervey, Frederick, prince of Wales, and the royal favourite in England in the 1730s', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), pp. 283–312.

¹⁴ For example: M. Marples, *Poor Fred and the butcher: sons of George II* (London, 1970), and M. De-La-Noy, *The king who never was: the story of Frederick, prince of Wales* (London, 1996). John Walters argues that 'the Griff [Frederick] was not at this time [1737–1738] interesting himself

the prince can now be seen as an important political and cultural figure-head, a patron of the arts, and the most important royal collector since King Charles I.¹⁵ This artistic revival was, in turn, one of the ways in which the prince bound himself to the Patriot Opposition, with artistic exchange forging a common identity among Frederick's circle. Poets and playwrights, artists and architects were drawn to Frederick, not solely for pecuniary gain, but because they shared a vision of national recovery founded upon enlightened royal patronage of the arts.¹⁶

Born in Hanover in 1707, Frederick had acted as the ceremonial head of the Hanoverian court during the long absences of his grandfather, George I. The prince did not arrive in England until 1728, for his father was loath to bring Frederick across the North Sea, fearing he prove a magnet for disaffected courtiers. Indeed, it was the young prince's relationship with his father that was to define his political and cultural life. It had been clear since the time of the Excise Crisis in 1733 that any proposal for increasing the prince's annual income would cause an open break with the king, thanks to an unwritten assumption, understood by all parties, that any increase in the size of the prince's household or his allowance through the Civil List covered not just personal expenses but provided a considerable war chest for political patronage.

With his marriage to Augusta in 1736 and impending birth of his first child, Frederick's claims for a yearly allowance of £100,000 came to a head at the start of 1737's parliamentary session. The administration, fearful they could lose the Commons' vote, especially given the king's long absence in Hanover,¹⁷ presented a compromise to the prince, which he rejected. Pulteney spoke for the prince in the Commons, while in the Lords, Carteret 'drew a sort of comparison between Edward the Black Prince and the present Prince of Wales – said that this prince was like him in his humanity and virtue, and he wished him in every respect such as he was, excepting

much in politics': *The royal griffin: Frederick prince of Wales, 1707–1751* (London, 1972), p. 163. The most recent biography of Frederick is, if anything, too uncritical of the prince: F. Vivian, *A life of Frederick, prince of Wales, 1707–1751: a connoisseur of the arts* (Lampeter, 2006).

¹⁵ Kimerly Rorschach's work has been vital to the resuscitation of Frederick's artistic patronage and collecting: see K. Rorschach, 'Frederick, prince of Wales, 1707–1751, as collector and patron', *Walpole Society*, 55 (1989–90), pp. 1–76; and at greater length, idem, 'Frederick, prince of Wales (1707–1751) as a patron of the visual arts: princely patriotism and political propaganda' (D.Phil. thesis, Yale, 1985).

¹⁶ Gerrard, *Patriot Opposition*, pp. 48–52. Frederick's plans for an academy for British painters were highlighted in Francis Hayman's *The muses paying homage to Frederick, prince of Wales and Princess Augusta* (1751).

¹⁷ Frederick had assisted at the Temple fire in January 1737 causing Lady Irwin to remark: 'He need not this to make him popular, for the King being obliged to delay his journey, the wind being still against him, makes the unreasonable populace so extravagantly angry that 'tis not to be imagined the outrageous things that is every day spoke against the King, and on the other hand how exceedingly the Prince is caressed by all ranks': Historic Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *The manuscripts of the earl of Carlisle* (London, 1897), p. 176.

the shortness of life'.¹⁸ Frederick's breach with king, court, and administration was made absolute by the circumstances of Princess Augusta's birth on 1 August 1737.¹⁹ As Augusta entered labour late on 31 July, Frederick rushed her from Hampton Court to St James's Palace, distancing his parents from the birth. Frederick's impetuosity shocked both members of his household and the court. His father banned him from all royal palaces and declared that those who attended the prince would not be welcome at court.

Sir William Irby, Princess Augusta's vice-chamberlain, feared for the coherence of the opposition. 'There are Hot ones about him, who will never rest till they make things desperate.' He believed that the moderate members of the prince's household would be 'made Fools to a set of Desperate Men who endeavour to blow him up, & ruin him' arguing that 'Your Carterets & your Chesterfields consider their own Spleen Preferable to our Masters real Good, Let him act like a Man in his Cause but let him not be led away a Fool to any Party'.²⁰ Chesterfield wrote to Lyttelton in November, suggesting that with the prince at the head of an organized opposition in both houses of parliament, and out-of-doors, 'We have a prospect of the Claud Lorraine kind before us, while Sir Robert's has all the horrors of Salvator Rosa. If the prince would play the Rising Sun he would gild it finely; if not he will never be able hereafter to shine through.'²¹

The opposition politicians who clustered around Frederick were, however, uncertain as to the prince's capabilities, forcing Lyttelton to write to Alexander Pope, 'Animate him to virtue, to the virtue least known to princes, though most necessary for them – love of the public – and think that the morals, the liberty, the whole happiness of the country depends on your success.'²² Not that the prince seemed all that concerned. Irby complained that 'Cricket & a Succession of Royall Diversions' prevented him from his correspondence;²³ and Martin Madan, one of the prince's equerries,²⁴ remarked of Kew that 'this Palace is the seat of Cheerfulness, no one here ever frowns but at the Thought of Hampton Court'.²⁵ However, the proximity of Kew to Hampton Court inclined Frederick

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁹ Lyttelton wrote to the duchess of Marlborough, giving her a detailed account of the birth, so that 'you may not be perplexed with the many idle stories which are set about by the Court upon that subject': BL Add. MS 61467 fos. 5–8, at fo. 5r.

²⁰ Irby to 1st earl of Guilford, 13 Oct. 1737, Bodleian Libraries Oxford (Bodl.) MS North d. 4 fo. 155r.

²¹ M. Wyndham, ed., *Chronicles of the eighteenth century: founded on the correspondence of Sir Thomas Lyttelton and his family* (2 vols., London, 1924), II, pp. 60–1.

²² *Ibid.*, I, p. 69.

²³ Irby to Guilford, 19 July 1737, Bodl. MS North d. 4 fo. 133r.

²⁴ Warrant for salary 3 Aug. 1736, BL Add. MS 24397 fo. 54. Madan most probably owed his appointment to his brother-in-law Augustus Schutz: M. Madan to J. Madan, 19 Aug. 1735, Bodl. MS Eng. lett. c. 284 fo. 135v.

²⁵ M. Madan to J. Madan, 14 July 1737, Bodl. MS Eng. lett. c. 285 fo. 1r.

to find a new country residence. When the earl of Orkney died in 1737, Frederick leased his home, Cliveden, from Orkney's daughter Lady Anne Inchiquin for £600 per year.²⁶

III

For Thomson and Mallet's *Alfred* to function as both a didactic tool and a political statement in August 1740 it needed to build upon connections already established between Frederick, prince of Wales, the Patriot Opposition to Walpole, and the English past. The third section of this article explores how throughout the 1730s and into the 1740s Patriot political thought could operate across a variety of different genres, including landscape and drama.

The most famous of these Patriot landscapes was Lord Cobham's at Stowe, designed to provide pertinent political comment on Sir Robert Walpole's administration.²⁷ Frederick visited Stowe in July 1737, and Cobham commemorated the occasion in the Temple of Friendship, constructed from 1739, which celebrated in stone, sculpture, and paint the Patriot Opposition's vision for national recovery. Busts of Lord Cobham, Frederick, the earls of Westmorland, Chesterfield, and Marchmont, Lords Gower and Bathurst, Richard Grenville, William Pitt, and George Lyttelton were placed around the room and an emblematic painting by Sleter of Britannia comparing the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and Edward III with the debased rule of George II completed the ensemble.²⁸ The Elysian Fields, inspired by the ancient landscape of Tivoli, has consistently been interpreted as a demonstration of a new form of Patriot politics, inspired by both a classical and English past, and designed to counteract the endemic corruption and degeneracy of the Walpole administration. The Temple of Ancient Virtue, completed in 1736, containing full-length statues of Homer, Socrates, Epaminondas, and Lysurgus, provided inspiration from the classical past. Positioned across the 'River Styx', the Temple of British Worthies was a domestic counterpoint. The epitaphs for each of the Worthies functioned collectively to rewrite English history with past liberties secured against external

²⁶ BL Add. MS 61467 fo. 14r. For Cliveden's architectural development, see G. Jackson-Stops, 'The Cliveden album: drawings by Archer, Leoni and Gibbs for the 1st earl of Orkney', *Architectural History*, 19 (1976), pp. 5–16, 77–88; idem, 'Cliveden, Buckinghamshire', *Country Life*, 161 (1977), pp. 428–41; idem, 'Formal garden designs for Cliveden: the work of Claude Desgots and others for the 1st earl of Orkney', *National Trust Year Book, 1976–1977* (1977), pp. 100–17. For Frederick's alterations to Cliveden see, Rorschach, 'Frederick, prince of Wales', pp. 184–91.

²⁷ All recent scholarship on Stowe is indebted to G. Clarke, 'Grecian taste and gothic virtue: Lord Cobham's gardening programme and its iconography', *Apollo* 97 (1973), pp. 566–71.

²⁸ G. Bickham, *The beauties of Stow: or, a description of the pleasant seat, and noble gardens, of the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Cobham* (London, 1750), p. 54.

threats by a band of selfless Patriots. King Alfred featured prominently as the wellspring of liberty:

The Mildest Justest, Most Beneficent of Kings;
Who Drove Out The Danes, Secured The Seas, Protected Learning;
Establish'd Juries, Crush'd Corruption, Guarded Liberty,
And Was The Founder Of The English Constitution.

What the figure of Alfred offered Frederick and his political allies was a standard of kingship against which his father could consistently be found wanting. If Alfred, as the gardens at Stowe proclaimed, 'crush'd corruption' and 'guarded liberty', George II and Walpole promoted venality and encouraged tyranny. Whereas Alfred was believed to have founded the Royal Navy, promoted trade, and ensured the nation's maritime security, contemporary governmental foreign policy was believed by Cobham and his allies to be too pacific and inappropriately European. Alfred, therefore, was both a stick with which to beat the administration and a figure that offered the possibility of a reformation of the role of the monarchy through a restoration of idealized Anglo-Saxon values.

Frederick also visited Lord Bathurst's estate at Cirencester Park in autumn 1738, where the convivial bond of friendship was likewise expressed through architecture. Bathurst, like Cobham, was an enthusiastic gardener and had been ornamenting his landscape with the help of Alexander Pope from the early 1720s. By the summer of 1733 he had created a Gothic banqueting house, known as King Alfred's Hall.²⁹ Mrs Pendarves wryly observed that 'My Lord Bathurst has greatly improved the wood-house ... It is now a venerable castle, and has been taken by an antiquarian for one of King *Arthur's*',³⁰ suggesting a more generalized association with the remote British past, rather than a specific engagement with a highly politicized historical figure.³¹

²⁹ A 'Wood House', dating from 1721, in Cirencester Park has long been recognized as one of the earliest gothic revival garden buildings: M. McCarthy, *The origins of the gothic revival* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1987), p. 29. For the construction chronology of Alfred's Hall, see M. Cousins, 'Alfred's Hall, Cirencester Park', *The Follies Journal*, 8 (2009), pp. 89–109.

³⁰ Pendarves to Jonathan Swift, 4 Nov. 1733, in H. Williams, ed., *The correspondence of Jonathan Swift, 1732–1736* (5 vols., Oxford, 1963–65), iv, p. 199.

³¹ Bathurst sought advice from his cousin, Lord Strafford, who had recently completed a gothic banqueting house, Stainborough Castle, on his Wentworth Castle estate, for the design of King Alfred's Hall: Bathurst to Strafford, 17 Aug. 1731, BL Add. MS 31142 fos. 24–5. The Alfredian connotations were not confirmed until 1763 when Thomas Robins produced a set of engravings. *The northeast view of King Alfred's Hall, Cirencester, 1763* (British Museum 1955-4-25-45). The original watercolours of these engravings are held at the Victoria and Albert Museum: E.1308:56–2001, E.1308:62–2001. Robins's engraving of King Alfred's Hall was included by James Wedgwood on the 'Frog Service' for Catherine the Great, empress of Russia, created from 1773: M. Raeburn, 'The Frog Service and its sources', in H. Young, ed., *The genius of Wedgwood* (London, 1995), pp. 134–48, image at p. 155. See also M. Raeburn, L. N. Voronikhina, and N. Nurnberg, eds., *The Green Frog service* (London, 1995).

Throughout these landscapes there is an emphasis on networks of friendship and political patronage. These landscapes were not just a result of these friendships but also a crucial original element in creating links. The process of design bound members of the Patriot Opposition together in a collaborative exercise, and one that Frederick was eager to be an active participant in.

Frederick, adopting the iconography developed at Stowe, willingly promoted himself as a latter-day Alfred through the garden of his London residence, Carlton House.³² The garden, 'more diversified and of greater variety than anything of that compass', contained within it an overt political statement.³³ The Octagon Temple, decorated by some of the pre-eminent craftsmen of the day, was a showcase of the prince's various artistic interests.³⁴ Standing in 'the neaches in the Pavillion' were 'two Bustows of king Alfred and the black prince' provided by Michael Rysbrack.³⁵ Their commissioning and installation was perceived as a political act with both pro-Walpole and opposition newspapers passing comment.³⁶ The *Daily Gazetteer* carried a Latin tribute to Frederick, 'on recently erecting one statue to Alfred the Great another to Edward', which prophesized that 'blessed England will rejoice in your kingdom, and broken France will fear a victorious leader. One day Virtue and Piety will know you as a patron, and the Laws, and the Muses too, will know you as their own.'³⁷ The same day the *Craftsman*, in a lengthy article discussing the antiquity of parliament, suggested that Frederick's recent adoption of Alfredian iconography, 'gives us an happy Presage that He will think Himself under an Obligation, whenever He comes to the Throne, to preserve the Liberties of our antient Constitution'.³⁸ The figure of the Black Prince, used by Pulteney in his Commons' speech to emphasize Frederick's potential and future promise, and at Carlton House acted in tandem with Alfred, as Barbara Gribbling has suggested, to highlight the prince's dissatisfaction with the Walpole

³² The most detailed account of Frederick's work at Carlton House is provided by Rorschach, 'Frederick, prince of Wales' (D.Phil. thesis), pp. 128–44.

³³ HMC *Carlisle*, p. 143.

³⁴ Rorschach, 'Frederick, prince of Wales' (D.Phil. thesis), pp. 140–4.

³⁵ Duchy of Cornwall Household Accounts, vol. xix, fo. 7, quoted in D. Coombs, 'The garden at Carlton House of Frederick prince of Wales and Augusta princess and dowager princess of Wales', *Garden History*, 25 (1997), pp. 153–77, at p. 159.

³⁶ *General Evening Post*, 22–4 July 1735. The inscriptions on the pedestals were also noted by the *London Evening Post*, 24–6 July 1735, the *Daily Gazetteer*, 25 July 1735, the *Old Whig or The Consistent Protestant*, 31 July 1735, among others. The bustos also featured in guidebooks: G. Bickham, *Delicie Britannicæ; or, the curiosities of Kensington, Hampton Court, and Windsor Castle, delineated* ... (2nd edn, London, 1755), pp. 161–63.

³⁷ *Daily Gazetteer*, 6 Sept. 1735. My warmest thanks to Dr Robin Darwall-Smith, Archivist at University College Oxford for this translation.

³⁸ *Craftsman*, 6 Sept. 1735. The prince did not complete payment for the statues until 31 Aug. 1736, with the receipts certified by 'William Kent Esqr. our architect': Duchy of Cornwall Household Accounts, vol. vi, pt 1, fo. 257, quoted in Coombs, 'The garden at Carlton House', p. 159.

administration's 'conciliatory stance towards Catholic France and the ministry's reluctance to wage war on Spain'.³⁹

Acting as powerful visual mnemonics of the threat posed to the ancient constitution by the Walpole administration, the landscapes of the Patriot Opposition were complemented by dramatic action on the London stage. Members of the opposition bound themselves tightly to these theatrical performances. Lord Barrington, for example, was keen to extend such pedagogic drama further, asking Mallet for a prologue and epilogue to a schoolboy performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, but cautioned him that, 'the Schoolmaster having the Sons of Courtiers, as well as the Brothers of Patriots at his School, begs there may not be any offensive flights in praise of Liberty & honesty'.⁴⁰ Political controversy was not just limited to the Patent Theatres and children's plays, as Frederick had earlier supported the Opera of the Nobility from its inception in 1733 as a riposte to George II and Handel's Royal Academy of Music.⁴¹

In the summer of 1738, despite private doubts in Frederick's household about his suitability as a leader, the prince chose David Mallet's *Mustapha* to open a fearsome theatrical attack on Walpole's ministry.⁴² A Patriot prince, Mustapha, alienated from his father, King Solymán the Magnificent, by the machinations of the empress and her evil favourite, and subsequently executed, required little imagination on the part of the audience to uncover the political message. If *Mustapha* was the arrowhead of the Patriot attack, Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora*, Henry Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa: the deliverer of his country*, and William Paterson's *Arminius* provided the flanking wings. Yet, the censor counteracted the opposition assault. A little over a month after the first performance of *Mustapha*, Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa* became the first play to be banned under the provisions of the 1737 Licensing Act. As is often the case, prohibition only increased interest in what was otherwise an unremarkable play, with Brooke clearing a profit of over £800.⁴³ Thomson's *Agamemnon* had been the only new play performed during the 1737–8 season, where the straightforward equation of Agamemnon with George II, Aegisthus with Walpole, and Clytemnestra with Queen Caroline had passed the censor.⁴⁴ He was not to be so lucky the next season. Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora* in many ways prefigures elements of *Alfred* with its presentation of a princess's 'inviolable Affection and

³⁹ B. Gribling, 'Nationalising the hero: the image of Edward the Black Prince in English politics and culture, 1776–1803' (Ph.D. thesis, York, 2008), pp. 202–9.

⁴⁰ Barrington to Mallet, n.d., John Murray Collection, 50 Albemarle Street, Algarotti papers, box 3.

⁴¹ C. Taylor, 'Handel and Frederick, prince of Wales', *Musical Times*, 125 (1984), pp. 89–92.

⁴² Lyttelton to Mallet, [summer 1738], John Murray Collection, Algarotti papers, box 3.

⁴³ H. Wright, 'Henry Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa*', *Modern Language Review*, 14 (1919), pp. 173–82, at p. 174.

⁴⁴ A. D. McKillop, 'Thomson and the licensers of the stage', *Philological Quarterly*, 37 (1958), pp. 448–53, at p. 448.

generous Tenderness for a Prince, who was the Darling of a great and free People'.⁴⁵ The censor's objections lay in the discussion of the future Edward I's accession to the throne, for mendacious courtiers and evil favourites surround his father, Henry III. Thomson included an 'Advertisement' – 'The Representation of this Tragedy, on the Stage, was prohibited in the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty-Nine' – the Gothic type face acting as a powerful visual stimulus to the reader to recall the danger posed to the ancient constitution.⁴⁶ The lord chamberlain also banned *Arminius* in January 1740. Patterson had clearly read his Rapin, as English constitutionalism emerges from Teutonic forests:

When Fate had fix'd th' irrevocable Doom,
And Liberty forsook degenerate Rome,
Strait to the Regions of the rugged North,
She took her Flight in Search of manly Worth.⁴⁷

Frederick, the modern-day Arminius, had emerged from the forests of Hanover to become the figurehead of a new movement of national regeneration, fighting against the degenerate influence of the Roman tyrant, Sir Robert Walpole.

IV

On 17 June 1740, Lord Hervey wrote to Count Algarotti at the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin to inform him that 'S^r William Windham has been seized with an apoplectic-Fit since you left England . . . What Alteration this will make in our political World here, I know as little as you care.'⁴⁸ Hervey only hinted at the chaos Wyndham's death would plunge the Patriot Opposition into.

By 1740, Wyndham occupied a central position in the Patriot Opposition to Walpole. He offered the possibility of removing a sufficiently large number of dissident Whigs to form a broad-bottom ministry with the Tories, and thereby provide the numerical strength required to counter Walpole in both houses of parliament.⁴⁹ With Wyndham's death, however, members of the prince's inner circle felt this opportunity to be lost forever. Pope informed Hugh, Earl Marchmont, that 'If I see any man merry within a week after this death, I will affirm him no Patriot.'⁵⁰ Lyttelton was worried that the prince would not be

⁴⁵ J. Thomson, *Edward and Eleonora: a tragedy: as it was to have been acted at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden* (London, 1739), dedication.

⁴⁶ J. Sambrook, *James Thomson, 1700–1748: a life* (Oxford, 1993), p. 196.

⁴⁷ W. Paterson, *Arminius* (London, 1740), prologue.

⁴⁸ Hervey to Algarotti, 17 June 1740, John Murray Collection, Algarotti papers, box 2.

⁴⁹ G. Glickman, 'Parliament, the Tories and Frederick, prince of Wales', *Parliamentary History*, 30 (2011), pp. 123–8.

⁵⁰ Pope to Hugh, Earl Marchmont, 22 June 1740, in G. Sherburn, ed., *The correspondence of Alexander Pope* (5 vols., Oxford, 1956), iv, pp. 249–50.

able to manage the group of Tories previously orchestrated by Wyndham, and that an alliance with a corps of disaffected Whigs would be impossible to achieve.

Who shall take the lead in the House of Commons? Who has authority enough there to defeat the perfidy of some, and to spirit up the languor of others, to direct our measures, and to give them order, weight and dignity? To say the truth, after losing in one year Lord Polwarth and Sir W. Wyndham,⁵¹ to hope to resist the fate of this nation is a sort of presumption.⁵²

Bolingbroke, in his reply, asserted the need for a concerted attempt at preserving a broad-bottom Patriot coalition during the parliamentary recess of summer 1740.

nothing less than maintaining the coalition, and his R. H. at the head of it, could give any chance of procuring a better administration, and of raising a national spirit in all the orders of Government and in the whole body of the people. Unless this be done, nothing is done.⁵³

Indeed, despite their combative programme of drama on the London stage, members of the Patriot Opposition continued to express concern for the coherence of the movement. Its members, the duke of Queensberry asserted, ran into the country at the end of parliamentary sessions, 'and in appearance laying aside their patriotism with their winter clothes, to be put on again at the return of the season'.⁵⁴ As parliament debated the Convention of Pardo, designed to prevent war, settle the commercial differences between Britain and Spain, and seen by the opposition as the highpoint of Walpole's pacific policy, Frederick could not ensure the unanimity of his household: his treasurer, Charles Montagu of Papplewick, for example, voted in favour of it.

The letters of the Patriots in the immediate run up to the first performance of *Alfred: a masque* were full of calls to action, reminders of the task in hand, and naïve reassurances that there were to be brighter days ahead.

⁵¹ Wyndham's death exacerbated a problem that had first surfaced in February 1740 with the passing of Alexander, earl of Marchmont, who with his son Hugh had managed the Scottish peers throughout the 1730s. Succeeding to his father's title in February 1740, Hugh was, however, unable to return to London for the next parliamentary session, for his opposition to Walpole had rendered any chance of him becoming one of the sixteen Scottish representative peers virtually nil.

⁵² Lyttelton to Bolingbroke, [June 1740], in Wyndham, ed., *Chronicles of the eighteenth century*, 1, p. 76.

⁵³ Bolingbroke to Lyttelton, 15 Nov. 1740, *ibid.*, pp. 77–8. Also printed in R. Phillimore, ed., *Memoirs and correspondence of George, Lord Lyttelton from 1734 to 1773* (2 vols., London, 1845), 1, pp. 153–6.

⁵⁴ Duke of Queensberry to Alexander, earl of Marchmont, 16 Aug. 1739, in G. H. Rose, ed., *A selection from the papers of the earl of Marchmont* (3 vols., London, 1831), II, p. 141. Queensberry's opposition pedigree was richer than most. In 1729, his wife had been banished from court for her solicitation of subscriptions for John Gay's sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*.

For Alexander Pope, however, it was too little too late, and he launched a stinging satire against the Patriot Opposition in his unfinished poem, 'One Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty'.⁵⁵ The Patriots are indolent, reduced to proud, ineffectual fools with the death of Wyndham:

The plague is on thee, Britain, and who tries
To save thee in th' infectious office *dies*.
The first firm P[ultene]y soon resign'd his breath,
Brave S[carboro]w lov'd thee, and was ly'd to death.
Good M[arch]m[on]t's fate tore P[olwar]th from thy side,
And the last sigh was heard when W[yndha]m died.

The only hope in Pope's poem, 'on one alone our all relies', is Frederick. Pope pleads with the prince of Wales:

Be but a man! unminister'd, alone,
And free at once the Senate and the Throne;
Esteem the public love his best supply,
A [son]'s true glory his integrity.

It was against Pope's exhortation for Frederick to lead that *Alfred* was first performed.

IV

On 2 August, the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* reported the performance of a new masque, 'of two Acts, taken from the various fortunes of *Alfred* the Great, by Mr Thomson'.⁵⁶ The following day, the newspaper commented on how, 'Their Royal Highnesses were so well pleas'd with the whole Entertainment, that he commanded the same to be perform'd' the following evening,⁵⁷ inspiring the *London Evening Post* to remark that

What must be extremely agreeable to every Lover of his Country was, to hear (in the Ode sung to the Honour of Great Britain) their Royal Highnesses, their whole Court, and the Lord Mayor, joining in the Chorus,

'Rule, Britannia, rule the Waves;
'Britons never will be Slaves.'⁵⁸

Subsequent discussion of the masque's first two performances at Cliveden has relied extensively on a small handful of newspaper reports in the mistaken belief that no relevant accounts or correspondence survive. Yet, these

⁵⁵ J. Wharton, *The works of Alexander Pope* (9 vols., London, 1797), iv, pp. 352–6. For a decoding of the poem's hieroglyphs, see P. Rogers, 'The symbols in Pope's *One thousand seven hundred and forty*', *Modern Philology*, 102 (2004), pp. 90–4. All quotations are taken from Wharton's 1797 edition.

⁵⁶ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, 2 Aug. 1740.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1740.

⁵⁸ *London Evening Post*, 5–7 Aug. 1740.

newspaper reports clearly suggest that the audience was composed of members of Frederick's court, and buried amongst the voluminous correspondence of these individuals are accounts of the Cliveden performances.

Writing to his wife, Judith, Martin Madan (one of the prince's equerries) related how:

The Diversions at Clifden were extremely Elegant. They began by the representation of a Masque wrote by M^r Mallet, the Author of Mustapha, & M^r Thompson, the Subject is the Story of King Alfred, who took Refuge in an Island in Somersetshire after the loss of a Battle fought against Eric who invaded the Kingdom, He there meets with a Hermit who is suppos'd a Prophet. The Poets in imitation of Virgil cause the Hermit to shew Alfred the Spirits of his great Successors Viz Edward the 3^d his Queen & the Black Prince their Son, Queen Elizabeth & William the 3^d. whose Virtues are enumerated, in opposition to their Virtues, are display'd the deformed Vices of Tyrants, the whole is a noble Lesson & proper to be exhibited to a Prince that durst hear Truth.⁵⁹

Madan went on to relate how the masque was followed by a 'great Dance, in which the celebrated Barbinni perform'd' and 'a French Farce & a Pantomime Scene' before a performance of 'the Judgement of Paris, of Congreve, set to Musick by Martini'.⁶⁰ The whole event lasted six hours, concluding with a firework display orchestrated by Frederick's chaplain Dr Desaguliers. The famous Signora Le Barbarini may well have been the main attraction for many members of Frederick's court.⁶¹

If Barberini was one attraction, the other came in the form of the outdoor theatre, constructed from Charles Bridgeman's grass amphitheatre.⁶² Madan continued to his wife, Judith:

I must not omit to describe our Theatre which was in Clifden Garden. In a part of a Green Walk, each side of which is a wood, Pillars were erected cover'd wth Boughs to which hung Chapplets of Flowers, a cross Arch was form'd from Pillar to Pillar made of the same Materials, there were about 20 Pillars of a side which form'd a long Room open a Top. Each Pillar was illuminated by 3 Lamps the same number hung pendant from each arch. 50 little Boys cloath'd in Blew wth Grenadier Caps were divided on each Side, holding a large wax Torch, by which means the illumination was very fine.⁶³

⁵⁹ M. Madan to J. Madan, 10 Aug. 1740, Bodl. MS Eng. lett. c. 285 fo. 28r-v.

⁶⁰ Madan's account proves Fiske's assertion that 'Sammartini set Congreve's libretto is certain ... and it is impossible to think of a more likely occasion for its performance than the 1740 celebrations at Cliveden': 'A Cliveden setting', p. 126; and challenges Burden's belief that Peter Preleur's *The contending deities* was the evening's second event: *Garrick, Arne and the masque of Alfred*, pp. 34-5.

⁶¹ H. D. to Algarotti, 1 Aug. 1740, John Murray Collections, Algarotti papers, box 3.

⁶² Part of 1st earl of Orkney's alterations to the house and grounds at Cliveden. The amphitheatre was in place by October 1723; J. Crathorn, *Cliveden: the place and the people* (2nd edn, London, 2001), p. 40.

⁶³ Bodl. MS Eng. lett. c. 285 fo. 28v.

But despite these distractions, the 'noble Lesson' succeeded in awaking patriotic fervour in the audience. Writing to Lord Guilford two weeks after the event, Bussy, 4th Baron Mansel, observed:

The Entertainment you had Here [Mansel's estate at Briton Ferry] was very short of that at Clifden, but Had I Known your Passion for a Chorus, I would have summon'd the Neath Choir ... to sing yours & Lady Norths Praises. Methinks I saw you stretching your Melodious Throat in the Greatest Extasy, pronouncing Those Delightful Words; Britons Never Will Be Slaves.⁶⁴

For the basic contours of the plot, Mallet and Thomson drew heavily from Paul de Rapin-Thoyras's account of the king's reign in his hugely popular *History of England*. Both authors were familiar with the Anglo-Saxon king. Alfred had featured in Thomson's *Britain: being the fourth part of Liberty, a poem* in 1736, in a traditional pantheon of Patriot Whig heroes alongside Edward III, Henry V, Elizabeth I, Algernon Sidney, and William III;⁶⁵ in his preface to a new edition of John Milton's *Areopagitica* in 1738 as the original defender of freedom of writing and publishing;⁶⁶ and he would revise parts of *The seasons* in 1743 to include Alfred, 'the best of kings'.⁶⁷ David Mallet used Alfred in a comparative historical and political framework in his *Life of Bacon* in 1740. In contrast to James I, Alfred was a monarch who encouraged learning and the spirit of liberty.⁶⁸

Alfred was imbued with a far greater degree of specificity than scholars have hitherto noted. Too often the masque has been reduced to a straightforward espousal of Bolingbroke's 'Idea of a Patriot King'.⁶⁹ However, there are no mentions of this slim treatise, composed in manuscript during the autumn of 1738, with a deliberately limited circulation, in any of the private

⁶⁴ Mansel to Guilford, 14 Aug. 1740, Bodl. MS North d. 5, fo. 22r.

⁶⁵ Alfred's particular achievement amongst these Whig heroes was as the restorer of peace to England (lines 731–4): J. Thomson, *Britain: being the fourth part of Liberty, a poem* (London, 1736), pp. 40–1.

⁶⁶ Responding to the Licensing Act of 1737, Thomson's preface argued that the end of press freedom spelt the end of the liberty. 'For what can Liberty mean, if it does not mean, the Liberty of Exercising, Improving and Informing our Understandings? "A People have Liberty, said a truly good King of England [Alfred], when they are free as Thought is free": J. Milton, *Areopagitica: a speech of Mr John Milton, for the liberty of unlicens'd printing, to the parliament of England. First published in the year 1644. With a preface, by another hand* (London, 1738), p. iv.

⁶⁷ Alfred, along with references to warlike Edwards and Henrys, was a late addition to Thomson's catalogue of British worthies in *Summer*, featuring from 1744 onwards: J. Thomson, *The Seasons* (London, 1744), p. 115. Glynis Ridley has suggested that the evolution of Thomson's worthies in the three editions of *The Seasons* from 1730 onwards demonstrates both the poet's 'general acceptance of the pro-Frederick loyalties signalled by the homage to King Alfred with which the roll call begins' and an adoption of 'a Cobhamite frame of reference': 'The Seasons and the politics of opposition', in R. Terry, ed., *James Thomson: essays for the centenary* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 93–116, at p. 102.

⁶⁸ D. Mallet, *The life of Francis Bacon, lord chancellor of England* (London, 1740), pp. 133–4.

⁶⁹ McLeod, 'Ideology and racial myth in Purcell's King Arthur and Arne's Alfred', pp. 96–7, is the most recent iteration of this belief.

correspondence of this period.⁷⁰ This scholarly obsession with Bolingbroke, moreover, has diverted attention from one of the more striking elements of the performances of August 1740, the conscious and deliberate use of the term ‘masque’. Arne had provided the music for a successful revival of John Milton’s *Comus* for the London stage in 1738,⁷¹ but the inspiration for *Alfred* was rooted much more closely in the masque tradition of the Jacobean and Caroline periods. The masques of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were interactive entertainments, which relied on the participation of their audience for effect. Intriguingly, one newspaper report recorded that ‘Mr. Essex’ composed the ‘Dances’, which whilst in all probability referring to the movements of the actors, offers the possibility for further audience engagement.⁷² The use of this genre would have appealed to Frederick, who modelled his artistic patronage and collecting on that of Charles I, repatriating much of the royal collection that had been dispersed under the Commonwealth.⁷³

Thomson and Mallet may have met Bolingbroke while he was staying with Pope during the autumn/winter of 1738–9, and whilst the masque shares images of national regeneration under a virtuous king with Bolingbroke’s treatise, these ideas were part of a common currency of Patriot thought, and should not be ascribed solely to Bolingbroke’s influence. Instead, Mallet and Thomson wrote the text in response to the sense of crisis that was, by summer 1740, pervasive among members of the Patriot Opposition, especially given the success of war with Spain and the victory of Admiral Vernon at Portobello, which offered Walpole the opportunity to claim back the opposition’s maritime posturing for the administration. Many of the problems relating to the play’s later performances relate to this specificity of context, and the unique circumstances of the garden theatre at Cliveden. Furthermore, the significance of the date has largely been overlooked. Not only was 1 August the anniversary of Frederick’s grandfather, George I’s accession to the throne, and thus a celebration of the original principles of Hanoverian kingship; but in commemorating Princess Augusta’s birthday, *Alfred* celebrated a pivotal moment in the recent history of the Patriot Opposition, Frederick’s removal from Hampton Court and formal break with his father. For the audience, the date of the first performance, combined with its Cliveden setting, powerfully

⁷⁰ For details of the circumstances of the treatise’s production, see G. Barber, ‘Bolingbroke, Pope, and the *Patriot King*’, *The Library*, 5th ser., 19 (1964), pp. 67–89, at pp. 68–72. For the treatise’s subsequent reception: D. Armitage, ‘A Patriot for whom? The afterlives of Bolingbroke’s *Patriot King*’, *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1995), pp. 397–418.

⁷¹ Burden suggests that the form of *Alfred* may have been inspired by this revival: *Garrick, Arne and the masque of Alfred*, p. 24.

⁷² *The Champion; Or, The Evening Advertiser*, 21 Aug. 1740. John Essex was one of the most famous dancing-masters of the first half of the eighteenth century. His *The dancing-master, or, The art of dancing explained* went through three editions by 1744.

⁷³ Rorschach, ‘Frederick, prince of Wales’ (D.Phil. thesis), pp. 8–10, who does not recognize the use of the masque genre as a conscious allusion to the court of Charles I.

repeated the reasons for their political position at a time when the fragile coherence of the movement seemed to be splintering.

Turning to the plot of the masque, these occasional hints become more apparent. Alfred, 'in this universal dejection', retires to Athelney, just as melancholy Patriots decamped to Cliveden. Bridgeman's amphitheatre, cut into the side of the steep hill dropping down to the Thames, offered expansive views to the fertile floodplain below, and was surrounded by woods, providing the perfect pastoral setting.⁷⁴ Throughout the masque, characters frequently draw attention to the views, showing Frederick the land he will one day rule, but which is currently suffering. The earl of Devon, for example, points to a hill at the eastern extent of the scenic backdrop, where 'some devouring fire/ That ruins without mercy where it spreads'⁷⁵ originates. From Cliveden's amphitheatre it is still just possible to see the outline of Windsor Castle to the east. Moreover, the pastoral setting goes some way to explaining why Mallet and Thomson chose to dramatize a period of Alfred's reign when he was 'at once abandoned by all his subjects'. In choosing the episode in which Alfred retires to the shepherd's hut, Mallet and Thomson were returning to an older English source, the ballad 'King Alfred and the Shepherd'.⁷⁶ In the ballad, Alfred has gone out disguised as a peasant to seek out some of his citizens. In the masque, these citizens become political mouthpieces.

Act 1, scene I opens with a shepherd Corin, and his wife Emma, in a pastoral setting identified as the Isle of Athelney (Alfred's last stronghold against the Danish invaders). The shepherds, in a clear nod to Patriot concerns regarding corruption, note that 'heaven forbid, / A *British* man should ever count for gain, / What villainy must earn.' Frederick, forbidden by his father from military service and aware of contemporary Spanish depredations in the Caribbean, sees his keenly felt political indolence find its dramatic mouthpiece in Alfred:

That prince who sees his country laid in ruins,
His subjects perishing beneath the sword
Of foreign rage; who sees and cannot save them,
Is but supreme in misery!⁷⁷

The earl of Devon, unwilling to pander to his sovereign's misery, reminds him that there is but one castle that is still English, from which it is possible to launch a counterattack. It is significant, given Frederick's experience the year previously with members of his household voting with the administration, that

⁷⁴ Visiting in 1742, Jeremiah Milles observed, 'this Spot commands a most glorious prospect of y^e Thames, & of Berkshire on y^e other side of it': BL Add. MS 15776 fo. 118.

⁷⁵ Mallet and Thomson, *Alfred*, p. 12.

⁷⁶ S. Aspden, 'Ballads and Britons: imagined community and the continuity of "English" opera', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 122 (1997), pp. 24–51, at pp. 47–8.

⁷⁷ Mallet and Thomson, *Alfred*, p. 13.

Thomson and Mallet should highlight the loyalty of Alfred's courtiers. Alfred, revived, is reminded by Devon to hold back from rash acts, for

You are *England's* king:
 Your infant children, and your much-lov'd queen.
 Nay more, the public weal, ten thousand souls,
 Whose hope you are, whose all depends on you,
 Forbid this enterprise.⁷⁸

The connection with Frederick, sitting in the audience with his wife, three-year-old daughter, and eighteenth-month-old son, would have been clearly apparent to members of the audience. In scene III Alfred is instructed by 'two aerial spirits unseen' that the greatest of heroes are those who show patience and forbearance, but that the present moment is the right time to act. Lyttelton, Pope, Marchmont and Stair's letters had, since August 1737, been full of similar exhortations. Alfred reflects on these sentiments in Scene IV, before meeting a 'Thrice-happy Hermit' of whom he demands, 'Say what remains, / What yet remains to save our prostrate country?' Fortunately the Hermit, well versed in the rhetoric of the Patriot Opposition, provides Alfred with a vision of national recovery.

when guardian laws
 Are by the patriot, in the glowing senate,
 Won from corruption; when th' impatient arm
 Of liberty, invincible, shall scourge
 The tyrants of mankind – and when the Deep,
 Through all her swelling waves, shall proudly joy
 Beneath the boundless empire of thy sons.⁷⁹

The second act included a discourse between Alfred and the Hermit on the subject of paternal affection, a fitting subject as the masque was ostensibly performed to celebrate Princess Augusta's birthday, and an area in which the House of Hanover hardly excelled. Summoned by the Genius of England, Alfred's illustrious successors are presented to the audience. The first three shapes to appear on the stage are the spirits of Edward III, Philippa, his queen, and the Black Prince, his son. Edward, 'Matchless in arms; in arts of peaceful rule', to whom 'Proud France, even now, thro all her dukedoms quakes', was not just a military hero, but crucially held his royal family together through respect for his ambitious son. The Hermit instructs Alfred to 'Remember then, / What to thy infant sons from thee is due, / As parent and as prince.' Philippa is presented to Eltruda as 'the best of wives', whose 'noblest charms' she must transmit to 'that fair daughter, that unfolding rose, / With which, as on this day, heaven crown'd your loves'. Frederick, parading his legal wife and legitimate children and celebrating his daughter's birthday, was a far more suitable

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

inheritor of this perfect Patriot family than the widowed George II, overseas in Hanover, visiting his mistress Lady Yarmouth and their four-year-old son, Johann Ludwig.

With the lesson in family management complete, Elizabeth I replaces the perfect Patriot family. The Hermit details her creation both of an empire against a backdrop of universal animosity and religious strife, and of a culture under which the arts flourished. Alfred, understandably curious, asks the Hermit how this queen was able to achieve such things. With the political vacuum created by Wyndham's death, Elizabeth's successes offered Frederick a guide. As the Hermit relates, Elizabeth, 'By ever seizing the right point of view, / Her truest interest' pursues this through the organs of the state and against 'The storm of opposition.' She is advised by 'various worthies glowing round her' and yet 'Still shines the first' in contrast to those monarchs who are the 'passive property of [their] own creatures'. But most of all, she is loved by her people.

As the spirit of William III rises, the Hermit takes time to discuss the failings of James II, 'the slave of dreaming monks', who was 'fond of lawless rule', before launching into a panegyric to 'Immortal William',⁸⁰ after whose reign 'Shall Britain date her rights and laws restor'd', before alluding to Frederick's grandfather, George I. With the vision complete, and Alfred's confidence restored, the earl of Devon returns with news of an English victory. He relates how, on sneaking through the Danish lines in disguise, he returned to his troops, 'They with a fierce / And gloomy joy inspirited each other; / Resolv'd on death, disdain[ing] to survive / Their dearest country'. Such fatalism found its modern day contemporaries in the members of Frederick's court. Devon, however, succeeds in inspiring them to triumph over 'the careless drousy camp' of the Danes.

The final scene of the masque reunites Alfred with Corin and Emma. The king leaves his wife with Emma and the Hermit, and, apostrophizing to God, pledges to 'finish thy great work, and save my country'. The Hermit then introduces an 'Aged and blind' Bard who starts to sing 'Rule Britannia!' To reinforce the message of an expansionist, global empire, the Hermit adds an epilogue:

Britons, proceed, the subject Deep command,
Awe with your navies every hostile land.
In vain their threats, their armies all in vain
They rule the balanc'd world, who rule the main.⁸¹

The masque, therefore, was a response to a specific crisis that threatened the unity and coherence of the opposition. In powerfully restating the Patriot's

⁸⁰ This celebration of William III was an inheritor of an earlier Whig literary culture: A. Williams, *Poetry and the creation of a Whig literary culture, 1681-1714* (Oxford, 2005), passim.

⁸¹ Mallett and Thomson, *Alfred*, p. 44.

core, political tenets Thomson and Mallet's masque looked forward, on one level, to a global empire, and, on another, to a coherent assault on the polls for the 1741 general election. Yet the masque, with its celebration of sea-power, might also have been an attempt by the Patriot Opposition to appropriate the government's success in the early stages of war with Spain. News of Admiral Vernon's victory at Portobello reached England in March 1740 and Vernon swiftly became the popular hero of the day,⁸² swiftly eclipsing Frederick's star, which had been burnished by his royal progresses through the West Country where he presented himself at the centre of the modern fashionable world, professing his loyalty to the patriotic causes of English trade and English liberty. Court Whigs had been quick to highlight Vernon's victory as 'proof of the vision and sagacity of ministerial war policy', whereas Patriot Whigs and Tories were swift to claim Portobello as vindications of their 'prescriptions for a vigorous and aggressive war policy and a purified body politic'.⁸³ *Alfred* embodied the opposition's interpretation of Portobello in masque form.

The performance was a popular topic of conversation. 'A subject I have heard a great deal of', wrote Jemima, Marchioness Grey, 'is the Entertainment at Cliefden.'

There was no Stage or Scenes but what the Illuminated Trees afforded. there were Benches for the Company, & Chairs for the Prince & Princess & the two eldest Children. All the Common People were admitted, & were with most of the Performers made exceedingly Drunk.⁸⁴

The political hints were not just apparent to the masque's first two audiences, but to readers of the printed version available two weeks after its private debut.⁸⁵ Frances, countess of Hertford, observed

There are two or three fine speeches, several party hints, and one invidious reflection – which did not need the pains that have been taken (by presenting it in a different character) to make it absolutely unpardonable. This fine performance is the joint work of Mr. Thomson and Mr. Mallet.⁸⁶

Hertford felt that attempts to disguise political comment were so transparent as to draw further attention to them.⁸⁷ Elizabeth Montagu was likewise

⁸² K. Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture and imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 142–51.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 149. See also K. Wilson's 'Empire, trade and popular politics in mid-Hanoverian Britain: the case of Admiral Vernon', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), pp. 74–109.

⁸⁴ Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service, L 30/9a/1, p. 1. From a transcript kindly provided by Mike Cousins. The author would like to thank Mr Cousins and Joyce Purnell, archivist at Hagley Hall, for their help with this connection.

⁸⁵ *Daily Gazetteer*, 19 Aug. 1740.

⁸⁶ *Correspondence between Frances, countess of Hertford (afterwards duchess of Somerset) and Henrietta Louisa, countess of Pomfret, between the years 1738 and 1741* (3 vols., London, 1805), II, pp. 125–6.

⁸⁷ McKillop suggests that the 'invidious reflection' is probably the passage in Act II, Scene III, praising the paternal affection of Edward III for the Black Prince, and thus drawing a contrast

unconvinced. She had first written to her sister, from Bulstrode in Buckinghamshire (eight miles from Cliveden), in early August that:

I suppose you had an account of a masque at Cliefden on the Princess Augusta's birth-day: The story of Alfred, by Thomson and Mallet. Mr. Grenville commends it, and says it will be published. I do not give much credit to his judgement as I rather think he commends it as a patriot than a critic.⁸⁸

Montagu's Mr. Grenville could be either of Lord Cobham's nephews, Richard or George Grenville, both of whom were tightly enmeshed in the opposition to Walpole. Not trusting Grenville's judgement, Montagu replied to her sister, having read 'the famous mask of Alfred', informing her that 'it is a sublime piece of nonsense, with very few good things in it' and linked it to the plot of *Gustavas Vasa*, 'whose je ne scai quoi heroical fashion, in taking a walk, or sitting down on a bank, betray an air of majesty that you know may be a compliment to our countrymen'.⁸⁹ The conventionality of the plot offended Montagu, but offered the perfect vehicle for Mallet and Thomson to convey their pedagogic message to Frederick, a point that was picked up in the audience by Martin Madan as 'proper to be exhibited to a Prince that durst hear Truth' and by pro- and anti-Walpole wings of the popular press.

'Philomathes', in the *London Magazine*, asserted that 'there was never any Thing gave me greater Pleasure, than to hear, that the *Heir Apparent to our Crown* was entertaining himself with a *Masque*, wherein our great King *Alfred* was represented'.⁹⁰ Philomathes situated the masque within the broader body of Patriot writing on the synergy of corruption with arbitrary government:

A *Prince of Wales's* pleasing himself with such a Representation, is a Sort of Pledge, that he will join sincerely in *Alfred's* Prayer in the *fifth Scene* of the *first Act*; that he will endeavour to build the publick Weal on *Liberty and Laws*; and that he will disdain to think of establishing his Throne upon the *Tongues* or *Swords* of those, who count for Gain, what they villainously earn by sacrificing the *Constitution* and *Liberties* of their Country.⁹¹

Philomathes suggests that the course of English history after the Norman Conquest has been a series of attempts to 'get restored the Laws of *Edward the Confessor*, that is to say, the Form of Government established by King *Alfred*'.⁹² The only escape from the tyranny of Walpolean corruption is a return to first

with George II's treatment of his eldest son: 'The early history of *Alfred*', *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962), pp. 311–24, at p. 313.

⁸⁸ M. Montagu, ed., *The letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu, with some of the letters of her correspondents* (4 vols., London, 1809–13), II, p. 54.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹⁰ *London Magazine*, 9 (Aug. 1740), p. 393.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² The classic exposition of the idea of the Norman Yoke remains Christopher Hill's 'The Norman Yoke', reprinted in his *Puritanism and revolution: studies in the interpretation of the English revolution of the seventeenth century* (London, 1958), pp. 50–122.

principles, 'which consisted in such a Distribution of Power between the King and the People, as prevented the latter's being oppressed, and preserved the Grandeur of the former'. Philomathes argues that the appointment of officials through a dialogue between king, Commons, and people, as existed in Alfred's reign, acted as a check on corruption: 'by their being appoint'd or chosen by *distinct and separate Interests*, they could not *all unite together* in oppressing or betraying the People, nor in protecting one another against the Resentment and Vengeance of the Nation'.⁹³

The Champion; Or, The Evening Advertiser, which had close links to George Lyttelton, drew attention to an often-overlooked element of the masque. As a private performance, it did not need to pass through the Lord Chamberlain's office, for in the gardens of Cliveden it was 'no Crime, to applaud Virtue, stigmatize Corruption, or endeavour to awake the ancient Spirit of a brave, tho' slumbering people'.⁹⁴

This broader call to action relied on the masque's publication, inspiring a 'Literary Article' in *The Champion*, which claimed it to be 'a Piece perfectly moral' with 'Some Strokes . . . of a bold, and some of a delicate Nature' where 'Some Things are artfully insinuated, some amply described.' The article pointedly compares the prince's literary patronage with that of the king. 'Upon the whole we heartily congratulate the Muses on this Occasion; the oldest Man living scarce remembering to have ever see them before at *Court*, except in the Tapestry Hangings at St. *James's*.'⁹⁵ The article excerpted dialogue between Alfred and the earl of Devon, where Alfred apostrophizes on the desolation caused by war and weeps for England's shame, to summarize the masque's sentiments. *The Champion's* coverage elicited a favourable response from its subscribers.

How pleasing to an *English Reader* must be that elegant Choice, which the Heir apparent to the Crown, made of an Entertainment by discovering a Taste to Poetry and at the same time, expressing an Affection for Liberty. There is something so amiable in the Character of this young Prince, that I contemplate it with Cheerfulness; and which will doubtless be returned with the Gratitude of a brave, a free, and a virtuous People.⁹⁶

The *Daily Gazetteer*,⁹⁷ by contrast, unable to attack the prince of Wales directly, turned to his immediate circle, 'this Generation of Vipers', a group of 'malicious Pickthanks, who in their best Humours are a boisterous Kind of Jesters and in their worst more fatal in their Flattery, than a fair enemy in

⁹³ *London Magazine*, p. 394.

⁹⁴ *The Champion; Or, The Evening Advertiser*, 5 Aug. 1740. Further details of the cast followed on 7 Aug. 1740.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 Aug. 1740.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 Aug. 1740.

⁹⁷ The *Daily Gazetteer* was one of eight newspapers sponsored by Walpole from 1722, who spent well over £50,000 on them: S. Targett, 'Government and ideology during the age of Whig supremacy: the political argument of Sir Robert Walpole's newspaper propagandists', *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), pp. 289–317, at p. 290.

his strongest attacks' chastising the rival definition of *Alfred* as 'a piece perfectly Moral'.⁹⁸ The author works hard to separate the character of Alfred from his appropriation as a totemic figure for the opposition, suggesting that 'there is no sort of resemblance' between the present state of England and when the Danes had overrun it. Any resemblance is 'in the malicious Judgement of the Libeller; who is wicked enough to hope, that the Reader's *Malice* will help the *Writer's* out'. The article concludes with an attempt to wrest back the character of Alfred for the king and his ministers:

If *Alfred* gave Laws, He [George II] protects them; and perhaps there are no other Two Reigns in which they have had so free a Course. If *Alfred* prefer'd the Safety of his People to his own Quiet; so does our present King: And if *Alfred* was particularly careful in his Choice of his Judges, we may safely say, His Majesty is not less so, and at the same time more happy. For, I think, we are told, that *Alfred* executed no less than Forty four of his Judges; whereas the present Reign is hitherto a Maiden one.⁹⁹

The ire of the *Daily Gazetteer* was especially aroused, not by the hints regarding war with Spain, or by the suggestion of the administration's inability to launch a fleet, but by the scurrilous comments on '*Persons of Sublime Rank*' and suggests that the performance of the masque at Cliveden on 1 and 2 August was not in of itself a political act. Instead, the story of Alfred has been given a partisan political interpretation through the malignant machinations of opposition newspapers such as *The Champion*.

V

This article has shown that in the original performance and the published text, audience members and readers alike perceived both a political purpose and a political message to *Alfred: a masque*. Indeed, performing the masque in private allowed Thomson and Mallet to circumvent submitting the text to the lord chamberlain. The Cliveden performance was a resounding success and James Hammond, the prince's secretary, expressed his master's approval for Mallet's plan 'to bring Alfred upon the Stage this winter'.¹⁰⁰ Mallet would have to wait a decade until his play appeared. First performed on 23 February 1751, *Alfred* ran for nine evenings, until, ironically, being cut short by the death of Frederick, prince of Wales on 20 March.¹⁰¹ But, by 1751, the association between the prince and Alfred had loosened to such a degree that the original political purpose of the masque was lost. The *Monthly Review*, for example, was relieved

⁹⁸ *Daily Gazetteer*, 3 Sept. 1740.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ J. Hammond to D. Mallet, 5 Oct. 1740, John Murray Collection, Algarotti papers, box 3.

¹⁰¹ The masque was reprised on 19 Apr. for the benefit of Mr Havard. The adverts were keen to stress the masque would be performed 'With all the proper Scenes, Dances, Music, and Machinery': *General Advertiser*, 10 Apr. 1751.

that the masque had been 'much more adapted to general entertainment than in its first occasional model'.¹⁰² The transition from a rallying cry for the Patriot Opposition to a broader popular patriotism was achieved only by detaching the Ode in Honour of Great Britain, 'Rule, Britannia!' from its original context.¹⁰³

¹⁰² *Monthly Review* 4 (Mar. 1751), p. 366.

¹⁰³ 'Rule Britannia' first appeared excerpted from *Alfred* in *The Bull-Finch. Being a choice collection of the newest and most favourite English songs. Most of which have been sett to music and sung at the public theatres & gardens* (London, 1746), pp. 24–5.