In Our Defense: Sheridan's The Camp, The Glorious First of June, Pizarro and The Fate of the British Nation in Late Eighteenth-Century England

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s plays *The Camp* (1778), and *The Glorious First of June* (1794), and *Pizarro* (1799), and how they dealt with the British invasion crisis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I investigate how Sheridan’s theatrical works confronted and presented British fears of national/racial annihilation and in turn how society used these plays to understand them. In particular, I want to consider the ways Sheridan’s works attempted to influence the audience members’ feelings about participating in the military to defend the British nation.

Although Sheridan’s play *Pizarro* is often examined in regards to how British national identity shaped ideas surrounding British colonial activities as well as the invasion crisis, I take a broader look at Sheridan’s works and the ways they dealt with the interactions of national identity, class, and gender within the defense of the British nation during this period. I argue that, for Sheridan, the problem of who was left to defend the British nation was ultimately an issue of the lack of male members of the middle-class taking part in the military in a defensive capacity in Great Britain. Sheridan’s military plays are marked by their problematic portrayal of middle-class characters who involved in the fight to defend their homeland; despite the level of class-consciousness in the plays there is a dearth of middle-class characters over all. The ones that are present are marked by corruption and greed, and more often than not problematize national defense rather than support it. Sheridan’s plays call for increased, active male middle-class participation in the defense of the British nation at a time in which the primary concern of the nation, regardless of class or political affiliation, was its military defense. Sheridan’s choice to use theatrical performance along with his political position to achieve these goals shows
the power and dexterity of the stage to influence public opinion and even an audience’s ways of identifying and understanding its own national and racial selfhood.

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

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Montclair, NJ

2014
“[Plays and players] are ‘the brief chronicles of the time,’ the epitome of human life and manners. While we are talking about them, we are thinking about ourselves.” — William Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage* (1821)

National defense is rarely the explicit subject matter of English theatre and just as rarely the subject of theatre study. However, as extrapolated from the above quote by William Hazlitt, the subject matter of theatre tends to reflect what is on the minds of contemporary audiences. More so than other mediums, to be successful, theatre must be topical and relevant. Therefore it is not surprising that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, defending the British nation was at the forefront of the minds of British audiences and playwrights alike. Between the years of 1778 and 1815, Britons faced, in varying degrees the threat of invasion from outside forces that were, by and large, French in origins. While this “invasion crisis” never resulted in a full-scale invasion of the British continent, the anxiety of the continual threat of France breeching Britain’s national borders impressed itself upon the minds of London audiences. In a larger sense, the invasion crisis was the zenith of the extended military conflict between France and Britain that had lasted over one hundred years. Therefore, the invasion crisis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries played a significant role in British culture and the overall development of British national identity. Linda Colley explains:

The fact that Britain escaped a substantial invasion did not make the prolonged conflict with France seem irrelevant to the mass of its inhabitants... Britons at this time... were able to savour the military glory without ever having to pay the price in terms of civilian casualties and large-scale domestic destruction... they were able to focus, many of them on the broader, less material characteristics of the struggle with France, a
struggle that played a crucial part in defining Great Britain through the very process of exposing it to persistent danger from without.

The threat of invasion was, on the surface, a major military threat to the British nation. However, to fully understand Britons anxiety over its national defense during this period, scholars must look at the threat of racial amalgamation and annihilation that was at stake for the British nation in regard to a national invasion.

Ideas about race in England during the late eighteenth century were evolving in very important ways in regard to how Britons viewed themselves as a distinct people and nation. Consequently, these ideas, like the invasion crisis itself, were reflected in the theatre. Kathleen Wilson writes: “The idea of nation once referred to a breed, stock, or race; and although the idea of nation as a political entity was gaining ascendancy, the more restrictive racial sense remained embedded in its use [during the eighteenth century]” (7). In this way, eighteenth-century conceptions of British racial identity were inextricably linked to ideas of British national identity and they “occupied overlapping, if not identical cultural and political terrains” (Wilson 55). Theatrical performances that focused on the British nation were also implicitly dealing with the British race.

This evolution of ideas surrounding British racial and national identity had much to do with the fact that during this time period Great Britain was continuously coming into contact with racial/ national “others” through both military conflict (Colley 5) and colonization (Wilson 7). Britain’s multi-frontal military conflict, to both protect its colonial interests and defend its own borders, are similar to the conflicts faced by many
world powers today. However, there are major factors that set the British invasion crisis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries apart from modern definitions of and ideas about the political, cultural and national significance of military invasion. The most significant of these is the ways in which national and racial identities overlapped during that time. While military invasion and empire are still issues dealt with in modern warfare, invasion in current international conflict is often presented to citizens as a humanitarian and “interventionist” measure (Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards). According to Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards, modern ideas of humanitarian invasion are tied to the belief that military operations “could prevent or halt genocides” (35). Conversely, the British invasion crisis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries carried with it threat of *causing genocide*, due to national definitions of race. Since ideas of race and nationhood were enmeshed in the minds of Britons during this period, any threat to their national border carried with it the threat of racial miscegenation. Therefore, a French invasion of Great Britain had the potential to blight and blot out the racial superiority of the Britons, an idea which was supported and promoted by Britain’s cultural, historical, and scientific modes during this time (Wilson 55-56).

I have chosen the realm of theatre, in particular the work of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, to investigate the invasion crisis because theatre represents what is prominent in the minds of those involved in it. This notion is exemplified within the early nineteenth century by William Hazlitt, a theatre critic, in his 1817 essay “On Actors and Acting.” Hazlitt explains that for Britons of the time, the theatre was a kind of mirror that reflected the life of those who experience it: “The stage is an epitome, a better likeness of the
world… What brings the resemblance nearer is that, as they imitate us, we, in turn, imitate them” (3). The British stage was, and is, much more than a fictive portrayal of the imagination of the playwright or even the audience. Instead, it can be seen, especially during the invasion crisis, as a scaling down of reality, a mirroring of the time, place, and culture to which it presents itself. Indeed, the theatre of the invasion crisis reflects that for Britons, this moment in history was not simply another moment of war; instead, it was a calamity of culture, politics, and the military and a very real threat to the way they lived and who they were. The theatre of the invasion crisis, therefore, represents an intersection of these elements of society. This can be viewed even more so in examining an author who had deep and wide reaching influence in all on these arenas. As a playwright and manager of one of the two official London theatres, Sheridan helped to construct the mirror in which the public viewed the invasion crisis. Additionally, Sheridan’s influence over England’s political culture as one of the leaders of the Whig party played a direct role in shaping the invasion crisis itself and England’s role in it. Sheridan’s plays have a particularly important part in the culture of the invasion crisis and how the British nation was able to understand and reflect upon it.

Throughout this thesis, I will investigate how Sheridan’s theatrical works confronted and presented British fears of national/racial annihilation and in turn how society used these plays to understand them. In particular, I want to consider the ways Sheridan’s works attempted to influence the audience members’ feelings about participating in the military to defend the British nation. Literary scholars have often investigated definitions of British racial, class, and gender identities in theatre during this time period (O’Quinn; Colley; Wilson). Additionally, military historians have examined
how British men were increasingly pushed to actively take part in the military during the time period (Higgins; Linch; McCormack). However, by looking at Sheridan’s plays, scholars can see how national identity, class, gender, and volunteerism came together to create and shape the invasion crisis throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although Sheridan’s play *Pizarro* is often examined in regards to how British national identity shaped ideas surrounding British colonial activities as well as the invasion crisis, I take a broader look at Sheridan’s works and the ways they dealt with the interactions of national identity, class, and gender within the defense of the British nation during this period. Sheridan’s plays were deeply concerned with the defense of the British nation due to the fact that a large portion of the British military was needed to protect the colonial interests of the nation abroad as well as to take part in wars on the Continent of Europe. This military activity on multiple fronts abroad, along with threats of invasion of the British nation by other European countries, required Britons to contemplate their own defense in explicit and conscious ways during the late eighteenth century (Colley 291; Jones 24-25). In regards to the military itself, these invasion threats extended the need for military participation for Britons, especially for home defense. However, because many of those involved in Great Britain's home defense were not professional military soldiers (Colley 306), there was a distinct anxiety within the British nation in the late eighteenth century about who was left to defend it on the Continent.

Ultimately, I seek to expound upon the ways in which Sheridan’s works negotiated these anxieties about British national defense in terms of gender and class. I have chosen these plays because of the way that Sheridan attempts to promote a unified
national defense of the British nation even as he reaffirms distinctions of class and gender through his differing prescriptions of what that unified national defense looked like for each subset of Britons (Wilson). Indeed, Sheridan’s plays about British national defense navigate a rather uneasy territory: creating a public vision of the invasion crisis that both shows the necessity of all Britons to defend their homeland which still critiques the inappropriateness of certain classes and genders participating in aspects of that defense. Other scholars have noted that Sheridan’s plays are a critique of class within the military (Wilson). I argue that, for Sheridan, the problem of who was left to defend the British nation was ultimately an issue of the lack of male members of the middle-class taking part in the military in a defensive capacity in Great Britain. Sheridan’s military plays are marked by their problematic portrayal of middle-class characters who involved in the fight to defend their homeland; despite the level of class-consciousness in the plays there is a dearth of middle-class characters over all. The ones that are present are marked by corruption and greed, and more often than not problematize national defense rather than support it. In these plays, the defense of the British nation is left in the hands of aristocratic leaders and the lower class soldiers they commanded; both groups are portrayed as either lax in their duty or having divided loyalties to their military service. These flawed defensive arrangements had the potential to threaten the British nation as a whole. In The Camp, Sheridan highlights internal threats to the British nation, owing to the unmitigated corruption of the lower classes by the aristocracy through their perversion of gender roles and their focus on only the theatrical elements of war. In The Glorious First of June, Sheridan portrays the divided loyalties of British sailors due to the changing nature of naval service and the increasingly compulsory nature of that service,
when the duties of lower-class sailors to the defense of the British nation clashed with their duties to their home and families as well as with traditional definitions of “manliness.” This loyalty is further threatened by the scheming and financial avarice of middle-class characters, who also do not participate in the war. In the final play, *Pizarro*, Sheridan presents the potential horrors of invasion, made possible by colonial greed and barbarity and yet ultimately circumvented by cooperation between classes to defend the nation. Nonetheless, within the play Sheridan still critiques and pushes back against the idea of female participation in the defense of the British nation. All three plays serve as a call to action for the British male middle-class to use their superior financial and moral positions to more effectively defend the British nation.

In this way, Sheridan’s plays serve a distinctly regulatory function (O’Quinn); the goal of *The Camp*, *The Glorious First of June*, and *Pizarro* was not simply to represent public anxieties about the defense of the British nation, but rather to both direct them and, by extension, to provide ways to quell these anxieties. Daniel O’Quinn writes that in the eighteenth century “theatrical productions enact governance and, in doing so, both discipline and regulate their audiences” (30). Sheridan’s plays, therefore, attempt to govern the audiences who are witnessing these military representations to cause them to take part in their own national defense. However, the governance that Sheridan sought to enact through his plays had less to do with the goals and aims of the official Georgian monarchy that ruled England at the time; indeed, by all accounts this would go against Sheridan’s Whig values which he ascribed to as a politician. Rather, Sheridan’s plays call for increased, active male middle-class participation in the defense of the British nation at a time in which the primary concern of the nation, regardless of class or political
affiliation, was its military defense. Sheridan’s choice to use theatrical performance along with his political position to achieve these goals shows the power and dexterity of the stage to influence public opinion and even an audience’s ways of identifying and understanding its own national and racial selfhood (O’Quinn 30). Sheridan’s plays about national defense not only sought to form audience’s ideas about how they should serve in their nation’s defense, but also how they thought of themselves as a superior nation and race that required such defense.

Sheridan’s call to action involved the changing nature of patriotism during this period, a change in which patriotism "became a matter of 'natural' obligation transcending allegiances of party class and ethnicity" (Russell 5). This new patriotism, a theme that ran deeply through Sheridan's plays, required that the middle class not simply leave the defense of the British nation to those socially above or beneath them. Wilson notes that this patriotism involved "men and women, aristocrats and servants joining together to promote that 'manly rational patriotism' and martial spirit without which the nation's security, self-sufficiency and destiny would crumble" (Wilson 38). In this way, Sheridan’s plays sought to bring about a much deeper middle-class involvement in the defense of the British nation because of their increasing obligation to stand up and defend the nation as a part of a patriotically and defensively unified British nation.

“Mars in a Vis a Vis — Bellona giving a Fete Champetre”: Satire and Defense in Sheridan’s *The Camp*

To begin to examine Sheridan’s concerns with the defense of the British nation in his plays, one first needs to explore the changing nature of the British military in the time Sheridan writes. Anxieties about the defense of the British nation precipitated these
changes. The fear of invasion became an increasingly common concern among Britons, reaching various peaks in response to French military mobilization beginning in the 1770s. Robert Jones describes the apparent threat to national security faced by the British nation on the continent, in conjunction with the threat to its empire during the ongoing American Revolution:

By the beginning of 1778 a French fleet was in preparation which, when joined by her Spanish allies would pose a serious threat to Britain’s southern coastline... The terror reached its height in August when the Franco-Spanish fleet was sighted off Devonshire coast... At this moment the aggressive intentions of the warships appeared horribly clear, and what had been alarm and preparation became open panic. (24)

In this readers can see the split in British military forces between the defense of Britain’s colonial interests abroad and its domestic security on the Continent. Britain's response to this threat was a securing of its defenses around vulnerable ports and coastal towns:

"Aware of the threat posed by France, Lord North’s government ordered the establishment of several large military encampments early in 1778. Positioned at strategic points along the coast, the camps were intended to block an invading army’s advance, while reassuring the local population" (Jones 25). Nevertheless, while there were military forces kept in Great Britain itself, Cecil Price notes that, even into 1779, British citizenry "seriously doubted the country's ability to defend itself" (466). This split in Great Britain's defensive forces coupled with this continuing anxiety over national defense begs a very important question, indeed one that was a primary focus of Britons at the time: because of the multiple fronts of British military action abroad, who was left to defend
the British nation on the continent? A deeper look at just which parts of the British military were involved in national defense provides a better understanding of these fears.

Despite the presence of soldiers on the Continent, this lingering unease that Britons felt about their home defense seems to come from the fact that those involved in home defense were not regular military soldiers but rather volunteers who saw the volunteer auxiliary forces as a “soft option to dodge the sterner obligations involved in [compulsory] militia service [decided by county ballot]” (Colley 306). Although Britain’s military forces increased exponentially from the middle of the eighteenth century to the end of it, one cannot assume that because they were more soldiers available for home defense, Britons felt secure about their defenses. Great Britain’s national defense has less to do with simply having soldiers in its military forces and more to do with the quality and capabilities of these soldiers. In his study of British military history, Jeremy Black notes that “the effectiveness and use of [military] unit and weaponry were, and are simply not a matter of quantity of resources, but of tactics, strategy and social-military characteristics such as discipline and leadership” (5). In this way, scholars note that the mere presence of soldiers involved in the defense of Great Britain did not necessarily assuage Britons’ fears of invasion. In actuality, British soldiers who were involved in home defense were often not equal, or at least viewed as equal by the eighteenth-century British population, in training and skill by the Britons. Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack note that "[a]uxiliary forces were partly formed to free up regular forces from home defense and its associated non-combat duties, and often had restricted terms and conditions that ensured they did not serve overseas" (146). Linch and McCormack note that these auxiliary forces were restricted to national defense allowing more
seasoned, and presumably well-trained, soldiers to serve abroad. These forces were made up of "a reformed militia, raised by counties by ballot that could only serve in the British Isles, which should have undertaken annual training during peacetime and once mobilized was a full-time armed force; and part-time auxiliary formations, variously titled armed associations, volunteers, and yeomanry, that usually only agreed to serve locally" (Linch and McCormack 6). When these types of soldiers are compared to professional soldiers serving abroad, there is an implicit acknowledgement of their unfitness for more organized combat-style military endeavors. This debate illustrates the reasons behind Britons' feelings of insecurity about their defense.

Furthermore, the political and military statuses of these auxiliary forces caused contention. J. E. Cookson notes because these forces were largely made up of volunteers, there was often confusion whether auxiliary forces were acting in their defensive capacities as citizens or part of the military (383). Cookson writes: "Even if not under military law when they acted, [auxiliary forces] still constituted a military force within society--and dangerously so if they were dominated by 'party' or any other particular interest. The 'minutemen' and Irish volunteers of the American war provided unsettling examples of autonomous popular militias" (383). Because the members of auxiliary forces were not part of the British military per se, there was a fear that volunteer militia would give their allegiance not to the defense of the British nation as a whole but to their separate political parties. The ambiguous nature of the soldiers involved in home defense only added to public anxieties about Britain's ability to defend itself. In Sheridan's The Camp (1778), one can see many of these anxieties surrounding the use of auxiliary forces in Britain's national defense.
Within the first act of the play, Sheridan presents the audience with a scene in which untrained, local young men volunteer for the military. It is clear from their exchange that what attracts them to military service has little to do with the actions of defending the nation:

2nd LAD. Why it does look main Jolly to be sure. ‘Tis all one as a Fair I think... believe there is one of the Grandest Troops come lately; I seed two of the Officers Yesterday, mighty delicate looking Gentlemen.

(Sheridan, The Camp 732).

For the recruits, this description of what draws them to this military unit has nothing to do with military action that the auxiliary unit is involved in, but rather the fashion displayed by the soldiers and officers. Linda Colley notes that this was often a major attraction for many lower-class volunteers: “…Britons who were poor… were drawn into military service …by the excitement of it all… by the lure of a free, brightly coloured uniform” (307).

The potential recruits’ focus on military fashion is compounded by the image of military service that presented to them by the drill sergeant that recruits them in a song in the same scene. The drill sergeant begins, promisingly enough, by evoking the recruits’ feelings of patriotism and concerns about national defense: “Come my lands, now is your
time to shew your love for your Country— If you are lads of Spirit, you will never stay to be scratch'd off a Church door for the Militia, or Smuggled aboard a by a Press-Gang…” (Sheridan, *The Camp* 733-34). Despite this, the drill sergeant’s depiction of the qualifications of those who join the volunteer unit is unconcerned with any such defensive, patriotic qualities:

SERJEANT. Yet ere you’re permitted to list with me

Answer me straight twice Questions three.

1ST COUNTRYMAN. No lies Master Serjeant we’ll tell to you

For tho’ we’re poor lads, we be honest and true.

SERJEANT. First can you drink well?

1ST COUNTRYMAN. Cheerly, cheerly.

SERJEANT. Each man his gallon?

1ST COUNTRYMAN. Nearly, nearly.

SERJEANT. Love a sweet wench too?

1ST COUNTRYMAN. Dearly, dearly

(Sheridan, *The Camp* 734-35).

Although the next section of the song goes into the martial activities that they will encounter, for these recruits the experience of military service is framed by its non-combative potential benefits: first fashion, and then drink and sex. Missing from this description is any type of consideration for discipline, skill in combat, honorable conduct, or any other qualities that would truly befit a man engaged in the defense of his country. Additionally, all of these activities involve hedonism and self-interest rather than the sense of patriotic self-sacrifice that would be involved in the act of potentially giving
one's life for the defense of the nation. Even when the drill sergeant begins to describe the activities of battle, his description of combat has a strangely shallow quality: “When Bullets are whizzing around your head/ You’ll bravely march on wherever you are led?/... Next can you swear well?/... Handle a Frenchman?/... Frown at a Cannon?” (Sheridan, *The Camp* 735-36). The sergeant’s inquiries focus mainly on the spectacle of battle: the recruits will be “march[ing] on wherever they are led” “swear[ing]” and “frown[ing] at cannon[s]” in a show of their bravery instead of fighting on and enacting such bravery. It would seem from this drill sergeant’s description of volunteer military life that the theatrical elements of service are more important than the actual act of defending their nation.

This idea that volunteer participation in the war had more to do with the hedonistic self-interest and theatrical performance of recruits than actual combat presents two equally problematic dilemmas to Sheridan's audience. The first of these would suggest that the image of military activity being presented to young men to get them to join was not an accurate representation of military life. It is indeed true that the activities involved in volunteer service differed from those involved in regular military service; volunteer soldiers were more often involved in manual labor projects and police activities than actual combat (Linch and McCormack 145-46). In fact, voluntary recruits were unlikely to see any combat at all outside of an invasion (Linch and McCormack 146). However, these non-military combat activities are a far cry from the ones mentioned by the drill sergeant in Sheridan's play.

Thus, recruits who held the belief that these hedonistic and self-interested activities were all that was involved in volunteer military activity would not be prepared
for the rigors of actual military duty. This was a serious problem not just in terms of recruits' psychological fitness for and expectations of military service but also in terms of desertion. Stephen Brumwell notes that the primary reasons soldiers deserted the armed forces were: "abuse from officers, personal reasons (such as going in search of a lost love), an insufficient quantity of pay or food, or a bout of drunkenness" (qtd. in Agostini 959). One cannot help but notice that these reasons for desertion are strikingly similar to the personal qualifications that the drill sergeant listed for his "ideal" volunteer troops. In this way, scholars explain that this distorted image of military life could attract the wrong type of recruit and leave Britain defenseless in the face of invasion despite how many men had volunteered for military duty. The alternative, although no less troubling idea that Sheridan's audience is presented with, is that these activities were, in fact, all that military volunteer troops did in their training and participation in military activities. In either case, the vision of volunteer military service that Sheridan presents his audience with "comments on the nation's unpreparedness and on the characters of those about to engage the French" (Jones 26). Sheridan uses his satirical depiction of volunteer military activity to highlight his audience's anxieties about those involved in their home defense.

Not only do the lower class characters in the play join the military for the wrong reasons, but their only attempt to guard the encampment in the play is also bungled by their lack of education and training. In act two, scene two, the soldiers mistake the Irish painter O'Daub for a spy:

SERJEANT. He certainly must be a Spy by his drawing figures.

2D COUNTRYMAN. Do your honors seize him, or the whole Camp may be blown up before you're aware.
O’DAUB. P.S. — Yet the Star and Garter must certainly be P.S.

SERJEANT. P.S. — What the Devil does he say?

1ST COUNTRYMAN. Treason you may Swear by our not understanding it.

(Sheridan, *The Camp* 742-743).

Although this scene is intended to be comical, it also speaks to the audience’s fears about the potential incompetence of the soldiers involved in the defense of the British nation. It is clear that the lack of education and training on the part of the soldiers is the reason for the detainment and near execution of O’Daub. The anxiety this scene creates and promotes deals with the fact that not only are the recruits themselves mistaken because of their ignorance and lack of training (“Treason you may Swear by our not understanding it”), but so is the sergeant leading them (“P.S. — What the Devil does he say?”). It is interesting to note that other than the sergeant, the audience never sees any military officers interacting with the recruits. Although the training of the volunteers should be the focus of the aristocratic military officers of the camp, they are not present in the play in this capacity. This scene shows the gap left in leadership by the aristocratic officers’ inattention to the preparations of war. In fact, O’Daub avoids execution not because any officer steps in to right the situation, but instead because he is recognized by Lady Sash (Sheridan, *The Camp* 749). Although it serves is a laughable moment in the play, it is clear from this scene that the lack of training of the soldiers involved in the camp that the defense of the British nation was being mismanaged by the military’s aristocratic leaders.
In *The Camp*, Sheridan represents the upper class characters as only being focused on fashionable, theatrical parts of the military, rather than the practical preparations of war. Jones notes that, although politically Sheridan did not support the idea of a standing army or British involvement in France’s civil war, in order to repel a French invasion “Sheridan supported war against France, demanding more rigorous and less theatrical preparation to meet the French threat” (42). In Sheridan’s view, the ability to protect the British nation meant separating theatrical representation from the military. However, the aristocratic characters within the play are actually more focused on the theatrical and fashionable elements of war than the camp’s military preparations. Sheridan places the responsibility for British volunteer soldiers’ focus on the theatrical and fashionable elements of war on the aristocratic leaders of the military encampments. Again, going back to the aforementioned scene, we see that the recruits are drawn to service through their attraction to the officers’ fashion. When the potential recruits describe the officers as being “delicate looking Gentlemen” who “wear a sort of Pettycoat” and other fashionable accoutrements (Sheridan, *The Camp* 732), Sheridan is also critiquing the aristocratic officers’ focus on the details of their uniforms rather than training the recruits of which they were in charge. This critique mirrors a prevailing opinion of military leaders in eighteenth-century society: “Georgian army officers were frequently associated with effeminacy, and were condemned for their addiction to fancy uniforms, gallantry, and the niceties of politeness” (Linch and McCormack 155). Because of their focus on the fashionable elements of military life instead of the training of recruits, Britons were anxious about these aristocratic officers fitness to lead the defense of the British nation.
This anxiety can be seen in act two, scene three of play, which is the first time the aristocratic characters who are involved in the encampment are introduced to the audience. Harry Bouquet critiques the theatrical elements of the camp: “Nay as Gad’s my judge I admire the place of all things— Here is all the Parade, Pomp, and Circumstance of Glorious War — Mars in a Vis a Vis — Bellona giving a Fete Champêtre” (Sheridan, *The Camp* 745). Here, Sir Harry is pointing out that the camp is more about entertainment and outer appearances than actual war preparations. Bouquet’s description of the Roman gods of war equipped in finery highlights the ineffective theatrical elements what should be the camp’s serious war preparations and training. For Bouquet, this focus on the theatrical elements of war originates from the officers and their wives. Bouquet speaks of the “Eternal Confusion” caused by the attention both the officers and their wives place upon their outer appearance in their military involvement (Sheridan, *The Camp* 744). In this scene, both the officers and their wives are implicated in the “emasculinization of the army” (Nielsen 140). This is owing to the fact that the women Bouquet is speaking to are dressed according to the stage directions “en militare” (Sheridan, *The Camp* 744). Sheridan portrays Lady Sash, Lady Plume, and Lady Gorget as mimicking the military dress of the soldiers, much like the Duchess of Devonshire and her entourage of female “volunteers” (Jones 29). For Sheridan, while these women showed their admiration for soldiers by dressing in military attire, because of their social removal from the politics of war, they were only appreciating soldiers for their fashion and entertainment value. It can be noted that for all the lauding and praise that Lady, Sash, Lady Plume and Lady Gorget apply to military service, they never mention the actual military preparations or exercises the soldiers should be engaged in. Nielsen also
notes that the ladies “applaud the soldiers’ effeminate attention to fashion, while they ignore the army’s lack of preparedness for fighting” (140). In this way, the play portrays these aristocratic females just as shallow and theatrical as their officer husbands. From this, critics can see that Sheridan’s portrayal of the aristocratic leadership of the military as ineffective in defending the British nation.

However, all of Bouquet’s critiques of the officers’ and their wives attention to their fashionable attire are troubled by Bouquet’s non-participation in military service because of the camps lack of aesthetic planning: “… for instance, now the Tents are all ranged in a Strait Line. Now, Miss Gorget, can anything be worse than a strait Line?... No Curve no break” (Sheridan, The Camp 745). Even Sir Harry’s rejection of military service is caused by his attention to theatrical representation in the camp. For all the aristocratic characters in the play, their involvement, admiration, or rejection of the camp’s preparations for war are tied to the performance of war rather than the practical execution of it. Therefore, in the play, it is not just those upper class characters involved in the military leadership of the camp that are only focused on the theatrical elements of war, but rather all the aristocratic characters. In this sense, Sheridan is presenting the audience with the idea that none among the upper classes are fit to defend the British nation.

Sheridan’s portrayal of the ineptitude of both the upper and lower classes in defending the British nation serves as a call to action for the middle class. In The Camp’s hurly burly of self-interested lower class soldiers and theatrical, ineffectual aristocratic leadership and voyeurism, what is almost completely missing is any substantial representation of the middle class in military participation. This is interesting due to the
fact that there is a distinct class consciousness about Sheridan's presentation of the military encampment. The recruits identify themselves as “Poor Lads” (Sheridan, The Camp 735). Lady Sash, Lady Plume and Miss Gorget are identified as “Great Ladies” (Sheridan, The Camp 739). Indeed almost every character Sheridan portrays in the play is identified through their class and profession, which makes the lack of middle-class characters notable. Coupled with the military shortcomings of the both the upper and lower class characters represented in the play, this lack of middle-class characters demonstrates how, for Sheridan and many Britons, the lack of middle class representation was negatively affecting the defense of the British nation. As Gillian Russell notes newspapers at the time often included letters that “suggested that the indolence and extravagance of some officers was setting a bad example to the lower ranks” and “complain[ed] about the delicacy of the macaroni officers” (38). Sheridan's problematic representation of the officer class highlights “a [military] system that rewards aristocratic privilege rather than merit and ‘manliness’” (Russell 38). For Sheridan, the defense the British nation required middle class male Britons to step in and be a regulatory, corrective force in the British military.

Unlike both the hedonistic, ill-trained lower class and the theatrical, foppish upper class, the middle class’s desire to serve in the defense of the British nation was thought by many Britons to come from a sense of “civic virtue”. Nielsen describes this idea as “a willingness to sacrifice one’s lives and loves for the nation” (136), and that it often denoted the need to serve “with pride and honor” (137). This characteristic is noticeably lacking in Sheridan’s satirical representation of either the upper or lower classes involved in national defense. In fact, some critics maligned the play for these reasons. John
Watkins, who published Sheridan’s memoirs in 1817, actually attempted to absolve Sheridan of writing the piece because of what he viewed as its unpatriotic themes:

It is not a little extraordinary, however, that no public disavowal of this contemptible production was ever made on the part of [Sheridan] the person most affected by the imputation, and to whom forcible remonstrance was addressed when the entertainment came out at Drury Lane... Next to the folly of writing such a piece was the indiscretion of suffering it to disgrace the stage at a period when the country was distracted by party, and menaced by a combination of foreign foes, who were bent on its destruction, or at least upon the annihilation of its naval power and commercial interests. Yet Wilkinson... has gratuitously attributed this piece of buffoonery to another hand, and in doing this... has rendered the literary character of Sheridan which the latter ought to have executed for himself. (226-28)

Although Watkins describes the play as being so unpatriotic that it blighted the very reputation of Sheridan as both a playwright and a manager, I feel like the irreverence with which the play treats the nation’s preparations for war were actually meant to prompt rather than simply to ridicule. The reason that Sheridan portrays Britain’s national defense as so problematic is that it lacks volunteer members who have morality and serve out of patriotic duty. This is a gap in national defense that should be filled by the male middle-class. Therefore, Sheridan’s exclusion of the middle class from the military showed the degenerate quality of that defense. By presenting the audience with the military’s lack of effective leadership and execution of defense, Sheridan was appealing
to male, middle-class Briton’s sense of civic virtue. The play ends with Nancy invoking such feelings: “Brave Sons of the Field/ Whose Valor’s our shield/ Love and Beauty your toils shall repay,/ In War’s fierce alarms,/ Inspir’d by those charms” (Sheridan, *The Camp* 750). This is coupled with the patriotic staging of the ending of the play. According to Jones:

...during productions of The Camp, Sheridan had the stage adorned with dramatic backcloths also designed by de Loutherbourgh; and troops had paraded patriotically, or seemingly so, on the stage. De Loutherbourgh’s drapery depicted the Coxheath camp at its most magnificent, with flags flying and the army arrayed as for a parade. Crucially, the image was unveiled only at the end of the performance, when in a sudden change of mood the play launched into a patriotic review in which the entire cast participated... (41).

While Jones reads this mood shift and patriotic display at the end of the piece as a subtle critique of the government, I read this unveiling as a final appeal to the audience on Sheridan’s part. The fact the entire cast participated in this patriotic show, added to the lack of characters representing the middle class, serves as a reminder for the male middle-class members of the audience that they too owe their country patriotic military service. Indeed, because of the public anxieties surrounding British national defense and after watching the satirical piece displaying the ineptitude of the other classes in trying to fulfill their own roles in military service, male middle-class audience members could truly see why their participation in the military was so desperately needed.
"But he died fighting Gloriously... that is my consolation": Manliness, Loyalty, Spectacle and The Glorious First of June

Sheridan’s focus on the defense of the British nation did not stop at his satirical critique of the army in 1778. When the British navy won a major victory over the French in 1794, Sheridan depicted the naval battle in The Glorious First of June (1794). This play, and Sheridan’s critique of the defense of the British nation, differed substantially from The Camp. While The Glorious First of June still functions as a call to action for the middle-class to take part in the defense of the British nation, the play also examines the complications that compulsory and continual naval service caused for members of the British nation. The play represents the struggles that sailors faced because of their inability to both serve their country and fulfill their duties as patriarchs and landowners, a marker of traditional manliness during this period. However, through their faithful, patriotic military service, sailors could engage in an alternative type of manliness in the “brotherhood” of the British navy (Russell 62). Nevertheless, the play presents the position of sailors as a truly problematic due to their integral position in the defense of the British nation.

Additionally, the play functions as yet another call to action specifically; this time, this call is for them to forego personal gain in the war, both in the form of service on the merchant ships that were also involved in the British navy as well as the exploitation of poor naval families, to serve in the active defense of the British nation. Their voluntary participation in the navy, although problematic, would circumvent the need for the use of impressment practices to man the British navy. Once again, in this play, there is a notable lack of middle-class characters. This lack is especially profound,
since this play depicts lower class sailors taking part in patriotic naval service. This is
further complicated by the character of Endless, the lawyer who, as a member of the
professional class, can be read as the only representation of a middle-class character.
Endless is the main antagonist within the play and attempts to exploit the Russets and
brands William as a deserter. This portrayal serves as a troubling indictment of the
middle class’s lack of participation for their exploitation of the lower class’s active naval
service for personal gain.

Once again, to examine this play one needs to look at the historical changes in
British naval service in this period. During the eighteenth century, serving in the navy
took on an even more complex role in the defense of the British nation. This was because
of the interplay of the active naval engagement in Britain’s war with France and the
financial endeavors that the British navy was responsible for securing. As Denver
Brunsman writes, because of Great Britain’s need for imperial and trade endeavors to
support its national income, the British navy was a dual-front operation comprised of
both the traditional navy and the “merchant marine” involved in financial and colonial
endeavors (20). Sailors could make substantially more money and have more freedom
during the war manning merchant ships than participating in the navy (Brunsman 25).
While sailors were more likely to voluntarily work on mercantile ships, this only
exasperated the need for the use of impressment to man Britain’s active naval warships.
Therefore sailors were often “caught between the ‘carrot’ of high merchant wages and the
‘stick’ of naval impressment throughout the long eighteenth century” (Brunsman 21). By
using the lack of middle-class characters taking part in the defense of the British nation,
Sheridan’s play urges the middle-class male audience members to forego the financial
pull of personal gain in time of war and take their own part in patriotic naval defense service.

The manliness of sailors was an issue of contention in British society during this period because of the changing obligations of war-time naval service. Scholars often note that military service destabilized traditional masculinity for those involved in both the army and navy in the eighteenth century. This was owing to the fact that, during this time period, masculinity was defined by "being a father, husband, householder," and as such "soldiers [and by extension sailor] were stuck in an unfulfilled stage of the male life cycle" (Linch and McCormack 155-56). Therefore, although these soldiers and sailors were though to embody other types of masculinity, British society did not deem them truly "manly" men. Nonetheless, sailors could engage in other forms of masculinity: "Mariners still had means of achieving gendered independence, however. Even if they were not large landowners, seamen could still control wives, lovers, prostitutes, and other women in their lives" (Brunsman 27). These alternative assertions of masculinity provided sailors with the ability to both fulfill their patriotic duty to serve in defense of the British nation while still maintain their gender roles.

This can be seen with in the first scene of The Glorious First of June. In the past, Henry Russet has been able to be both a sailor and maintain the markers of his masculinity. The play begins with his family lamenting his loss:

    OLD COTTAGER. Alas our poor Henry! We have lost him, the truest friend — the best Son.—

    SUSAN. The kindest brother.

    MARY. The fondest father and most affectionate husband—
OLD COTTAGER. My boy—who was the support of us all—

(Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 763).

In these lines, the audience is immediately shown all the ways that Henry fulfills a sailor’s alternate forms of masculinity. Henry is a sailor as well as a “Son,” “brother,” “father,” and “husband.” Henry has also fulfilled his role of patriotic naval duty, at the expense of life. Henry’s father states: “But he died fighting Gloriously—fighting for his King and Country—that is my consolation” (Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 763).

In Henry’s father’s eyes, Henry’s death, while tragic for his family, was a glorious, patriotic death. By Henry’s father speaking these words, Sheridan evokes a traditionally masculine male’s recognition of both a sailor’s alternative masculinity and his patriotic duty. Henry’s father is identified as a “Cottager,” a householder, also a father and husband. In this way, Sheridan’s play takes part in shaping both the audience’s own recognition of sailors’ masculinity and the necessity of naval service.

Nevertheless, in reality, impressment practices did not allow sailors to be both faithful in their duty to the navy and maintain their alternative masculinity. For soldiers in the army, due to the perceived theatrical quality of their military participation their roles in the military were finite and easy to shed (Russell 19). This was especially true for those involved in volunteer participation. According to Russell: “The idea of military service as a performance was important in enticing these amateur soldiers to join the Volunteers in the first place...the role of soldier could be readily discarded and one’s civilian identity reasserted” (19). Impressed sailors, on the other hand, did not have this luxury because of the nature of naval service. British naval service had undergone drastic
changes in the late seventeenth century which extended in to the eighteenth century because of Britain’s continual state of war (Brunsman 16). Brunsman notes that:

Beginning in the winter of 1692-93, therefore, the navy began to keep its ships manned year-round until individual wars ended. The turning of the calendar no longer ended a term of impressment. Instead, an impressed seaman remained in the navy until he died, he escaped, or a particular war ended—whichever came first. (17)

Coupled with this, sailors’ leave time to spend with their loved ones and consorts on land was minimized during the eighteenth century, decreasing from “two and a half months” a year (Brunsman 24) to “a day or two or at most a few weeks” (Brunsman 29). Impressment practices destabilized sailors’ manliness by taking away the few opportunities available to them to assert this quality. Brunsman explains that “more than other laborers, a sailor’s... manhood depended on controlling his own movements.... Impressment robbed sailors of the one thing, short of property, that made them independent men—their freedom of movement” (27).

In *The Glorious First of June*, the Old Cottager’s Wife’s rebuttal of her husband’s patriotic sentiment and Mary’s and Susan’s acknowledgement of William’s desertion display these complications within the play. Their comments show that, because of the changed nature of naval service, fulfilling both roles is simply not possible anymore for sailors to serve in the defense of the British nation and take care of their families:

COTTAGER’S WIFE. Consolation indeed! — and we all might have starved Gloriously had it not been for his friend and Messmate, William.
MARY. Generous William! To quit his Ship, the Service and Commander he loved that he might perform his promise to my poor Henry— and support his helpless parents and destitute family.

SUSAN. And he has fulfill’d that promise nobly— for five months has William’s daily labor been our support.

(Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 764).

The Cottager’s Wife’s appropriation of the term “Gloriously” has an important effect on this exchange: it points out the fact that changing naval practices hurt not only the sailors themselves, but their families as well. Henry’s glorious death in the service of his country would have led to several inglorious deaths in his family’s starvation, had not William deserted. Although Henry has been able to fulfill both roles in the past, currently William cannot. Russell notes that the play seeks to assuage sailors’ concerns surrounding the care of their family (61-62). Russell states that although eighteenth-century sailors’ concerns about their family may have been justified, “humanitarian instincts — in the form of reified male bonding— will overcome the demands of predatory landlords and food shortages. There will always be a William or a Robin to lend a helping hand” (62). What Russell doesn’t elaborate on, however, is the contradictory nature of William’s ability to fulfill his promise: the only reason that William is able to save the Russets is by deserting the navy. Indeed, when William expresses the desire to go back to the navy, Susan responds: “Will you desert us?” (Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 765). Susan’s use of the idea of desertion further exemplifies William’s inability to serve both nation and family. Sheridan’s play shows how these two duties are incompatible and, thus, how
contemporary naval service and impressment practices posed a serious threat, not only to the masculinity of sailors, but to a large portion of the British nation as well.

This idea of impressment practices being detrimental to the British nation is also revealed in the dialogue between one of the Russet children and her mother, Mary. The child confesses: “I am so frightened — there are some sailors talking together at the corner of Orchard — I am afraid they want to rob us” (Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 765). The child’s fears of robbery can be read to signify more than simply burglary or theft. As Russell notes, “[t]he mention of lurking sailors would have evoked the press-gangs for many members of the audience” (62). Therefore, the idea of theft being evoked in this scene is not just the theft of money from a person, but the theft of young men and labor resources from a community. Brusman notes that:

...seaport communities that pursued fishing, coastal, and other short-distance trades opposed press-gangs more fiercely than those occupied in long-distance trade. Sailors in many provincial and colonial seaports split their time evenly between sea and shore...For them impressment posed a threat not only to their individual livelihoods but also to the seasonal labor rhythms of their home ports. (25)

For these communities, impressment presented a threat to their economic livelihood by removing able-bodied young men who were the backbone of their financial support systems. In this scene, it is not just the sailors who are threatening parts of the British nation, but the navy itself through impressment.

Sheridan’s portrayal of the way the middle class exploits the patriotic naval service of the lower classes adds to the complications of naval service in the play. This is
seen through the character Endless, the attorney who persecutes the Russet family. Endless attempts to subvert civil justice in his pursuit of both Susan and the Russet’s farm. He pleads his case to Commodore Chace, a retired naval officer:

   ENDLESS. ...but here comes Commodore Chace... A fine, stupid honest Old fellow— I count his credulity a hundred a year in my pocket.

   ENDLESS. I fear I must distrain for farmer Russet’s rent— I can’t get the money by air means.

   COMMODORE. The old man lost his sheet Anchor in his Son Henry... and the family have ever had wind ad Tide against them.

   ENDLESS. The family is vilely managed— I had some thought of marrying the eldest daughter Susan— and taking the farm into my own hands— merely to manage it for your honour.


Endless makes his intentions clear for both the Commodore and the audience: he intends to profit despite the fact that the Russet’s poverty is the result of Henry’s naval service. When the Commodore rebuts this attempt, Endless appeals to the Commodore’s sense of naval justice by revealing Williams desertion (Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 768). It is only once the Russet family and William are accused of disrupting William’s naval service that the Commodore agrees to extract the rent money from the Russets. Through Endless’s lack of respect for Commodore Chace in his reference to him as “A fine, stupid honest Old fellow,” the audience can see the middle-class’s disregard for patriotic naval
service. In Endless’s scheming against the Russet family, the audience can determine the primacy of personal gain for the middle class. It can also be noted that in Endless’s single musical number, which he sings in honor of the Commodore, he states: “O’er the vast surface of the deep/ Britain shall still her Empire keep” (Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 768). This song, while praising the navy, begins by evoking images of empire rather than defense. Owing to the of Britain’s empire with naval mercantile ships and trade, Endless is continually portrayed as focusing on monetary gains within the war. In all these ways, the sole representative of the middle-class within the play presents the audience with a rather scurrilous indictment of that class’s non-participation in the defense of the British nation.

For these reasons, William’s temporary return to naval participation serves to assuage many of the problems surrounding naval service. When Robin, another sailor, comes to tell William of the naval victory, it is revealed that William did, in fact, return to the sea to serve his country:

ROBIN. O poor William! How sorry I am for him!... He’ll never forgive himself being absent, when he sees the knocks I’ve got how the Rogue will envy me, what a damn’d lucky fellow I was to be in the thick of it.

..........................................................

WILLIAM. Now Robin, pity me no more...I went to my post, and shared your danger and glory.

(Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 773).

William has, indeed, left the Russet farm and gone back to the navy as a volunteer, as also stated by Mary earlier in the play (Sheridan, *The Glorious First of June* 770).
Through his volunteer participation, William is able to serve in the battle and to return to the Russet family after the battle is over to continue to fulfill his promise to Henry.

Sheridan portrays volunteer service based on patriotic duty as a better way for the navy to enlist men to defend the British nation. The play, therefore, represents a plausible alternative to impressment service: Britons will hear their nation’s call to duty and respond by joining in arms to defend themselves, their families, and their nation from naval threats.

On the other hand, for his crimes against the navy in his pursuit of personal gain, Endless faces naval justice:

COMMODORE. Yes, and you dam’d knavish lubber— you curs’d land Shark, I’ll give you your due. Here my lads lay hold of this miscreant — I have detected him in the worst kind of oppression— in grinding a poor Sailor’s family— seize him and give him a good wholesome ducking. ENDLESS. Take care Commodore what you do— you are a Justice and must know this is against the law. COMMODORE. I’ll not wait to consider whether it is Law or not… and you shall see it carried into execution (Sheridan, The Glorious First of June 774).

It is important to note that it is not only the Commodore that orders this strikingly naval punishment, but the sailors themselves who carry it out; the entirety of the navy is involved in enacting Endless’s punishment. Russell explains that play show that “the heroes are not only the admirals and generals but the people’s own sons and brothers, thus identifying the civilian population even more strongly with its defenders” (62).
Although Endless appeals to the Commodore’s sense of civil justice to get out of his punishment, it is naval justice that prevails in the play. This resolution can be read as another admonishment to the middle class: if middle-class males persist in only pursuing personal gain at the expense of the navy and the lower classes, those involved in the defense of the British nation will ultimately triumph over them and punish them for their non-participation.

Sheridan’s play seeks to promote voluntary naval service to all members of the audience through the use of spectacle. For Sheridan’s middle-class audience members, Endless’s shameful actions could be seen as analogous to their own in not taking part in the active naval defense of the British nation. However, rather than simply chiding them for their lack of patriotism, Sheridan counteracts this with the spectacle and glory of the British navy’s victory. Russell notes that, although the plight of William and the Russet family was significant to the play, “The Glorious First of June featured a mechanical spectacle as its centre-piece. According to the Salopian Journal, the ‘immense’ stage of the Drury Lane was ‘turned into a Sea’ and the maneuvers executed more than usual verisimilitude” (qtd. in Russell 60). Indeed, when the play premiered, a review in the July 3rd 1794 issue of the London Times noted that “the Sea fight may be deemed the most complicated, as well as striking spectacle ever exhibited” (qtd. in Price 756). The spectacle employed by Sheridan attempted to transport the audience to the sea battle itself, in a way allowing them to take part in it. This use of mechanical special effects allowed the audience to experience the glory of sea battle through observation rather than participation. These effects, nonetheless, fall short of the glory that young men could gain by actually serving in the navy. Additionally, the fact that the play was performed for the
benefit of the widows and orphans of those sailors lost in the battle shows that even the theatre itself would support those who joined in the defense of the British nation. Thus, the play both relieves the audience’s fears and pushes all male members to take an active role in naval defense.

“Victory or Death! Our King, our Country, and Our God”: Tragedy, Empire, and *Pizarro*

*Pizarro*, Sheridan’s final major theatrical work, can be read as the culmination of Sheridan’s theatrical engagement with the invasion crisis and the defense of the British nation. Of all of Sheridan’s works, *Pizarro* has perhaps received the most scholarly attention. The play was written in 1799, during another peak in the invasion crisis; this time, threat came from the rise of the Napoleonic government. *Pizarro*, unlike Sheridan’s previous two plays, diminishes class critique in the defense of the British nation. Rather than highlighting the problems or limitations of certain classes’ participation in the defense of the British nation, the play highlights the need for class cooperation in a unified patriotic defense to successfully repel a Napoleonic invasion. This cooperation is embodied in the interplay of the roles of Rolla, a Peruvian nobleman and general of the Peruvian forces, and Alonzo, a former soldier in the Spanish army who has joined the Peruvian army to protect the natives. Their patriotic rhetoric and alliance in Rolla’s speech was a call to arms for all Britons, regardless of social station, to take part in the defense of the British nation. Additionally, the play also engages with Britain’s colonial activities, and the problematic but necessary role that British imperialism played in the defense of the British nation. Because of the necessity of revenue from colonial resources to support both the nation and the military, *Pizarro* both critiques British
colonialism at the time and presents the audience with a more ethical and moral type of
imperialism through Alonzo and his relationship with Cora, his Peruvian wife. The play
demonstrates the interaction of national defense and colonialism and how Britons can
successfully negotiate this interaction through unified military participation.

Nonetheless, Sheridan continues to promote active male, middle-class military
engagement as well as prescriptions for traditional feminine domesticity within the play
as major factors in a successful defense. Alonzo, although of noble European birth, has
married into the Peruvian nation, thereby forsaking his nation and noble birth.
Nonetheless, he takes on a primary role in Peruvian society, not rising to the same class
standing as nobleman Rolla, but still significant for his morality and heroism in his role in
defending the Peruvian nation. Therefore, Alonzo can be read as a middle-class character
as well as a standard for morality and masculinity in national defense. On the other hand
Elvira, Pizarro’s lover and a Spanish noble woman who has followed Pizarro to the front
lines of battle, represents British anxieties about female participation with the British
version of *levee en masse* (Russell 4). Sheridan portrays Elvira as a deadly woman who
transforms into a woman warrior. However, this transformation ultimately culminates in
a return to domesticity to take part in a spiritual and moral defense of the Peruvian nation.
Through her role and the changes she undergoes in the play, audiences can see Sheridan’s
avowal of traditional female domesticity in the defense of the nation, which began in *The
Camp*. Although patriotic mores that promoted a more unified national defense are
present in the play, Sheridan’s directives to specific subsets of Britons remain within the
discourse of *Pizarro*. 
Adapted from August von Kotzebue’s *Die Spanier in Peru* (1796), *Pizarro* was performed at the Drury Lane Theatre on May 23, 1799 and was a huge commercial success for Sheridan and the Drury Lane Theatre. According to Charles Hogan, “Vast crowds flocked to the box-office [to see *Pizarro*]. After its run of thirty-one nights, the receipts amounted to £13,624 9s. 4d., being about a quarter of what the theatre took in for the entire season” (2097). However, as Heather McPherson explains, the play has been traditionally viewed “as a derivative, commercial potboiler unworthy of Sheridan’s dramatic genius,” by modern scholars and contemporary theatre critics (611). Many critics viewed early performances of the play as unsuccessful, despite the fact that its opening night was well-attended and sold out before Sheridan was even finished adapting it (Price 628-29). As stated in one review in May 25th issue of *The Morning Oracle* in 1799: “A liberal mind will make much allowance for the first night; but, with the Stage deficiencies, there is a prolixity in the *Second and Third* Acts which approximates to dullness and insipidity, hence it was very evident that the whole has, in Play-house phrase, been hastily got up” (qtd. in Price 633). Nevertheless, even with the problems of its opening performance, the play “concluded amidst thunders of *unanimous* applause” (*The Morning Post*, 25 May 1799, qtd. in Price 633).

Despite the critical distaste for the play during the time it was written and performed, there is much scholarly interest in the way the play speaks to contemporary issues: *Pizarro* is a historical play that depicts the invasion of Peru by the Spanish. Written at the height of the Napoleonic invasion crisis, “Sheridan made this drama the mouthpiece for a sentiment agitating all Englishmen at this moment— the fear of invasion by the army and navy of Napoleon” (Hogan 2097). Therefore, scholars can see
that *Pizarro*’s commercial success had much to do with audience’s concerns with the defense of the British nation; Britain’s renewed anxieties about the possibility of a Napoleonic invasion in 1799 were at the forefront of the audience’s mind. Many critiques and contemporary audience members alike interpreted the play as a patriotic appeal to all Britons to take part in repelling a French invasion. In his introduction to the play, Price notes: “The invader might be viewed by English audiences not as Spanish but as French, and eager applause was given to every reference to King and Country” (629-30). Unlike his previous plays, which focus on the defensive maneuvers of the British nation to prevent an invasion, Sheridan’s adaptation of *Pizarro* stages the terrifying reality of an invasion for his audiences, once again to prompt Britons to act in their own defense.

This idea is most notably seen in Rolla’s speech in the second act. On its surface, the speech served as a call to arms for the British nation, one that attempted to both unite and shape Britons in their defense. It is easy then to see why and how British audiences would sympathize and identify with the Peruvians, whose struggle against invasion mimics their own potential for invasion by the French. The speech was May 25th issue of *The Morning Herald* as one of the “most successful appeals to Patriotism, that has ever distinguished the English Drama” (qtd. in Price 635). Even Sheridan himself used the speech to explicitly provoke this type of reaction from the public in response to the invasion crisis. Carlson notes how, four years after the play’s debut, “answering to another alarm of invasion from France, Sheridan recirculate[d] Rolla’s speech as ‘Sheridan’s Address to the People’ in support of ‘Our King, our Country, and Our God’” C373). Clearly, Rolla’s address to the Peruvian people is Sheridan’s most direct plea to all of England to defend their nation.
In this scene, Rolla, a Peruvian nobleman, is addressing his fellow Peruvians to defend themselves against Pizarro’s men who are attempting to invade the Peruvians’ homeland. Rolla states:

My brave associates... Can Rolla’s words add vigour to the virtuous energies which inspire your hearts? No—You have judged as I have, the foulness of the crafty plea by which these bold invaders would delude you—... They, by strange frenzy driven, fight for power, and extended rule—We, for our country, our altars and our homes. — They follow an Adventurer whom they fear—and obey a power which they hate—We serve a Monarch whom we love—a God whom we adore (Sheridan, Pizarro, 669).

Rolla’s speech addresses all Peruvians in the scene to take up arms against Pizarro and his men. Scholars sometimes explain that Sheridan makes yet another class distinction within the play. Price notes that Sheridan “drew on his ...admiration for less sophisticated Englishmen for the part of virtuous Peruvians” (630). However, Price misses an important distinction in this characterization: Rolla is a noblemen addressing a united crowd of Peruvians. Although Rolla is set to lead the defense against Pizarro’s men he is addressing a unified crowd of Peruvians who are set to collectively defend their homeland. Rolla makes no mention of class or gender divisions within the speech; in fact Rolla only refers to the Peruvians’ “we,” actively breaking down such distinctions. Indeed, the only division one can draw from Rolla’s words are those of defender and invader, virtuous Peruvian or villainous Spaniard. Rolla refers collectively to all the Peruvians he is addressing as his “brave associates.” Rolla also describes his fellow
Peruvians’ ability to judge and understand the moral intentions of the invaders: “You have judged as I have, the foulness of the crafty plea by which these bold invaders would delude you” (Sheridan 669). Rolla draws upon the universal ability of all Peruvians to use their superior morality to repel the greedy Spanish. In the speech, all Peruvians, regardless of class, have the ability to understand and take part in their own defense.

Even within the play’s theme of a unified British defense we can see Sheridan’s promotion of the middle class to take a lead role in the defense of the British race in the character of Alonzo. Alonzo, the former Spanish soldier, takes a primary role in the defense of the Peruvians. Alzono is depicted within the play as coming from noble origins. The first description of Alonzo in the play comes from Pizarro: “Alonzo! the traitor!... His noble mother entrusted him, a boy, to my protection” (Sheridan, Pizarro, 659). Alonzo, although of noble birth became a common soldier in Pizarro’s army. Due to his “early genius and ...valorous spirit,” he becomes Pizarro’s confidant. Already in the character of Alonzo, we can see the shifting of class positions. He is born of nobility but is placed by his mother into the life of a common soldier. It is due to his intellect and valor rather than his upper-class lineage that he becomes close to Pizarro and a prominent figure in Pizarro’s army. Once again, Sheridan is playing upon the middle-class sentiment of valuing morality and virtue over class distinction as the marker of a good soldier.

Pizarro then states that Alonzo “forego[es] his country’s claims for those of human virtue” (Sheridan 659). Alonzo is not simply a military deserter; instead, he is a valiant warrior whose focus on morals and virtue transcends his colonial ambitions. Compared to Pizarro’s “insatiate avarice” (Sheridan 661), Alonzo is a virtuous warrior who is willing
to give up both the nobility of his birth and his status within the Spanish army to protect the Peruvians.

Alonzo is the hero of the play and a model for the British male middle-class audience members to emulate in the defense of the British race. Alonzo has given up his Spanish nobility to marry a Peruvian woman and become part of their nation. Alonzo’s lack of noble distinction within the Peruvian nation allows audience members to view him as a middle-class character. Alonzo’s middle-class distinction is further characterized by his commitment to fight based upon ideas of morality and virtue. While some critics have argued that Alonzo is a European who simply “goes native” (Peters 38), I argue that Alonzo’s allegiances stay never truly change within the play; Alonzo’s allegiances are to moral values. Alonzo explicitly states that he is not fighting against Spain itself. Rather, as Alonzo states:

Deserter I am none! I was not born among robbers! pirates! murders!—
When those legions, lured by the abhorred lust for gold, and by [Pizarro’s] foul ambition urged, forgot the honour of the Castilians, and forsook the duties of humanity, THEY deserted ME. I have not warred against my native lands, but against those who have usurped its power (Sheridan, Pizarro, 681).

Alonzo’s appropriation of ideas of desertion presents audience members with the notion that Alonzo’s loyalty to his country is not what is at stake in his joining of the Peruvian army. Rather, it is his countrymen’s adoption of greed and immorality that prompted him to continue to fight for the side of good in the defense of the Peruvians. Alonzo, like Britons at this time, was fighting to protect a virtuous people against the barbarity of
foreigners who were invading their homeland. Like Sheridan directive to male, middle-
class audience member, Alonzo fights for the good of an innocent nation repelling an
invasion.

From this, scholars can also see how *Pizarro* occupies another prevalent theme in
British society at the time: England’s imperial activities. Dana Van Kooy explains:
“British military and extra-military forces such as the East India Company committed
atrocities all over the world and the figure of Pizarro in Sheridan’s final drama
represented the ghosts that haunted the British imaginary… These events exacted a toll
on… the common British citizen who struggled to survive both at home and abroad”
(188). As seen in this quote, scholars often note that that the play, particularly Alonzo’s
role was actually Sheridan’s commentary on British imperial practices rather than a
patriotic appeal for Britain to act in their own defense in the invasion crisis. Peters writes:
“[Alonzo] reverses the meaning of the trope of filial piety… the father land owes a duty
to its children to uphold the principles of honor; the son is no longer bound by duty to a
*patria* that tramples ‘Justice, Faith, and Mercy” (32). Although Peters reads this as
Sheridan promoting revolution and excusing disloyalty to his nation, critics must again
take note of the fact that Alonzo explicitly states that he refuses to fight against Spain.
Rather, he is fighting against his former brethren that are involved in imperialistic
activities motivated by greed. These extra-military soldiers have forsaken the virtuous
nature of Spain’s honorable leaders. Alonzo is loyal to his nation in a way that transcends
the barbaric colonial activities that the nation is taking part in. In this too, Sheridan
comments on the defense of the British nation: Alonzo’s defense of both the Spainish and
Peruvian nation is based on a morality in military participation. Alonzo’s patriotic and moralistic defense both reflected and shaped male middle-class audience members participation in the defense of the British nation.

The imperialistic reading of the play is further supported by Sheridan’s involvement in the trial of Warren Hastings, governor-general of the East Indian Company. In 1787, Hasting was tried for crimes committed against the female leaders of one of the ruling families of India, the Begums (Peters 15). Although the trial was ultimately unsuccessful, scholars interpret *Pizarro* as a re-imagining of the fate of those involved in the trial. Sheridan even went as far as to include parts of his own rhetoric in the play: “The most ‘original’ contribution of Sheridan’s to *Pizarro*, Rolla’s speech, repeats the Begums’ speech which is itself a repeat performance. Sheridan first delivered it... as the fourth of twenty-two charges brought by Edmund Burke against Hastings” (Carlson 360). The inclusion of Rolla’s speech is what leads critics and scholars to the double interpretations of the play: Rolla’s speech is cited as both an appeal to the audience to defend the British nation and a commentary on British colonialism. The speech and Sheridan’s inclusion of his own rhetoric from the Hasting trail within the speech are the main aspects of the play that contribute to the double interpretations. Julie Stone Peters writes:

The Spaniards had a double face: they were the invading Napoleonic forces..., but they were also Hasting’s men (identified with the evil sixteenth century conquistadors). The Incas were the Indians of both the West and East Indies, as well as the victims of Napoleonic expansionism. Pizarro was clearly the villainous Hastings (with echoes of Napoleon)...
Sheridan himself was Rolla, to whom he gave his most famous speeches and Alonzo, the young idealistic soldier who has learned... to “forego his country’s claims for those of human race” in the name of “right, of justice and humanity.” (30)

Contemporary viewers, too, noted striking similarities between Sheridan’s involvement in Hasting’s trial and the play. When William Pitt, Prime Minister of England during Hasting’s trial and when Pizarro premiered, was asked about his personal reception of the play, he responded “there is nothing new in it, for I heard it all long ago at the Hastings’s trial” (qtd. in Peters 30). Many scholars continue to note that two readings exist within the play: one which focuses on Britain’s national defense against the French and the other that critiques Britain’s colonial practices abroad (Van Kooy; McPherson; Carlson). Like other scholars’ readings of the play, I argue that, instead of being two independent interpretations of the play, these readings are part and parcel of the intersection of British military and imperial actions. I however argue, that by looking specifically at the ways Britain’s colonial resources funded its defensive activities, scholars can see why the two readings are deeply intermingled.

As we can see from the scholarly commentary above, Pizarro is Sheridan’s renewed call to action for all Britain’s to take part in defending themselves on the Continent as well as his critique of British’s problematic extra-military practices in maintaining their empire abroad. These intersecting readings are due to the way that Great Britain used resources from its empire to fund the nation in times of war. Although extra-military organizations, like the East India Company, were guilty of atrocities
against native people, Britain’s financial dependence on these organizations made them an essential part of the defense of British nation. According to Tirthankar Roy:

In Europe, the outcome of political competition was growth in the size and capacity of states, as they tried to take control of the economic means of financing wars. In this way, some of the major European states in the eighteenth century moved towards sovereign control of fiscal and military organizations, away from dependence on mercenaries, creditors, and contractors. (1126)

As Roy states, Britain’s imperial conquests were mainly used to fund its political competition and wars with other European powers. Owing to the fact that the invasion crisis was yet another manifestation of its continued wars and political competitions with France, Britain could not dispense with such organizations and continue to be a world power and repel invasion. This is further supported by the focus of British naval forces on its mercantile marine forces. As mentioned in the previous section dealing with the changing nature of British naval service, Britain required men to serve both its defensive and imperial interest to fund its wartime economy. According to Brunsman: “The strategic and ideological considerations made the British navy the centerpiece of Britain’s fiscal-military state and the largest industrial organization in the western world. Britain… could not afford to function without the tax revenue provided by trade during the wartime” (20). In this way, scholars can see why both imperial critique and the defense of the British nation was inextricably linked within Pizarro: English imperialism and national defense functioned in a recursive process that could not be interrupted without severe financial and military consequences. For the British nation to keep its status as a
world power and to gain tradable resources, it had to pursue colonies outside of the British nation. As European states competed for greater colonial control, the threats to these colonies and the British nation itself resulted in war between Britain and other European nations. To fund these wars, Britain depended on the financial income that came from its imperial nations. Rather than presenting two alternative readings of the play, the interplay of colonial interests and national defense unifies both prevailing themes within *Pizarro*.

The unification of these two themes plays a crucial role in the galvanizing of Britons to defend the nation. The Britons were caught in a kind of paradox: being appalled by the sometimes barbaric nature of British imperialism and aware of the fact that this imperialism was a necessary evil to sustain and defend the British nation. *Pizarro* is reflection of this conundrum. According to Van Kooy: “*Pizarro* both portrayed and concealed the horrors of global war and the terrifying atrocities committed in the name of the British Empire” (182). Owing to the necessity of the British Empire in the defense of the British nation, Sheridan had to negotiate yet another delicate territory: making his audiences sympathetic with the plight of the colonized people without wholly disavowing colonialism. The doubling of the themes of the play serves to make Britons aware of the British nation’s role in the oppression of other nations even as it calls Britons to defend themselves from such an oppressive force. British audiences were made aware of these atrocities, but also their ability to circumvent such atrocities in the play. Rather than British imperialism itself being the problem in *Pizarro*, it is the men who are involved in directing this colonization that are the problem. If, as Peters notes, immoral Britons like Hastings and his men in the East India Company were the real
problem with British colonialism, then Sheridan’s more noble and moral male middle-
class audience members, who would serve in both military and colonial capacities in the
defense of the nation, could be the solution once made aware of these atrocities.
Nonetheless, this speech can also be read for its anti-imperialistic qualities which
function not in opposition to its patriotism but rather in conjunction with it. Peters refers
to Rolla’s speech as a “great anticolonial call to arms” (30). Van Kooy, too, notes that

*Pizarro*...mirrored and critiqued the ideologies of British imperial
power...the originary historical event— the Spanish Conquest—
accumulated exchange value [for its audience] through its ability to
resonate with contemporary events and provide a critical perspective on
those conflict in which the British were more obviously culpable — for
example, the violent oppress of the Irish, the Jamaican Maroons, and the
Bengalese. (181)
The content of *Pizarro* served to push audiences towards a more sympathetic colonial
service in extra-military organization. Although audiences were shown the culpability
that some Britons had for colonial atrocities, its intent was not to promote audiences to
call for the end of colonial practices. Instead the play ends with an acknowledgment of
the limits of native power: the inability of Ataliba, King of the Peruvians to help his
people and the death of Rolla, which happens due to his rescuing of the baby created by
Alonzo and Cora.

Alonzo is a former member of the Spanish army and Cora is a Peruvian
noblewoman; thus the play ends on the peaceful blending of cultures at the expense of
part of the native positions systems of power:
CORA. Oh! Avoid me not, Ataliba! To whom but to her King, is the wretched mother to address her griefs? — The Gods refuse to hear my prayers.... And will not, my sweet boy, if thou’lt but restore him to me , one day fight thy battles?

CORA. Is he our Sovereign, and has he not the power to give me back my child?

ATALIBA. When I reward desert, or can relieve my people, I feel the real glory of a King— when I hear them suffer, and cannot aid them, I mourn the impotence of all mortal power.

(Sheridan 700).

In this scene, Ataliba is depicted as a powerless ruler, who, if not for the strength of Rolla, is unable to defend his people. Furthermore, almost immediately after this scene, Rolla enters mortally wounded. Rolla’s final line in the play is to Alonzo, where he states that he dies “for thee, and Cora” (Sheridan 700). Although on the surface, Rolla’s death is a heroic gesture of friendship, it leaves control of Peru in the hands of an elderly, impotent native ruler and a representative of colonial power. As Peters states: “The play may be easily read as a blithe apology for a kinder, gentler colonialism, not governed by commercial interest or brute for, but by benevolent colonials gone native” (39). For these reasons the play cannot be read as a disavowal of colonial activities. Rather, British audiences were presented with a better view of colonialism for them to enact.

Despite its unifying theme in terms of class in regards to both national defense and anti-colonialism, Pizarro still delineates Britons’ appropriate response to their
defense along gender lines. Many scholars have looked at the ways the play’s intention to galvanize Britons overall to defend their nation. However, when looked at in the larger context of Sheridan’s military play, scholars can see a distinct shift in how Sheridan presents the defense of the British nation to the audience. In a continuation of Sheridan’s discourse on female in and around military encampments, *Pizarro* warns females away from active military participation despite its call for a unified patriotic defense. Much has been made of Sheridan’s use of his own rhetoric and Rolla’s speech as a call for all Britons to take up arms in their own defense. However, the role of Elvira’s final speech in the fifth act of the play can be read as equally prescriptive to female Britons and their part in the defense of the British nation. Elvira begins the play as a femme fatal as well as a fallen woman who has followed her beloved to war. Only by re-embracing traditional female domesticity and taking a passive spiritual role in the defense of the British nation can Elvira be redeemed. By looking at the ways Elvira’s speech actively works against the French ideal of *levee en masse* (Russell 4), scholars can see how and why gender becomes the key factor in the defense of the British nation.

By 1799, the French Revolution had ended and Napoleon’s government had replaced Frances’s revolutionary government. Nevertheless, revolutionary ideals persisted in France and helped to shape British response to France’s continued threat of invasion. According to Russell:

In 1793... the nature of the enemy had changed: the British people found themselves confronting not the old absolutist France but the Revolutionary *patria*... the French Revolution mobilized the nation as a whole — men, women, children, and the old— in order  to preach the unity of the
republic and the hatred of kings'.... The bearing of arms was represented as the basic right and duty of citizenship to the extent that to be a citizen was to be a soldier of the Revolution and vice versa. (3-4)

On the other hand, the idea of women taking an active role in the defense of the nation was a distinct source of anxiety for Britons. Despite the fact that these women were fighting in their own defense and for righteous ideals, the notion of female Britons fighting in a combative role within the defense of the nation was seen by many Britons as problematic to the point of perversion. Nielsen explains:

Outside of France, the ostensibly unnatural power of women underscored the perversity of overturning the Old Order: according to tradition, women belonged at home...The French Revolution seemed to produce a generation of femmes-hommes (women-men), hideous hybrids who, by violating conventional gender roles belonged to neither sex wholly and, therefore appeared inhuman. (4)

British ideals about woman and their place in combat differed deeply from French ideals. While it is true that the French revolutionary government never officially condoned female combatants in the Revolution (Nielsen 4), the French were much more comfortable with the fictive figure of the female warrior in promoting the French Revolution: “The allegorical figure of Liberty appeared in female form, and in prints and broad sheets la Liberté resembled a warrior because she often carried a pike and a cockade” (Nielsen 4). English culture distinguished itself from that of Revolutionary France by disavowing the idea of the female warrior. Because the Britons were so
disturbed by the figure of the female warrior, female participation in combat had to be curtailed even as universal themes of patriotic defense were promoted.

In *Pizarro*, Sheridan uses Elvira and the status of the actress who portrayed her to warn the British nation away from the errors of including women in national defense. Sheridan presents Elvira as a femme fatale, a female character who “schemes and manipulates men in order to wield power, and kills to avenge herself” (Nielsen xiii). Elvira arraigns for Rolla to kill Pizarro in his sleep, embodying the role of the femme fatale. Despite the failure of this plot, Elvira returns near the conclusion of the play to help Alonzo defeat Pizarro. In the end, Elvira transforms into a woman warrior who realizes her contribution to the Peruvian nation requires her to return to her native Spain and the convent she ran away from, to aid the Peruvians through prayers and appeal to God. Elvira’s return to Spain and to the convent is a return to traditional female domesticity. Elvira’s return curtails the active female participation that female audience members might see as an appropriate response to Rolla’s unified patriotic appeal. For Sheridan, the proper way for female Britons to aid in the defense of the British nation is by taking on a decidedly domestic role as a woman warrior: to spiritually and morally defend the British nation. Elvira role shapes and reflects Britons’ anxieties about female participation in the military defense of the British race.

Elvira begins the play as a femme fatale. Although she pledges that her sympathy for the Peruvians is the reason for her wanting to kill Pizarro, this noble goal comes secondary to her own revenge. In act four scene two of the play, Elvira states: “No— not Pizarro’s brutal taunts— not the glowing admiration which I feel for this noble youth, shall raise and interest in my harrass’d bosom which honour would not sanction. If
[Alonzo] reject the vengeance my heart has sworn against the tyrant, whose death alone can save this land—yet shall the delight be mine to restore him to his Cora’s arms…” (Sheridan, Pizarro, 688). Elvira explains that it is not the fact that Pizarro has wronged her that makes her want to arrange for Alonzo to murder him, nor her sympathy for Alonzo. Elvira cite honor as being her primary goal in Pizarro’s murder. Yet Elvira still construes her murdering of Pizarro as “vengeance.” Later, in the same scene, Elvira says to Rolla that Pizarro has wronged her “[d]eeply as scorn and insult can infuse their deadly venom” (Sheridan, Pizarro, 690). When Rolla is appalled by her form of vengeance, her appeal for him to murder Pizarro in his sleep, she rationalizes her desire due to Pizarro’s intended killing of Alonzo “in his chains” (Sheridan, Pizarro, 690). Here again, critics can see Elvira’s primary motivation for killing Pizarro: she seeks to revenge herself. Although she also expresses a desire to free the Peruvian people from Pizarro and his men, this desire for vengeance is what makes her character a femme fatale rather than a woman warrior. Nielsen explains notes that women warriors are distinct from femme fatales because of the fact that they are true warriors who “wage war for a righteous cause and in an honorable manner” (Nielsen 77).

Going along with this idea, Elvira’s method of killing Pizarro, much like other femme fatales, “violates the rules of war” (Nielsen 79). Her attempt to have Rolla kill Pizarro in his sleep violates fair rules of combat within war because Pizarro has no chance or ability to defend himself in such an attack. Elvira’s assassination attempt fails, owing to the fact that Rolla cannot kill him in this manner. Rolla explains: “No!—my heart and hand refuse the act: Rolla cannot be assassin!—Yet Elvira must be saved!... Pizarro! awake!” (Sheridan, Pizarro, 691). Rolla’s betrayal of Elvira in this scene is
problematic, until scholars consider her position as a femme fatale. If Rolla enacts Elvira’s unethical vengeance, both his honor as well as Elvira’s own would be besmirched. Instead of righteous warriors, Rolla would become an assassin and Elvira simply a deadly woman, both without claim to virtue. Instead, Rolla sacrifices himself and Elvira to save their honor. It is important to note that, although Kotzebue’s text ends with Elvira being lead to her death off stage, Sheridan’s adaptation expands Elvira’s role and brings Elvira back in the conclusion of the piece to and helps Alonzo defeat Pizarro (Couture 191). Elvira’s role as a failed femme fatale allows her the opportunity to be redeemed both from her femme fatale status to become a true woman warrior.

Sheridan’s expansion of Elvira’s role as well as his choice for Sarah Siddons to play her in the original performance of *Pizarro* allow Elvira to be transformed from a deadly woman into a woman warrior and a model for female Britons in the defense of the British nation. Through Elvira’s return in her nun’s habit from the convent she was in before she left with Pizarro, her final speech, and Sarah Siddons embodiment of “British womanhood” (Couture), Sheridan creates a model of moral and spiritual defense as the proper role for female Britons in the defense of the British nation. Selena Couture makes a wonderfully complex argument about Sarah Siddons’s portrayal of Elvira in the original staging of Sheridan’s *Pizarro*: “…Sheridan used [Siddons’s] celebrity as an actor and her status as a national icon and symbol of British womanhood to respond to the simple patriotism of Rolla’s speech and to articulate a more complex, self-reflexive understanding of British responsibility for colonial abuses” (184). Although Couture attempts to “correct a considerable oversight [in scholarship]… that consequently disregards the influence of a powerful combination of gender and celebrity in the
performance” (184), she seems to overlook another layer of Siddons’s portrayal and the audience’s response to the Elvira as a character and Sheridan’s addition of her final actions and speech. Specifically, in valorizing Siddons’s role as “the personification of Britain speaking about remorse” regarding its colonial activities (194), Couture fails to see Siddons’s portrayal as well as Elvira’s extended role and final speech as gender-specific, both in its response to Rolla’s speech as well as its targeted audience’s reaction to it. Elvira’s trajectory in the play serves as a directive to female Britons, which locates their ability to take part in their own national defense through traditional, domestic femininity. Furthermore, Elvira’s final speech is a tempering of the unified patriotic defense that is espoused in Rolla’s speech. Elvira’s transformation into a spiritual and moralistic woman warrior urges female Britons to see their own part in national defense as non-combative, taking a decidedly removed place from the physical conflict of war.

Rather than being a general national symbol, Elvira changes in the course of the play to a just female warrior, whose ultimate triumph in the play is being able to begin to redeem herself by embodying a more spiritual, domestic female role, away from war and combat. It is in this capacity that Elvira is able to triumph over Pizarro, as well as secure Alonzo’s military victory. In the final battle between Pizarro and Alonzo, Alonzo is about to be defeated by Pizarro until Elvira enters. According to the stage directions “At this moment, Elvira enters, habited as when Pizarro first beheld her” (Sheridan, Pizarro, 701). Pizarro is ultimately defeated when Elvira re-enters the play dressed in her former habit as a nun (Sheridan 56). However, it takes both his distraction by Elvira and Alonzo’s renewed attack to do so. Elvira’s return to domesticity is a return to the spiritual and moral defense of a nation. In her final speech, although Alonzo asks Elvira to stay in Peru
to heal the wrongs of Pizarro and protect the Peruvians, she responds that she must return to her convent and that prayer will be her main contribution to the defense of the nation: “... for thee, thou virtuous Monarch, and the innocent race you reign over, shall Elvira’s prayers address the God of nature” (Sheridan 56). This idea works in conjunction with Alonzo’s martial action. Elvira states: “Humbled in penitence I will endeavor to atone the guilty errors, which... have long consumed my secret heart. When, by my sufferings purified and penitence sincere, my soul shall dare address the Throne of Mercy in behalf of others” (Sheridan 56). Through prayer and suffering away from the military front, Elvira will be able to affect a positive impact and be able to protect those who are involved in battle and national defense. As Couture mentions, after this declaration in her speech, she is celebrated with trumpet flourishes (Sheridan 57). It would seem that her return to her spiritual and moral feminine domesticity is what is being celebrated and the focal point of the ending of the play. In this way, Sheridan’s extension of Elvira’s role in the play seems to do more than give a generalized audience response to Britain’s colonial and military activities. Rather it serves to redeem Elvira as a woman warrior and to prescribe to female Britons with a way to become moral and spiritual woman warriors in the defense of the British race.

Additionally, Sheridan’s use of Siddons’s celebrity and cultural influence also serves as a call for British women to return to domesticity in their national defense. It warns female audience members away from the unnaturalness of the femme fatale and presents them with the power and influence of the woman warrior, whose role in national defense is, located within the spiritual and moral realm. Although Couture points out that in both Sheridan’s and Kotzebue’s versions, Elvira is lauded for her bravery, Elvira is
also portrayed in both versions as unnatural because of her position as a femme fatale and a women who has gone against social and religious mores in her sexual relationship with Pizarro. Elvira is exceptionally vulnerable because of her position as Pizarro’s mistress. Indeed, contemporary audiences may have found it hard to sympathize with her as a character. As contemporary critic, Samuel Argent Bardsley points out:

Yet in close investigation of the Character [of Elvira], it does not strike me as founded in Nature... that she should afterwards be seduced by this illiterate, ferocious, and every-way unpolished Adventurer [Pizarro] – (the murderer of her Brother by his sword and her Mother through Grief – to abandon her noble Family, her Fame, her Home; to share the dangers, humours, and crimes of such a Lover—is an outrage against probability” (29).

Bardsley’s words, which mirror Valverde’s within the play, points out the moral ambiguity of Elvira’s position. The play begins with an exchange between Elvira and Valverde, who, after discovering Elvira asleep and alone, attempts to seduce her. Elvira responds to his advances: “Audacious! Whence is thy privilege to interrupt the few moments of repose my harassed mind can snatch amid the tumults of this noisy camp? Shall I inform thy master, Pizarro of this presumptuous treachery?”(Sheridan 9). Despite this threat, Valverde continues his advances, unfazed. It would seem then that though Elvira has standing as a brave woman due to her connection to Pizarro and his military triumphs, she has no protection as a woman because if it as well. Her power as a female character is sexualized and weakens her in other ways and leaves her open to any male member of Pizarro’s camp for use. Through her transformation into a woman warrior,
coupled with Siddons's own status as a figure of ideal British womanhood, Elvira's becomes a more positive figure for female audience members to emulate in their national defense.

Sheridan's final play best embodies the complexities of the invasion crisis. Even as it collapses its distinction between classes and stresses the need of cooperation between them, gender roles become more problematic in the text. Once again, Sheridan's play is pushing for the moral and patriotic service of the male middle-class in the defense of the British nation. This is further supported by the fact that during subsequent revivals of the play, Sheridan explicitly invited military volunteer members to attend (Carlson 373). Once again, these members of the volunteer militia were involved exclusively in the defense of the British nation on the Continent. These mostly male volunteers were receiving the plays directives on unified patriotic male defense as members of the audience. Likewise, non-participating male members of the audience were present with both the play's message and real military representatives. The presence of members of the volunteer militia prompted male-middle class members of the audience to do their patriotic duty and take part in the defense of the British nation.

**Conclusion: Defensive Maneuvers in the Theatre**

Throughout late eighteenth-century Great Britain, because of the continuing invasion crisis, military defense was an important issue for the British nation. The threat of invasion, the fitness of those who were left to defend the nation, and the rightness of the activities that comprised that defense were issues that interested and troubled many members of British society. It is no surprise, then, that the plays during this era, especially those that were both commercial and popular successes such as Sheridan's,
took up these theme in an attempt to help audience member to negotiate their anxieties towards these issues. Nevertheless, the defense of the British nation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a problematic issue for both the audiences of Sheridan’s plays. Sheridan’s plays attempt to make sense of his audiences’ fear but also to give them directives as to how and in what ways they could themselves be a part of their own defense. These directives seemed desperately needed for Britons as a whole.

Although Britons recognized the need to defend their nation, they reacted angrily and sometimes violently to the government’s practices in attempting to man the military and navy. As Russell explains: “Naval Impressment aroused considerable opposition… Press-gangs were hounded out of coastal towns and villages, and naval recruiting offices burned down… In 1794 houses used for crimping — the military equivalent of impressment — were attacked by rioters in London” (9-11). Sheridan, too, as a playwright as well as a politician, both found these practices surrounding the armed forces “injurious to political liberty” and “regretted the apparent inadequacy of the government’s preparations to meet the threatened invasion” (Jones 32). Sheridan’s plays produced during this time period can be read as responding to and trying to navigate this paradox in Great Britain. In The Camp, The Glorious First of June, and Pizarro, Sheridan attempts to promote the national defense to Britons in differing ways. By targeting the middle class, Sheridan’s plays not only encouraged men to take part in the defense of the British nation, but specifically encouraged the type of men he deemed most fit for that defense.

By evoking male middle-class audience members to volunteer for the armed services out of a sense of patriotic duty, Sheridan’s plays supported the middle class’s involvement in the political arena of the late eighteenth century. By being the answer to the problem of
the defense of the British nation, male members of the middle class could be further valorized in their attempts to sway the nation politically, which Sheridan saw as a way to rectify the government’s injustices to all of Britain (Jones 34).

With the culmination of these idea embodied in *Pizarro*, Sheridan presented his audience with all the complexities of how they were able to serve in their national defense. That defense, like the many themes of *Pizarro* involves both a unified patriotic appeal which still requires male middle-class audience members to take a lead role in national defense. It required Britons to critique the British imperialistic practices, but avouched a more ethical brand of colonialism to both rectify imperial abuses and fund the defense of the British nation. Finally, it required both men and women to take part in their national defense while still maintaining women’s traditional domestic roles in that defense. Ultimately *Pizarro*, more than any of Sheridan’s other plays becomes the epitome of Sheridan views of the invasion crisis itself: deeply complex and stratifying for his audience members, complicated in its attempts to simplify, understand, and promote participation in the defense of the British nation.

Sheridan’s plays that dealt with the defense of the British nation reflect and attempt to shape a country seemingly edging closer and closer to the horrors of invasion. Sheridan’s plays move from satire to spectacle to tragedy because of the increasing imminence of invasion in the mind of Britons. The sighting of the French fleet off the coast of the Continent in 1778 called Britons to act and secure their borders to the possibility of invasion. Therefore, the comedy *The Camp* critiques the preparations of a nation in which invasion is likely but not imminent; there is a sighting of an aggressive other but it is still removed from the British homeland itself. In 1794, Briton’s were able
to see their military’s superiority against the French threat, even as conflict between the European factions grew and the threat of invasion moved closer still. Sheridan’s use of spectacle in *The Glorious First of June* show cases that military superiority, even as it problematizes the position of those Britons who were taking part in the Navy and called still more to help solve this issue. By 1799, the power of the Napoleonic government seemed poised and ready to strike at both the British nation and its empire. Sheridan’s use of tragedy in his adaptation of *Pizarro* helped Britons to understand the necessity of both defense and empire to create a unified response to effectively repel this apparently impending invasion as well as the role of middle class involvement and female domesticity in distinguishing Britain’s superior national defense from France’s degenerate one.

Together, these plays construct a multifaceted mirror for Britons to view themselves and their defense. Due to Sheridan’s different prescriptions for each faction of the British nation, this mirror can seem fractured and even contradictory to modern scholars. However, I would argue that this is because it also reflects the changing nature of the public’s concerns and opinions about the invasion crisis itself. Sheridan’s plays and the English stage itself both shaped and were shaped by the lived conditions of the audiences that viewed them. Sheridan’s plays presented the shifting and multi-level problem of the invasion crisis to diverse audiences who were all affected by it, and yet were expected to respond and view the crisis and their part in it in differing ways. These differences of response were based on their place in society, gender, and the social and political atmosphere of Britain at the time. In this way, Sheridan’s diverse range of plays and directs to the audience about the invasion crisis once again directly reflects his
audiences. These plays present to the audience that, although they may not agree with the actions and practices involved in the defense of the British nation, it was their role, in varying degrees and fashions, to take part in it and change it for the better. Sheridan’s plays targeted male middle-class who he felt was best suited to enact this changes. Additionally, his critiques of the upper and lower classes as well as women who took part in this defense mapped out their appropriate responses in a way that allowed middle-class men to take on a leading, and in Sheridan’s view rightful role in defending and leading the British nation. For Sheridan, in a time when so many Britons were either not participating in or even opposing efforts to defend the British nation, promoting the middle class’s involvement was crucial to creating a British society worth defending.
Works Cited


Feichtinger, Moritz, Stephan Malinowski, and Chase, Richards. "Transformative Invasions: Western Post-9/11 Counterinsurgency and the Lessons Of


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¹ Wilson notes: "Theatrical extravaganzas, scientific classificatory systems and religious and historical imperatives converged to set the English... apart as an 'island race', a notion that idealized past national and imperial experiences and... also the cultural and physical requirements of 'Englishness'" (55-56).