Porous Spheres in Time of War
The Fair Americans and the Questioning of Gender Roles within the Family

Pauline Pilote

The War of 1812, although the Treaty of Ghent maintained the pre-war borders, was considered by many Americans at the time as a definite turning point, signifying the end of all British presence on the American soil. Right at the end of the conflict, Samuel R. Brown thus published an account of the war that he entitled *An Authentic History of the Second War for Independence*. The choice of title aptly translates the views of many of his contemporaries, as Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans led to a surge of patriotism throughout the country, although that last battle did not actually change the outcome of the treaty. In the following years, the war was commemorated over and over again, by historians and writers alike, from Samuel Woodworth's own "romance of the nineteenth century, founded on the events of the war" (the subtitle to his *Champions of Freedom* [1816]), to Richard Emmons's *The Fredoniad; Or, Independence Preserved, An Epic Poem on the Late War of 1812* (1830). Through novels, poems, and romances, the war made its way into the American literary sphere (see Eustace), and the involvement of young American soldiers in the battle—and in particular on the Canadian front—was celebrated time and again.

The burgeoning American stage, which thrived during the conflict by producing patriotic plays to enliven the spirit of the American citizens, soon took up the subject as well. However, this surge of popularity was quite a recent phenomenon for the American theater as stage performances had been facing strong public disfavor since the seventeenth century, until theatrical representations were eventually outlawed by the General Court in 1750 on the grounds that they "occasion[ed] great and unnecessary expense, and discourage[d] industry and frugality, but likewise tend[ed] generally to increase immorality,

impiety, and a contempt of religion" (Nathans 22). After the Revolution, the debate lived on as theater was considered a preferred activity of the British enemy (Richards, *Drama* 1) and Boston, New York, and Philadelphia stages remained subject to government sanctions until the very end of the eighteenth century (Caldwell 311-12). Yet, despite its shaky beginnings, theater rapidly grew to become a popular entertainment at the dawn of the nineteenth century, as most coastal cities started to replace the smaller pre-revolutionary theaters and to build new structures, where local professional or semi-professional troupes could perform (Richards, *Drama* 1-2). Yet, even then, most plays performed on these new stages were of British origin or inspiration. In the early decades of the 19th century, however, plays tended to become more patriotic in themes and settings, with an increasing number focusing on representations of the nation's history (Baym 188) and issues of national identity (Kritzer, "Comedies" 3). With the American victories in the War of 1812, the plays taking place around major events or personalities involved in the conflict multiplied, alongside plays reviving the War of Independence, from John Daly Burk's *Bunker Hill; or, the Death of General Warren* (1811) to the dramatization of Woodworth's poem about the Battle of Lake Erie, *Heroes of the Lake* (1813), to the pantomime *The Battle of York; or, the Death of General Pike* (1814), the years 1814-15 being the heyday of these overtly patriotic productions (about productions on the Boston stage in particular, see Gafford).

Within that particular context it comes as no surprise that Mary Carr, seeking to earn a living from her productions, should turn to such a popular subject for her first play, *The Fair Americans*, performed under the title *The Return from Camp* in Philadelphia at the Chestnut Street Theater, on January 6, 1815—shortly before the official end of the war on February 13 (Kritzer, "Comedies" 9). Little is known about Carr, later Clarke, except that she was born in Philadelphia in the early 1790s and later lived in New York, where she was married to a man who died in 1816, probably from wounds he got fighting in the War of 1812, and that she wrote to maintain herself and her children after his death (Branson 38-39). She thus became one of the first American women to support herself as a writer and the first to edit and publish a magazine for women, *The Intellectual Regale; Or, Lady's Tea Tray* (1814-15), alongside writing songs, poetry, biographies, and creating and reviewing plays (Kritzer, *Plays* 16). If *The Fair Americans* was the first play she wrote, mingling dramatic performance, musical interludes, and pageantry, she continued with *The Benevolent Lawyers; or Villainy Detected* (1823), a melodrama about a woman pursued by the lustful intentions of a villainous landlord while her husband is at sea,

and *Sarah Maria Cornell; or, the Fall River Murder* (1833), the dramatization of the then sensational murder of a young mill worker in Rhode Island, that had a long run at Richmond Hill Theatre in New York (Fisher 96; Kritzer, "Antebellum Plays" 122).

Contrary to the contemporary plays on the War of 1812, *The Fair Americans* shies away from the representation of major military figures (as Generals Warren and Pike for Burk and Woodworth respectively), and chooses rather to focus on a village, and in particular on two families, living on the shores of Lake Erie. Both families commit to the conflict, the sons going away to fight, while the women and fathers stay at home and wait for their return. With that, the setting and the layout of the plot recall the hackneyed storylines of other more famous romances set in time of war, such as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* (1821), which spans from the War of Independence to the War of 1812. Like *The Fair Americans*, Cooper's novel extols the young soldiers' bravery, the patriotic feelings of the women who let them go and anxiously stay behind, and the expected family reunion glorified in the celebration of both the victorious country and the wedding of the long separated lovers at the end of the story.

By choosing the stage rather than the book, Carr steps into a male preserve: contrary to the theater of the late eighteenth century, which "provided a receptive space to the feminine voice" by "welcom[ing] women into a public role" (Thoen 15-16), early nineteenth century theater became more exclusively masculine in terms of attendance, production, and themes, with a particular emphasis on manly virtues (Butsch 378-79). This gender bias lasted roughly until the heyday of sensational melodrama in the 1860s and 70s, which drew women back into the theaters (see Block). Thus, Carr, picking up a theme favored by her contemporary male novelists and playwrights, gives it a new turn in a play where the main focus is on the comedy of marriage rather than on the various stages of the armed conflict. Using the constraints of the theatrical space, she provides a new version of the hackneyed storyline of romances in times of war: unlike plays and romances where the main battles are described at great length, the war happens offstage in *The Fair Americans* and the stage is shared by both the soldiers in their camp and their families that remained in the village. Narrowing the focus on two families, the Harleys and the Fairfields, whose sons and daughters intermarry at the end of the play, Carr thus alternates between two different settings to picture the war without ever bringing the conflict onstage. By this shifting back and forth between two stage sets, the play reconsiders the usually never-overlapping

worlds of the men fighting on the front for the women waiting at home for their return. This essay will seek to show that this choice of rotating settings for her narration of the war enables Carr to use the male-dominated space of the early-nineteenth-century American theater to discuss women's place: *The Fair Americans* renegotiates the ideology of the separate spheres at the time of its consolidation in the public discourse by blurring the boundaries between these two spheres.

War and the Codes of Manhood and Womanhood

The play opens with an apparently clear notion of two well-defined separate spheres delineating dissociated gender roles, thereby denoting an ideology that emerged in the aftermath of the Revolution and thrived throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, as Linda K. Kerber shows, the Revolution shook old assumptions about bourgeois and upper-class women's place in civil society and enabled many women, both Loyalist and Patriot, to take on an active political role (Kerber 20). The end of the war asked for a re-evaluation of the place of women and in the context of a "historical and political gendering of the nation" (Samuels 14)—the ideology of the separate spheres emerged, separating the private from the public along gendered lines. Therefore, in the early nineteenth century, "issues of sexual asymmetry dominated public discourse to an unprecedented extent as people tried to define a place for women in postrevolutionary society" (Kerber 20), and it is in that context that Carr wrote *The Fair Americans*. In this articulation of these gendered spheres, the emphasis is put on separation: in the post-revolutionary years, the domestic sphere is reconsidered as thoroughly disconnected from the public world. This clear partition emerged as a particularly American phenomenon, as noticed in 1835 by Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*: "in no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes and to make them keep pace one with the other, but in two pathways that are always different" (705). It is this context where "[the two] spheres may be mutually supportive but are nonetheless emphatically distinct" (Samuels 18) that shapes the background of Carr's play and that is illustrated in the division of the dramatis personae along gender lines in the introductory pages and the opening scenes of the play.

Although sharing the same theatrical space, two different settings alternate at first: Act I, Scene 1 takes place against the bucolic background of a farm

in a village on the shores of Lake Erie, while the stage direction indicates a "beautifully romantic" scenery (186). In this setting, Anna Harley and Sophia Fairfield are involved in light chatting about morning chores. However, they soon leave the stage as soldiers come in and start discussing the oncoming war and the necessity of recruiting troops.[1] Visually, thus, the stage at first suggests two spheres that do not overlap: the moment Sergeant Dash and his men enter the stage, the girls exit. In the first scenes of the play, the stage appears as a middle ground: Anna and Sophia leave on one side, while the soldiers leave on the other (188), as if to emphasize the two distinct spaces to which the audience is then introduced. In the following scenes, the story indeed alternates between the events happening on the farm and those happening at the military camp, the two settings being clearly differentiated through specific stage directions—"the village," or at times, the garden of the Fairfield's farm, on the one hand, and "the camp" on the other. The village itself is marked by everyday work and household activities, as enunciated by Mrs. Fairfield upon her very first appearance in the second scene: "cows to milk—breakfast to get—bread to bake—beer to brew—butter to churn—cheese to press, everything to do" (188). The farm seems to be the preserve of women, and Mrs. Fairfield goes on to call out for all the other girls in the house, namely her two daughters, Sophia and Maria, and the maid, Hetty. The farm therefore stands as a female space, in opposition to the camp. This gendered contrast is made obvious by servant Dermot, who is willing to enlist in the army precisely with the purpose of leaving the farm and its women: "Ah, may the devil's mother fly away with me if I wouldn't rather be shot ten times a day than live with an ould [sic] scolding devil as you are, so here goes to list [sic] [...] For dam'me [sic] if a camp can be worse than this house" (196). In these early scenes, the context of war seems to bring about a literal separation of the two spheres, with the domestic circle located in the Fairfield's farm, geographically distant from the masculine space of the camp.

And the play goes on to maintain the idea of men going to war to protect the country and their women guarding the home: "On your generosity, honor, and courage we depend for protection" (204) is the motto branded on the flag the women present the soldiers on the eve of battle. War, as presented by Carr, just as by Cooper or Woodworth, or many other writers of the times, seems to

1 The scene recalls at first sight the plot of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), a play that was highly popular during the American Revolution and in the early nineteenth century (see Gardner).

be the context where the ideals of manhood and their undertones of chivalry can be re-enacted: "At beauty's shrine [the soldier]'s doomed to bow, / To honor true, you well do know," claims Anna's song in the first scene (187). Women appear as either ladies to be revered or damsels to be rescued: Sergeant Dash himself uses the words "rural damsels" (188) to describe Anna and Sophia, who indeed later become "distressed damsels" (212) at the end of the story, when they are kidnapped by Indians and have to be saved by their companions. Be it against the outside foe—the British—or menacing Native Americans, "it's a soldier's duty to protect the fair" (207), says one of the officers in the play. While men take on this chivalrous role, women assume the position of ladies pining for the return of their lovers and lamenting their absence, as Maria Fairfield grieving the departure of Charles Harley: "Poor Maria, its [sic] heart is fled, and now she pines like a wood robin in a cage. Can she not raise one sweet song to call the wanderer back?" (199). The clichéd image of the lady awaiting her lover's return corresponds to that of men battling to honor their ladies and looking for prizes to come back triumphant, as Ensign Freelove wishing for "laurel to lay at [Anna's] feet" (210).

The play therefore starts by casting those separate roles very neatly: if Anna and Sophia leave the stage in the first scene while mentioning "those whose duty it is to protect us" (187), Sergeant Dash's first words bring the expected answer: "Well, my gallant lads, this is glorious going to war" (187). And the play proceeds with this initial extolment of warfare, by presenting it as a means of gaining "honor and fame" (187), or a stamp for manliness, as in the case of Dermot who goes to fight because he wants to prove his manhood: "I must list [sic] to show her [Hetty] I am a man" (197).

In Carr's rendering of the conflict, war seems at first to distribute distinctly the roles of manhood and womanhood and therefore to recast men and women into separate roles and separate spheres, with men fighting for glory and to protect their country, their home and the women, all three seemingly coalescing into one single lot.

War on Stage and the Constant Blurring of Boundaries

With this, Carr's choice of a love plot pegged onto a martial background is in the same vein as that of her contemporary fellow-writers: for the Americans of the early nineteenth century, writing about the wars, be it the War of Independence or the War of 1812, is a way of extolling a mass of male heroes

that rose up to defend the country in the name of patriotism. Yet, the use of a single theatrical space to bring these two worlds before the audience leads to a constant criss-crossing and blurring of the boundary between the two. Despite the illusion of a clear-cut division in the opening of the play between two separate settings, the stage is actually constantly shared and each sphere repeatedly invaded by the other.

Some men stay at home, as is the case of Mr. Fairfield and his friend Harley, who are too old to fight. More tellingly, the play also features the former's son, Edward Fairfield, who refuses to go to war because his fiancée lives across the lake in Canada: "For me, my resolution is taken never to raise an arm against the country that contains my Matilda; therefore, I remain neutral" (197). As a result, these male characters recurrently appear against the background of the farm setting, which was initially introduced as a female preserve. Similarly, women stand on the male location of the camp, as specified in the stage direction starting Act II: "A camp. Soldiers pitching their tents, women cooking and preparing breakfast" (193), or even more obviously, Anna and her friends intruding into the camp in Act IV to present the flag. In these cases, the stage therefore allows the spheres to overlap visually.

But this overlapping reveals more than just a practical way for Carr to deal with the constraints of a unique stage for two separate spheres. The sharing of the theatrical space comes as visual evidence of a deeper revision of what was first presented as separate spheres: in fact, the visual imbrication is translated into the roles of the characters themselves. Time and again throughout the play, some characters go beyond the boundaries of their gendered roles and overstep the limits of the initially distinct domestic and public spheres, thereby suggesting the notion of porous rather than separate spheres. The scene of the military pageant in Act IV—when the girls come to give to the soldiers the standard they have woven—is at first sight seemingly replete with chivalrous undertones. Yet, in Carr's rewriting of this commonplace of chivalric romances (where the lady gives a cloth as a token for her knight to carry into battle), Anna is the one who brings the flag to the camp in a scene that plays with the references it summons:

> SOPHIA: […] But Anna, you must present [the flag]. You have more courage than any of the girls in the village, so the task devolves on you.
> ANNA: Well, so be it. I must dress a la mode de Amazon [sic]. Let me see… yes, yes, my green riding habit will be the very thing, with a green velvet hat and three white feathers. I really think I shall make a few conquests—nay,

> without doubt, half the generals, majors, colonels, and captains, in the army will bend to my all-conquering eye. (200)

The Amazon costume first refers to the female attire for side-saddle riding fashionable in the nineteenth century, which she describes in detail. Yet, the earlier portrait of Anna as the bravest girl in the village and her own explicit mention of conquests (while Sophia opts for the flatter image of her own "powers of attraction" [200]) bring to the fore an unequivocal echo of mythical female warriors. Anna compares herself to these warriors, even though the association was a dreaded one in the new republican definition of womanhood (see Shaffer). And indeed, the fact that she and her bevy of followers all wear the same colors and the same costume as they enter the stage for the presentation suggests the idea of a company in uniform. The association of Anna with the belligerent Amazon in the second half of the play asks for a reconsideration of Sergeant Dash's initially comic mistake in the very first scene, when he misidentifies Anna and Sophia as "men [who] attack in ambuscade" (188). The very descriptive stage direction of the pageant emphasizes the military dimension of the scene that extends to the arriving females: "enter[s] […] Anna, dressed in a green riding habit, velvet hat the same color, with three white feathers. Sophia, Maria, and three others, dressed like Anna. […] [T]hey *march* round the stage. The officers *salute* them" (204, my emphasis). By militarizing the women who fully belong in these martial surroundings, Carr here seems to be overturning the chivalrous commonplace: not only are women and soldiers here sharing the stage, but they are also put on an equal footing visually, in a group scene evoking two companies of soldiers in uniform.

And this revision of conventional gendered roles reverberates verbally in the lines of some other characters who also overstep the boundaries of their gendered spheres. Mrs. Fairfield, who was initially rambling about domestic chores, later envisages herself at Congress, thereby stepping directly into the public sphere—"I wish I was Congress; I would always be at peace!" (198). At the same time, Ensign Freelove, while boasting of his chivalrous manhood, is the one who stays behind and remains inside his tent, pining for home as the conflict is raging outside: "I was roaring, dying with the toothache! Had I have been well, I should have fought like a lion; but I thought I should have died with agony. My limbs shook with pain. This is the cold I caught some time ago" (210). The "cold" here refers to an earlier dialogue Freelove had with General Trueman, which shows Freelove's ineptitude for warfare: "dam'me if

my bones don't ache most cursedly. *(Yawns.)* I am afraid I have caught cold, for *I* never slept out of a feather bed before" (193, original emphasis). Although both Freelove and Mrs. Fairfield are the butt of the comedy and though their lines contribute to the jocular tone of the play, the porosity of the spheres they evince is taken up in other, more serious, characters. Unlike most plays on the war, where women are usually constrained to secondary roles, in *The Fair Americans*, they are given the first and concluding words (uttered by Sophia and Anna respectively). While verbal prominence is given to the female characters of the play, most of them also question their usual status. Such is the case of Maria who, though earlier seen yearning for her lover's return, also says: "What a dependent state is woman's. I wish I was a man" (199), only to later "unman" (200) her lover.

Verbally and visually the world of men and the world of women constantly overlap as characters freely move from one to the other. The theme of conquest that runs as a thread through the play seems to bind both into one. Initially belonging to the military, it applies in the play to both the conflict at stake *and* the underlying notion of courting that pervades the dramatic narrative, therefore uniting lexically the sentimental plot with the martial context. While General Trueman is initially discussing military conquests allowed by the war with Freelove, the latter moves from territorial possession to sexual possession: "a few months will make us masters of [British Canada]; for the inhabitants will, of course, flock to our standard by thousands, and we shall only have to take possession. I wonder if the girls in Canada are as handsome as in America" (193). This overlapping of military and sexual possessions later transfers to female characters, since Anna herself, dressing up for the pageant, states: "I shall make a few conquests—nay, without doubt, half the generals, majors, colonels, and captains in the army will bend to my all-conquering eye" (200). Contrary to Amelia Howe Kritzer's view that the war enacts the severance of the two spheres—"when most of the young men join the army, […] the play's action divides into two separate spheres […] [and a]t the end, when the war is won, the two spheres reunite" ("Comedies" 9-10)—, this reading sees the theme of war itself, chosen by Carr as the specific background of her story, as precisely the means of enabling their conjunction.

From the Comedy of Union to the Promise of Fusion

Warfare, although fostering a re-enactment of codes based on the separation of the two gendered spheres, also seems, in this play, to create the conditions for the overlapping of the domestic and the public spheres and the ensuing questioning of gender roles. From the title page, which brings together visually the words "comedy" and "war," to the plot, blending the sentimental with the sensational tropes of war fictions, the play represents an oxymoron, one that fuses together usually non-overlapping notions. Carr's comedy, on top of featuring the stock characters of the "fop" (Freelove), the "shrew" (Mrs. Fairfield), and the prototypical Irishman (Dermot), is also a comedy of marriage that ends with a triple wedding: Anna Harley and William Fairfield, Maria Fairfield and Charles Harley, and Sophia Fairfield and Captain Belford. The first two are part of the conventions of the genre and of the chosen theme of an American family at war, where the ending merges the expected reunion of the lovers with the restoration of national order. However, the third marriage—and the one that closes the play—comes more as a surprise and fully participates in the oxymoronic outlook of the play. Indeed, Captain Belford is an English officer, who is welcomed within the American family because he rescued Anna and Sophia from their captivity at the hands of Native Americans. So if *The Fair Americans* fully belongs to such comedies of union that flourished in the early nineteenth century, presenting victorious America through the trope of a unified family (see Samuels), it nonetheless incorporates in this particular case the British Belford and the neutral Edward: even though the issue of the latter's wedding is left up in the air and is not part of the triple celebration, Edward is last seen on a canoe bound to Canada with Belford's friend, Major Clifford. The incorporation of weddings across the national divide is unprecedented, in particular when compared with other romances on the subject. In the case of Cooper's *The Spy*, such a union is bound to fall apart, as the engagement between the American Sarah Wharton and the Loyalist Colonel Wellmere fails to come through and ends in the flames of their burning house on their wedding night (267). In *The Fair Americans*, however, the wedding does take place and the play therefore ends on this "uni[on of] contraries" (213), to rephrase Sophia's words when describing her marriage to Belford.

The play orchestrates this juxtaposition of opposites, not only in terms of nationalities and characters, but also in terms of themes, thus allowing for the

confrontation of discourses both in favor of and against the war. The Harleys wish for a rekindling of the "spirit of seventy-six" (191):

> The spirit of Washington, Warren, Montgomery,
> Looks down from on high, with aspect serene.
> We will give them a sign, and a tear to their memory.
> Oh, make us valiant as they all have been.
> See children, affrighted, cling close to their mothers,
> The youth grasp the sword and for battle prepare;
> While beauty weeps fathers, and lovers, and brothers,
> Who rush to display the American Star. (192)

If the Harleys—father, daughter, and son—are united in the war effort, the Fairfields as a family condemn such a war, thereby voicing the strong anti-war sentiment that surfaced in the first years of the conflict—before it was outweighed by a more patriotic support of the war in the final victories (see Winter). Sophia describes the war as "this unnatural contest" (195) and both Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield lament the state of a country at war. Recruiting troops takes the workforce away from the fields and leaves the country desolate and the women dejected, according to Fairfield, who rephrases a common argument of the anti-war press at the time: "The declaration of war was precipitated by the fatal impatience of the administration, operated upon by the haughty threats or seductive artifices of an undisguised enemy and oppressor; and a corresponding anticipation ensued in the plot planned against our lives and our property" (*Federal Republican* publisher Alexander Hanson, qtd. in Winter 1572). In the play, Fairfield says:

> War said you? Once more must our fields be deluged with the best blood in the country; once more must carnage stalk abroad in the form of hostile Indians, and our flourishing villages be laid in ruins—our smoking hamlets serve but to light their distressed inhabitants in their flight. Again "must mothers weep their husbands lost, their infants slain." Oh, my too prophetic heart! Long have I dreaded this resource, yet now it comes like a thunderstroke [sic]. (190)

At times, Carr shifts away from the usual paeans to war as a patriotic endeavor that can be found in contemporary texts dealing with such a theme. She allows discourses about the other side of the war to confront the still present extolment of warfare, without ever appearing disloyal, as in the case of Edward Fairfield, whose neutrality is neither ridiculed nor condemned.

Through the play, the notion of patriotism, brought to the forefront in the last lines of the play's prologue (185), is thus constantly questioned and eventually redefined. Although the staging enacts a dispute between different views on the conflict, the characters who challenge the very relevance of war do not, however, come across as unpatriotic. While the Harleys, both father and son, voice the common patriotic opinion on the War of 1812—"England has broke [sic] the treaty of amity and commerce made by our glorious Washington; the spirit of seventy-six is aroused, and no longer shall our Eagle crouch to their proud Lion" (191)—other reactions seep through, embodied in the play by the Fairfields: "adieu, the fertile fields, the rural ball, the soft sigh, the tender smile; and welcome, the tented field, the martial shield, and all the horrors of almost civil war" (195). Yet, Carr never presents this dissensus as a sharp dichotomy. Despite his reluctance, William Fairfield still acknowledges the nation's call to arms: "I cannot see the justice of invading Canada by way of reprisal for the depredations of England on our commerce. I think it would be better to protect the trade, than invade our friends; yet, as war is declared, why, it is the duty of every man to espouse his country's cause" (194). On the other hand, while Freelove boasts of his courage and patriotism when he seeks to arrest Captain Belford (213), his lack of spirit and his ineptitude belie his very words and cast ridicule on his pretentions. The ironic use of "patriotism" in his lines is even highlighted as it comes as a repetition of the term voiced in the previous scene by none other than Major Clifford, the British friend of Captain Belford (211). Patriotism appears in the play as a token of valor, closely associated with the notion of heroism (192, 199), and all the more so since the only other occurrence of the word is applied to Anna, whose "patriotic efforts" (200) are commended. The connotations of the term reach further than the usual trope of patriotic American soldiers in the war fictions of the times and include worthy enemies and heroic females. As Jeffrey H. Richards notes in his analysis of the play, "[t]hese [male] republican ideals infuse many of the female characters" ("Republican" 64), such as Anna, who is recurrently defined as "heroic" or "noble," on a level with her brave male counterparts.

As a key term in a play performed at a time of the celebration of American heroism and amidst a general surge of nationalism in the wake of Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans, the notion of patriotism is eventually redefined by Carr. By extending its range, she blurs further the limits of gender and the nation, and therefore promotes, both in the actions and the lines of the play, an ideal of harmonious blending. More than a comedy of union, *The Fair Americans* is eventually one of fusion, where opposites merge and gen-

dered spheres overlap and eventually amalgamate. It is the context of warfare, in bringing two neighbors together, that creates the conditions for such blurring and merging. The change of title from the initial *Return from Camp* to *The Fair Americans* illustrates this indistinctiveness. If the original title clearly focused on the physical separation between the two circles through the image of men coming back home from an outside military front, the later title opts for undertones much less gendered. The choice of the word "fair" with its multiple meanings could apply equally to the fair, as in beautiful, ladies as to the honorable men (as the word, when applied to a person, retained into the nineteenth century its overtones of a noble, honorable, and reputable character). But the term also carries connotations of exemplary moral conduct (still in use in the nineteenth century although more archaic today), here to be applied collectively to both British and American characters. Indeed, although the title specifically focuses on the latter, the word "fair" tellingly reappears in the very last lines of the play, in a twice-repeated comment by Harley as Mrs. Fairfield hands her daughter to Belford: "[n]one but the brave deserve the fair" (215). Here, the indefinite address brings a notion of universality that goes beyond the nations at stake, and furthers the extended use of such terms as "patriotism" and "heroism" in the play.

The finale of the play fully participates in this promotion of an ideal of universality. The title-word "fair" recurs one last time when General Trueman adds a conclusive remark that closes the play before Anna's ode to peace: "And 'tis to the American fair the heroes of their country look for reward" (215), therefore eventually encompassing with the unspecified "country" all the new bridegrooms, both American and British. Even though the play opened with the announcement of war and the conscription of men, it closes with a more harmonious tone and does not end on the expected appraisal of the American battling spirit, but on a eulogy of peace and domestic bliss across countries and borders. By blending a sentimental comedy of marriage with a narrative of war, Carr's play eventually brings about a comedy of peace and union, where the action shifts from an initial conflict and oppositions between disagreeing families and neighbors at war to a general reconciliation. This overlapping and final fusion is visually brought on stage in the conclusion, the last act ending on a collective scene with all the actors present and reuniting on the shores of Lake Erie (212). The choice of such a neutral space, neither the camp nor the farm, set on the border between the two warring countries, heralds this plea for peaceful concord as an end note to the play.

Carr in *The Fair Americans* uses comedy and the tropes of sentimental accounts of war that were fashionable at the times in order to play with the conventions of the genre and the constraints of the theatrical space. Through the sharing of the stage by both soldiers at war and women at home, Carr gives another account of the War of 1812 and another narrative of union that goes beyond the expected happy ending with the wedding of the young American hero on his way back from victory. She takes further this notion of union and redefines it as a seamless overlapping of the two separate spheres that were being defined at the times through a separation of gender roles between domestic and public circles. Playing with this notion of opposite entities, the intermarriages and the final ode to peace call for an end to confrontation and highlight—beyond the notion of porosity and indeterminacy—the idea of union and thereby harmonious fusion.

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