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James Baker will provide a close reading of our selection of James Gillray prints, using the idea of liberty - central to British identity - in order to draw out the contemporary and historical questions of freedom, fashion, bodies, and politics contained by the prints on display at Nottingham Contemporary.

[SLIDE] - Intro page (name, place, title, picture [Parasols])

Short story...

In the Spring of 1789 James Gillray was commissioned to make a portrait of Prime Minister William Pitt by the printmaker Samuel Fores. At this time Gillray was forging a career. The same could not be said of Pitt, the second Pitt to hold this office in the 18th century. Pitt the Younger had been subject to various portraits.

[SLIDE] - portraits of Pitt

That Fores commissioned a portrait to be printed and reproduced from his shop in Piccadilly demonstrates the desire of Britons to own a likeness of their PM - not poor Londoners I might add, but those with disposal income - the middle classes, the bourgeoisie. Gillray duly went away and after a few sittings came up with this...

[SLIDE] - Gillray on Pitt

Fores was horrified. A written dialogue was opened up between printer and artist, the surviving letters from Gillray to Fores being one of the few insights we have into a working relationship of this kind...

Fores clearly insinuated that Gillray's likeness of Pitt was poor, to which Gillray replied: "with regard to altering ye Nose, Mouth, Hair, Eyes, Chin &c &c &c which you seemd to think unlike, I must observe, that I have had again two opportunities for examining every particular feature of ye fact of ye original - and am convinced that my likeness is a striking one therefore, I will not alter an lota for any Man Opinion upon Earth"

Indeed Gillray would later draw on this portrait in...

[SLIDE] - BM10414 Political-Candour;-i.e.-Coalition-"Resolutions" of June 14th 1805

Unmistakable portrait of Pitt rather than strictly a caricature... note even the words from his mouth pointed, purposeful, and abrupt.

[SLIDE] - Gillray on Pitt

Gillray's portrait may seem an odd place to begin this discussion of Gillray and 'Ridiculous Liberty'. However his subtle caricaturing of Pitt offers an insight into the discourses surrounding its production. In particular those regarding liberty.

What do I mean by liberty?

Dr Johnson's *Dictionary* (9th ed, 1790) - Liberty:

- "1) Freedom as opposed to slavery.
- 2) Freedom as opposed to necessity.

- 3) Privilege; exemption; immunity.
- 4) Relaxation of restraint; laxity.
- 5) Leave; permission.”

First three meanings foremost in 18th century BUT liberty here, and for the remainder of this talk, will follow final definition - a definition of liberty coming to prominence in the late-Georgian period more as we see it, as a social and cultural concept. Contemporary example:

[SLIDE] - quote below with Gillray on Pitt

London und Paris, a Weimer journal founded in 1798 to comment on European affairs, was for example astonished at British freedoms in terms of ‘leave’ and ‘permission’. In a passage discussing the work of radical satirist Peter Pindar (real name John Wolcot) they wrote:

“It would be hard to overcome the revulsion which our quotation inevitable arouses, were it not for the fact that the poem, in all its loutish crudity and insolence, is evidence of the extent to which liberties can still be taken in England. It shows the ignorance of those people who maintain that the once-free Briton has now had a padlock permanently clamped on his muzzle”

It is precisely this liberty of action which Gillray exploited, a situation brought about by French Revolutions subversion of liberty, which had opened up various ways of seeing it in a European context beyond politics and political narratives. Liberty could now be seen

...through freedom of action, speech and dress

...through customary behaviours

...and through liberty of practice.

[SLIDE] - Gillray on Pitt

So returning to our portrait of Pitt...

Gillray then here subtly teases at liberty, and attempts to ridicule it in a way which became the motif of his career...

... Gillray ridicules the freedom of Pitt to dress and go about as he pleases - noted bachelor and dandy but not a noted rake which led to all sorts of libellous accusations regarding his sexual preferences.

... Gillray ridicules the custom of depicting upholders of ‘British Liberty’ in the traditional sense in serious, regal, and uncontroversial ways (by doing the opposite).

... and Gillray ridicules the very commission he has been given, the assumption of his deference - testing the bravery of Fores to publish in the fashionable West End an atypical (and realistic) representation of Pitt.

Hopefully this has set the scene with regards to why I am talking about Gillray and liberty. But before I go any further exploring Gillrays explorations of liberty, it might be worth telling you something about the man himself...

Bio

[SLIDE] - Picture of Gillray [c. 1800 both - left: engraved by Charles Turner, repub in 1819, 43 years after JG death; right: self portrait]

When we think of Georgian satire we tend to think of two men - William Hogarth and James Gillray. For many the latter exemplifies what the historian Diana Donald (among others) has called the 'Golden Age' of Graphic Satire - that being those precocious, anti-authoritarian, rude, and bawdy satires produced circa 1780 to 1820. Liberty was a preoccupation of Gillrays. As it was of his contemporaries - Thomas Rowlandson, William Dent, Charles Williams, Richard Newton, the young George Cruikshank, and his father Isaac Cruikshank.

Gillray born 1756 or 1757 (depending on who you read). Studied as an engraver of fine art under the Italian master engraver Francesco Bartolozzi, but rejected for his comic style he had by the mid-1780s turned his back on the artistic establishment. Bitter and angry he would later viciously satirise the Royal Academy and their first president Joshua Reynolds for what he saw as their retrogressive pomposity. From mid-1790s worked almost exclusively for Hannah Humphries who published his satirical work at the heart of fashionable London after moving her premises to 27 St. James's Street in 1797. This premises was also his home, from which he developed a disdain for the high minded nonsense he perceived to be swirling around London's West End.

Whilst this ridiculous world seen through the eyes and pen of his contemporary and friend Thomas Rowlandson was jolly, playful, sexual, and joyous, for Gillray it was hypocritical, ghoulish, wasteful, and depraved

[SLIDE] - BM8811 Fashionable-jockeyship

Satire on Lord and Lady Jersey. Prince of Wales rides his lovers husband. Jersey takes the Prince to his wife. Sign of cuckold. Mockery here of the acceptability of philandering in high society - acceptable breach of marriage and hence custom. The prince had of course married Caroline of Brunswick a year earlier. Frances Villiers was 9 years his senior - hence depicted as a wicked, elderly woman.

Despite this sort of work, Gillray outwardly sided with the loyalists in their struggle against French revolutionary ideas (the key word here being 'outwardly'). For although Gillray may have made 48 prints for the Anti-Jacobin Review in 1798-9, his relationship with loyalist figures such as John Reeves was highly strained and his output for them, as historian Iain Haywood notes, in fact 'spectacularly disloyal' in its ambiguity - a point I shall return to later.

Yet as the foremost satiric artist of his age he remained in demand. Upon the resumption of war with France in May 1803, a flurry of loyalist prints emerged from a variety of artists, 'their lights', notes historian Alexandra Franklin, 'somewhat dimmed by the brilliance of Gillray'.

Just as Gillray bathed in the legacy of William Hogarth, so too did the generations that followed Gillray.

...the publisher William Hone, standing trial in December 1817 against charges of libel, brought to court copies of Gillray engravings to prove that his supposed libel against George IV was no worse than those attacks made against the then Prince of Wales during the 1790s and 1800s... Most famous...

[SLIDE] - 'Voluptuary under horrors of digestion'

PoW fashionable *standard* - yet ghastly, obese, self-serving, debted man... what hope did fashionable London (who were buying the prints?) have? what hope did they **deserve**?

Hone was acquitted.

...in 1854 the Union of Institutions, London, enjoyed a lecture (as you are today) on Gillray, his life, and his work.

...even in Europe, Goethe was a noted fan of Gillray.

...and although his work was too ribald for the measured pages of the great Victorian comic publication Punch, chatter around the Punch staff often turned to the genius of Gillray...

[SLIDE] Add*** Shakespeare and the Pigmies, Punch 30 January 1864

Ridicule of bungled Shakespeare tercentenary - pigmies climbing on statue. Henry Silver, a Punch writer, noted in his diary that Gillray would have done the same topic 'as little dogs pissing against the statue'

This example demonstrates how his reputation often tinged with a note of caution, especially in the prudish Victorian public sphere. As John Smith wrote of Gillray in his *The Streets of London: Anecdotes of Their More Celebrated Residents* (1861):

"genuine bent of his genius [...] was too often at the expense of honour and even common honesty. He would by his publications either divulge family secrets which ought to have been ever at rest, or expect favours for the plates which he destroyed. This talent, by which he made many worthy persons so uneasy, was inimitable; and his works, though time may destroy every point of their sting, will remain specimens of a rare power, both for character and composition"

[SLIDE] - Gillray/Bell

It is this powerful handling of character and composition, revered to this day by the likes of Steve Bell and Martin Rowson, which I want to draw out for the remainder of this talk...

'Sphere, is a Figure bounded by a Convex surface; it is the most perfect of all forms; its Properties are generated from its Centre; and it possesses a larger Area than any other Figure.'

'A Plane, is a perfectly even & regular Surface, it is the most Simple of all Figures ; it has neither the Properties of Length or of Breadth ; and when applied ever so closely to a Sphere, can only touch its Superficies, without being able to enter it'

All sorts of ideas of sexuality and social power wrapped up here - the fashionable Hobart? or the Prime Minister Pitt?

...in particular look at how Gillray uses bodily excess in the prints displayed at the present

exhibition, to explore liberty through four central themes of his work:

- **familiarity of personality** (breeds contempt...) / contradiction of personality.
- injustice of war/**ambiguous loyalism**
- **unnatural fashions** (women) - important topic. From social satires which proliferated and more important than historians have realised...
- **theatricality** - absurd freedom to express AND absurd deference

PRINTS

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

All of these ideas converge in one famous print, his *The King of Brobdignag and Gulliver* (1804).

Intertextuality. Popular mode of satire...

[SLIDE] - BM8286 The slough of despond;-vide-the patriots progress

Earlier satire on isolation of opposition Whig leader Charles James Fox following Whig splits of late 1792 framed by Bunyans 1678 *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Mockery of Napoleon [direct reading]

[SLIDE] - KoBaG (with quote)

Passage from Swift's *Gullivers* (1726)... "I often used to Row for my own diversion, as well as that of the Queen & her Ladies, who thought themselves well entertained with my skill & agility. Sometimes I would put up my Sail and shew my art, by steering starboard & larboard, - However, my attempts produced nothing else besides a loud laughter, which all the respect due to his Majesty from those about him could not make them contain. - This made me reflect, how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavour to do himself honour among those, who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him!!!"

> Napoleon not an equal to British monarchy - 'Neither indeed could I forbear smiling at myself, when the Queen used to place me upon her hand towards a looking-glass, by which both our persons appeared before me in full view together; and there could be nothing more ridiculous than the comparison; so that I really began to imagine myself dwindled many degrees below my usual size' [111] > Earnest speech 'produced nothing but a loud laughter' from the court > 'This made me reflect how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavour doing himself honour among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him'. [130]

> Actions laughable - 'All the mirth, for some days, was at my expense' [130]

[SLIDE] - KoBaG + BM9998 Maniac Raving's-or-Little Boney in a Strong Fit

Boney as tiny and petulant in his grievances against the English seen a year earlier - developing motif.

Back to GT...

- He is a doll > given the name 'Grildig' (meaning manikin in Brobdingnag) by Glumdalclitch [97].
- He is a coward > Queen asks Gulliver 'whether the people of my country were as great cowards as myself' [113]
- He would like to be Imperial > 'I fell upon my knees, and begged the honour of kissing her Imperial foot' [104] > 'My master' [91]... For example...

[SLIDE] - Plum Pudding

Here we have both Nap and Pitt imperialists - one of readings here certainly mocking Napoleon as just another ambitious, landed politician - betraying ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

Mockery of English Monarchy & leisured/noble society

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

Although Gulliver hardly the hero of GT, hardly the 'right' against the countries he visits are negative types, there is a sense throughout that those places he visits are there to be mocked.

When he first reaches Brobdingnag and sees these huge humanoids Gulliver remarks: 'For as human creatures are observed to be more savage and cruel in proportion to their bulk, what could I expect but to be a morsel in the mouth of the first among the enormous barbarians that should happen to seize me?' [87] - Royal Family suddenly not 'correct' size and Napoleon 'tiny' [in fact normal size...], rather they are savage and cruel giants....

[SLIDE] - KoBaG (details of faces, smiles or giants)

Later in the chapter size is equated to intellect as the King of Brobdingnag is mocked for his logic which is 'expressed in the most plain and simple terms' [144]. George III was, of course, often mocked by radicals for being simple, not least a little on the mad side. He was also considered ignorant of the will of his people, proclaiming fasts which were ignored, campaigns against vice which criminalised the already oppressed poor... For example...

[SLIDE] - BM10571 "The Friend of the people", & his petty-new-tax-gatherer, paying John Bull a visit.

Fox acting on King's wishes (at this point Leader of the Commons in the so called Ministry of All Talents).. increase taxation accompanied by scaremongering - greater good rhetoric > whilst at the same time wealthy spared tax on home brewing...

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

This comes out again later in the Brobdingnag chapter of GT where having gained his liberty and found his way (via a curious eagle) to a boat home the sailors who rescue Gulliver ask 'whether the King or Queen of that country were thick of hearing' [158]. Due to their comparative sizes Gulliver had shouted on Brobdingnag to make himself heard, and was continuing to do so as a matter of habit (he had been there for 2 years). However there is of course a social commentary here on the monarch who does not 'hear' his people...

Size also plays itself out in GT through an exploration of perceiving the reality of giants from a vantage point of miniature. On mother of family who initially took Gulliver in - 'I must confess no object ever disgusted me so much as the sight of her monstrous breast', incomparable to anything he has before witnessed

[SLIDE] - KoBaG + close up on princesses

>> link here directly to the royal princesses, one of whose ample bosom leans over the tank Napoleon is in....

Gulliver then goes on to 'reflect upon the fair skins of our English ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own size, and their defects not to be seen but through a magnifying glass, where we find by experiment that the smoothest and whitest skins look rough and coarse, and ill coloured'...

[SLIDE] - Row, *Mending*

Reminder of Rowlandson's *Mending a Face*... superficiality of ladies, fashion, and wealth, lack of natural beauty... Interestingly, reversal of Jonathan Swift's poem A Beautiful Young Nymph going to Bed (1734):

Returning at the Midnight Hour;
 Four Stories climbing to her Bow'r;
 Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair,
 Takes off her artificial Hair:
 Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,
 She wipes it clean, and lays it by.
 Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hyde,
 Stuck on with Art on either Side,
 Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,
 Then in a Play-Book smoothly lays 'em.

Now dextrously her Plumpers 5 draws,
That serve to fill her hollow Jaws.
Untwists a Wire; and from her Gums
A Set of Teeth completely comes.

... This idea of prosthetic manliness and femininity repeated motif of Georgian satire... For example...

[SLIDE] - BM8754 Parasols, for 1795 + BM11612 Les Invisibles.

Earlier... Fashion. Impracticality. Looks like a plant/furniture.; > mockery of the promenade. And the dress of the times.

Later... The high collars, frills, audacious hats... copy of French print, but designed to reinforce point that high society divorced from reality of European conflict - for them France is a la mode, France is a la mode irrespective of conflict with them...

[SLIDE] - BM9577 The man of feeling, in search of indispensables; -a scene in the little French milliners + Fash Mama

Inelegance... pun on 'feeling' (here the Prince of Orange **feeling up** ladies ankles) - satire on fashion (place of purse due to tight dresses) and lack of elegance of European leaders (the allies England were fighting for...)

Unnatural... Fashionable mama is a critique of high society - what do they value? function or beauty? motherliness or the fashionable rout? of these mamas much better than spinsters leading apes in hell?

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

Intertextual mockery of society continues if we consider when Gulliver is brought to the royal court by his master 'for the diversion of the Queen and her ladies' [103] > mockery of Napoleon as a plaything of royal families. HOWEVER also mocking royal courts for needing playthings, diversions, follies, fripperies - esp in 1804. It is not so far fetched that at a time of war, at a time of acute panic the royal family are likely to be diverting themselves with passing trends and fads such as that depicted by Gillray.... For example...

[SLIDE] - BM7980 Siege of Blenheim + BM8347 Flannel-armour; -female-patriotism

Pun here on 'Gunning' scandal... Society intrigue and marriage market > satire on disconnection of fashionable society from the reality of war and preoccupation with scandal Flannel garments sent by ladies to the troops in Flanders. And a depot was formed in Soho Square for storing these and similar badly needed comforts. **Yet...** ridicule of high society to think only in terms of fashion and mode..

[SLIDE] - KoBaG (inset of James Cecil, 1st Marquess of Salisbury, Lord Chamberlain of the Household)

Gulliver has chairs made which are strung using the Queens hair and presented them to the Queen as a gift > 'The Queen would have made me sit upon one of these chairs, but I absolutely refused to obey her, protesting I would rather die a thousand deaths than place a dishonourable part of my body on those precious hairs that once adorned the Majesty's head' [132]. Mockery here of pretension, deference, obsequiousness in 'liberal' British society > the court Gillray draws being of course, an example of just that.... Elsewhere, example...

[SLIDE] Tentada via est qua me quoque possim tollere humo - Virgil, Geor:

One of Gillray's last professional works... BRILLIANT - Grenville former PM in Ministry of All-Talents. Supported Catholic Emancipation in 1801, and resigned due to George III's hostility to the measure. Here, for Gillray, he is Catholic, and on becoming Chancellor of Oxford University Gillray images a fantastical vision of Oxford without liberty... obsequious, deferential, respectful of rank > **quite the opposite of the liberty Gillray knew or indeed believed in...**

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

This sort of satire on the British state plays out most memorably in GT during an extended passage where Gulliver details the genius of British establishments (lords, commons, justice, finance, gambling) and the King of Brobdingnag takes them apart > Gulliver is here reduced as a silly little man - he is blinded by nationalism to the ills of his country, and hence his tales of greatness of the British constitution are amusing, absurd, and laughable to the King of Brobdingnag [134-140]

Gulliver disappointed that King ridiculed GB, however > 'great allowances should be given to a King who lives wholly secluded from the rest of the world, and must therefore be altogether unacquainted with the manners and customs that most prevail in other nations; the want of which knowledge will ever produce many prejudices, and a certain narrowness of thinking, from which we and the politer countries of Europe are wholly exempted'

Now. Pause... - French politics et al laughable to George III - HOWEVER Gulliver represents England in GT and France in the Gillray print. None of this then works. The English establishments Swift mocks do not function satirically when projected through Gulliver-cum-Napoleon. So what is Gillray getting at?

Mockery of the situation (inability to communicate - lack of peace)

[SLIDE] - BM9960 The first kiss this ten years! - or - the meeting of Britannia & Citizen François.

War... with France ceased March 1802 signing Treaty of Amiens.

Peace... Britannia as a large ovoid female getting reacquainted with lean French military officer - caution, suspicion, circumspect BUT jovial - **traditional new year print signalling future prospects...** BUT of course the peace would not last long....

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

Thus another reading of KoBaG through intertextual references in GT sees the print, as with the Brobdingnag chapter in Swift's novel, concerned with a poverty of communication causing a unwarranted resumption of hostilities. 'We were wholly unintelligible to each other' [90] Gulliver observes on first discovering the citizens of Borbdingnag - because of both the language and size differences involved. When in the royal court Gulliver observes 'The Queen [...] was however surprised at so much wit and good sense in so diminutive an animal' [105] > see here the curious gazes of the King and Queen towards Gulliver-cum-Napoleon. 'After much debate they [King's great scholars] concluded unanimously that I was only *relplum scalcath*, which is interpreted literally, *lusus naturae*', otherwise a freak of nature [107]. Misunderstanding biologically in GT becomes misunderstanding politically to Gillray > Napoleon not a freak of nature but a logical outcome of radical politics AND British failure to understand him... Satire on all belligerents earlier in...

[SLIDE] - BM9972 Physical Aid,-or-Britannia recover'd from a trance;-also, the patriotic courage of Sherry Andrew: & a peep thro' the Fog.

Breakdown of peace March 1803... signalled by proclamation from the King to defend ports. Govt (lead by Addington) denied threat, stating French merely amassing troops for colonial service. Here all sides ridiculed - pacifists, war mongerers, spirit of Britannia, and Napoleon (who is literally a 'nobody').

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

Yet, Francophilia was still present in London post-peace which ties in nicely with a passage in GT - 'I was the favourite of a great King and Queen, and the delight of the whole court, but it was upon such a foot as ill became the dignity of human kind' [148]. This 'ill foot' is seen here in Gillray's print - through the fashion for curiosity, the undue loyalist belittlement. The printseller S W Fores, for example, had a guillotine installed in his Piccadilly premises. The purpose? To amuse his customers and draw curious crowds.

Celebration of Napoleon?

We might even suggest that the print celebrates Napoleon. As stated Gulliver hardly the hero of GT, but his desire to return to old England, to be once more at liberty makes him the readers favourite. Is Napoleon here then a favourite? Merely seeking liberty against the backdrop of an alliance of old powers trying to prevent him doing as he pleases? He is certainly demystified in Gillray's design, just another comics character... See for example

[SLIDE] - BM10244 Britannia between death and the doctor's.

Subtitled... 'Death may decide when doctors disagree' - traditional joke seen writing of Samuel

Johnson and James Boswell, and satires from Gillray to Punch --- Tories/Whigs alike mocked here for squabbling whilst national security on the line > yet Nap, despite being death, made less threatening by virtue of being part of the this absurd comedy of characters and bodies - a point argued at length by the historian Stuart Semmel, fitting in with what he calls the cult of 'anti-anti'Napoleonism' at this time...

Concluding remarks

[SLIDE] - KoBaG

Hopefully reading and rereading KoBaG through Gullivers Travels demonstrated the brilliance, complexity, and challenge of Gillray.

I think KoBaG an important example of his attitude to 'Liberty'... And in particular his AMBIGUOUS LOYALISM.

For me... Gillray here in essence mocking the direct reading of the print. Mocking those who only see the obvious and ignore the literary depth of Swift's GT beyond this famous scene. In sum Gillray uses a scene loaded with assumptions regarding bodily excess to mock the very loyalists who suggested the satire to him.... And this ambiguity is evident throughout his work.

What I want to leave you with then.. is a few seeds of doubt about some of Gillray's most outwardly obvious satires. And when walking around this exhibition I want you to consider whether, virtue of their detachment from reality (especially use of extreme bodies in those spaces), they are in fact strikingly ambiguous:

[SLIDE] - BM9260 Destruction of the French Colossus

...an exaltation (ultimately without warrant) of Battle of the Nile. French style liberty in sum ridiculed. **BUT** so bombastic. **SO** extreme. There is not merely celebration here but humour.

[SLIDE] - BM9522 Tha apples and the horse-turds; -or-Buonaparte among the golden pippins

... to some extent this fits in with the mockery of Napoleon for claiming he is on same level as European kings by sending a letter offering peace to George III > he is a horse turd, they are golden apples... **HOWEVER** outside of this direct reading, surely kings also mocked here for presumption of permanence, their wasteful grandeur and pursuit of fame.

[SLIDE] - BM7892 The Hopes of the Party, prior to July 14th- "From such wicked Crown & Anchor-dreams, good Lord deliver us."

Here... the King, Queen, and Pitt murdered by Foxite Whigs celebrating FrRev. They are outside the Crown & Anchor, a noted radical public house in London. This is then a loyalist vision of an English revolution... **But since when did** bodies hang from the streets of London? Is Gillray not saying this loyalist vision is hysterical?

[SLIDE] - BM8318 Dumourier dining in state at St James's, on the 15th of May, 1793.

By 1793 Crown and Anchor holding alternative dinners of state... Gillray images General Charles François Dumouriez, a skeletal embodiment of French revolution, being invited to one such dinner. As a popular French military leader (until his defection and fleeing Revolutionary France) he name was widely known in the Georgian press, and a picture of him had been constructed in the English popular mindset. Gillray draws on that pictures, **BUT** construction of extreme body here a critique of over-zealous loyalist rhetoric? Although terribly anachronistic to say so, the irony should not be lost on us that by 1804 Dumouriez was on an English pension advising the British government against Napoleon...

I am sure to Gillray, reflecting upon his charge to produce satires supportive of King and country, that irony would not have been lost on him. Neither would the fact that he had throughout his career been ridiculing the ridiculous loyalist standard and rhetoric of liberty all along...

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