# *Introduction*

For Samuel Johnson a tavern was a space in which thoughts, ideas, and opinions, stimulated by wine and urged on by affectionate company, could be given free rein. "As soon as I enter the door of a tavern," John Hawkins recorded Johnson saying, "I experience an oblivion of care and a freedom from solicitude … wine there exhilarates my spirits, and prompts me to free conversation and an interchange of discourse with those who I most love."[1] Taverns, in this account, were secure spaces where freedom of expression was assured, and ideas could be tested out without fear of repercussion. By the 1790s it was no longer possible to make the same claims. "Every tavern and coffeehouse has been haunted," John Thelwall wrote. "My hours of conviviality have been attended by spies and sycophants … and my confidential friends stretched on the rack of interrogatory, in order to extort from them the conversation which in the unsuspecting hours of social hilarity may have been uttered at my own table."[2] For Thelwall, taverns *should* offer the freedoms Johnson had enjoyed, but their capacity for providing security had been destroyed by a culture of surveillance in which individual liberties had been sacrificed to the suspicions of a paranoid government. No longer was it possible to enjoy the freedoms taverns were intended to provide.

As Johnson's comments indicate, the tavern had been one of the central institutions of the eighteenth-century public sphere. In taverns men met to engage in many of the cerebral activities associated with Enlightenment sociability: they discussed literature, politics, art, and science; they engaged in battles of wit and improving conversation. But Johnson suggests that taverns were also sites of bodily pleasure where spirits could be exhilarated by wine, and where patrons indulged in drinking, eating, and laughter. Thelwall also understood that taverns should be spaces not just of conversation but also of "conviviality" and "social hilarity," and it is this capacity for providing convivial pleasure as much as political conversation that has been destroyed by the culture of suspicion. Both sets of comments point toward the connection between improving conversation and pleasure. It is this double life of the tavern, a domain of both polite sociability and physical desire, that this book seeks to explore, and it does so by focusing primarily on the final

decades of the eighteenth century, a period in which assumptions about the improving capacities of Enlightenment conversation came into conflict with the unrestrained enthusiasm of radical politics. As institutions that provide venues for both political discussion and convivial pleasure, taverns index, and in a historically concrete way embody, the period's negotiations of the cerebral and the corporal, seriousness and pleasure, at a time when a dominant belief in the importance of polite rationality was being challenged by ideas now associated with the emerging Romantic movement.

For some time now, we have understood that the Addisonian ideal of the coffeehouse – a place of polite sociability in which distinctions of rank were suspended, and rational-critical debate, fueled by coffee, could help shape political and artistic agendas – was nothing more than a fantasy. Recent work has recognized that eighteenth-century coffeehouses, which often sold alcohol as well as coffee, were places of "boorish excesses, drink, and foul language," and that "gallons and gallons of port and punch and disorder and foul language … accompanied [eighteenth-century clubs] as the evening wore on."[3] But while it may never have been historically instantiated in quite the way Addison describes, this does not mean we should dismiss Addison's account of polite coffeehouse conversation, upon which accounts of eighteenth-century public life by Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett have relied.[4] Indeed Addison's fantasy of the ideal coffeehouse finds echoes in Johnson's testimony to the pleasures of tavern conversation, suggesting Addisonian coffeehouse ideals were transferable beyond the coffeehouses with which they have become primarily associated, to influence expectations of taverns too. Thelwall's frustration with taverns and coffeehouses, meanwhile, lies in their inability to live up to Addison's ideal. As David Fallon has pointed out, the value of Addison's account of the coffeehouse, and of Habermas's account of the public sphere that was partly derived from it, lies within the "uneasy coexistence of an idealised conceptualisation alongside a more problematic and varied concrete historical existence."[5] My focus on the tavern, then, is not intended to challenge the importance of the coffeehouse idea; rather it is intended to register the fact that in the second half of the eighteenth century new models for polite sociability were being developed, which adapted and transformed Addison's influential writings into new ways of understanding man as a sociable animal. The realities of convivial practice – the expectation for boorish excess, drink, and foul language, or "social hilarity," as Thelwall calls it – began to influence the ideal of mutually rewarding discourse, and the possibilities of sociability.

These changes to masculine metropolitan sociability were not, however, a neatly linear development, but should be seen in relation to other developments in urban life. The final decades of the eighteenth century witnessed an explosion of public entertainments, new forms of gathering, and new venues for their

accommodation in the metropolis. Many of these provided opportunities for men and women to interact in new ways, and to participate in a metropolitan culture that was rapidly commercializing. Gillian Russell has done much to refine our understanding of the forms of fashionable sociability in the second half of the eighteenth century, and of the way in which a newly commercialized culture enabled the development of "a highly theatricalized and thoroughly feminized arena of social interaction, identified with, but not the sole preserve of, the female aristocracy and upper gentry."[6] The tavern existed in an uneasy relationship to these novel forms of sociability. With their much longer pedigree, dating back at least to Roman times, taverns were manifestly not one of the new diversions that appeared daily in the metropolis, and yet they nevertheless responded to the same social pressures that produced the proliferating distractions of London. From the 1760s onwards taverns were reconfigured in order to attract the fashionable "ton," while still catering to the all-male gatherings upon which their existence largely depended. Taverns are thus to be seen as bridging what has been regarded as a divide in sociability, between a feminized "fashionable sociability" of the Town on the one hand, and the masculine commercialized politics of clubs and coffeehouses on the other. Taverns simultaneously responded and gave shape to changes in metropolitan sociability, making particularly apparent how the commercialization of culture adapted older forms and made them new.

What I am describing is a crucial second phase in the development of ideas about the public sphere, one in which models of sociability associated with Addisonian coffeehouse conversation had given way to an idea about masculine physical gathering that drew on fashionable sociability to produce a much more ludic and celebratory form of gathering organized around rituals of drinking, singing, and toasting – a set of practices we might think of as belonging to a *convivial* public sphere. At issue are all the familiar concerns that have dominated debates about Habermas's conception of "private people coming together to form a public" in the last several decades: its bourgeois nature, the exclusion of women and the plebeian classes, its supposedly consensual character, the relationship of orality to print culture, but added to these are other concerns that are particular to conviviality.[7] An emphasis on humor, pleasure, and mutuality – the three pillars of conviviality – meant that the tavern's influence over political discourse could at times be more indirect, or mediated through its commitments to enjoyment. In the bourgeois public sphere a continuity between physical gathering and print production is frequently assumed, but in the convivial public sphere gaps begin to appear in the transition from spontaneous effusions to the permanence of print media, and the relationship between physical communities and imagined communities becomes much more contested. Different genres that are peculiar to the convivial public sphere, such as drinking songs, toasts, and speeches, take center

stage, and these can tell us a great deal about the way political and literary cultures were conceived, while also revealing new aspects of more familiar genres that engage with them. My discussion of the tavern thus participates in an ongoing conversation about the nature of the public sphere in a period marked by democratic revolution: a discussion that takes into account the recent insights of scholars who have expanded the purview of sociability.

As recently as 2000, it was possible to imagine the "Romantic Tavern" as an oxymoron. In his impressively nuanced romp through great pub scenes in canonical literature, from Chaucer to Martin Amis, Steven Earnshaw stumbles when faced with the Romantic period. "Where did the Romantics drink?" he wonders. Pointing to the celebrations of conviviality in Boswell, Fielding, and Goldsmith earlier in the eighteenth century, and the huge variety of hostelries that litter the pages of Dickens's novels, Earnshaw points out the remarkable paucity of pub scenes in literature of the Romantic period. It's not that the Romantics didn't drink, it is clear, as stories from the Immortal Dinner that took place at Benjamin Haydon's in December 1817 attest. In a letter to his brothers, Keats noted that he kept "two glasses at work in a knowing way," while according to Haydon, Charles Lamb got "exceedingly merry and exquisitely witty," embarrassing Wordsworth's superior at the stamp office, John Kingston, by singing nursery rhymes whenever Kingston tried to talk.[8] Lamb is involved also in another of the period's more famous drinking scenes – the gatherings at the Salutation and Cat on Newgate Street, where he and Coleridge met in the mid-1790s, as discussed recently by Felicity James.[9] In his *Confessions of an Opium Eater* De Quincey make clear that he was addicted to wine as well as opium. But, Earnshaw argues, "When we view the later part of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth, we find that the literature of this period has little to offer us in terms of substantial representations of drinking places."[10]

Earnshaw hypothesizes that the occlusion of pubs in the period has to do with the class politics of drinking. In discussions of Wordsworth's *The Waggoner* and several texts by George Crabbe, Earnshaw demonstrates that when drinking establishments appear in the works of the Romantics, it is usually the alehouse that is invoked, summoned up in order to be dismissed as the sphere of the lower orders, so that to "incorporate [alehouses] into serious literature and treat them seriously is a breach of literary taste."[11] When, on the other hand, taverns are invoked, they display a nostalgia for an old England that has gone. Earnshaw quotes from Leigh Hunt's "Pleasant Memories Connected with Various Parts of the Metropolis" in which Hunt associates the tavern with Falstaff's revels:

> But who knows not Eastcheap and the Boar's-head? Have we not all been there time out of mind? And is it not a more real as well as notorious thing to

> us than the London tavern, or the Crown and Anchor, or the Hummums, or White's, or What's-his-name's, or any other of your contemporary and fleeting taps?[12]

In Hunt's tour of the literary haunts of London the tavern becomes a way of measuring England's depleted present against the riches of its Elizabethan past. For John Keats too, according to Earnshaw, drinking is "entirely abstracted into an asocial lyricism" and becomes coupled with classical antiquity or, in the case of "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern," associated with the early modern period.[13]

Based on the evidence of canonical Romanticism it is hard to argue with Earnshaw's conclusions: there are not many scenes equivalent to those in Fielding or Dickens in the male Romantic poets, and yet in the approximately twenty years since Earnshaw's study was published a robust counter-narrative has developed from within Romantic-period studies itself. Beginning perhaps with Jeffrey Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (1998) and signaled most obviously by the publication of two collections of essays, Clara Tuite and Gillian Russell's *Romantic Sociability* (2002) and Kevin Gilmartin's *Sociable Places* (2017), scholars now recognize that far from being erased from Romantic-period works, sociability in its myriad forms was constitutive of the period. What is notable, however, is that our new narratives of the period have emerged particularly out of studies which take a broader approach to what constitutes "literature" and what might be read as "texts"; studies, that is, that understand the literary, not as a static set of prescribed texts, but as a dynamic process that is historically constituted and contingent upon developments in a much wider series of cultural practices, including, most notably, practices in which women participated. What, we might ask, would Earnshaw's chapter look like if it were written now?

This study provides some answers to that question by looking anew at the institutions of the masculine associational world, with an expanded sense of their functions. My particular interest is in what tavern cultures can teach us about modes of literary production and more familiar forms of writing such as lyric poetry and the novel, but these literary and aesthetic considerations interact so extensively with other facets of political and cultural life that my approach has been to view literary genres (forms of written creative expression) as part of a social network that includes persons, places, objects, and ideas. By structuring my study around the tavern, I mean to emphasize that my object of study is the way that literature interacts with other social forms and to demonstrate that buildings – mechanisms for arranging bodies, objects, and ideas in space – can provide access to different configurations of those forms.

Take, for instance, the Shakespeare's Head Tavern in Covent Garden. This was a tavern that was well known in the eighteenth century for its literary associations,

largely because of its proximity to the Covent Garden Theatre, to which it was attached. The tavern originated in a large seventeenth-century house on lands owned by the Duke of Bedford, which occupied the northeast corner of the Covent Garden piazza and had a garden that extended north towards Hart Street (see Fig. 1). In 1731 the whole of the site was let to John Rich, by which point the house had been divided into two, with the southern part becoming the Bedford Coffee House in 1726, the northern part becoming the Shakespeare's Head Tavern, probably in around 1736, and the adjacent gardens providing the location for Rich's theater, which opened in 1732.[14]

Among the central functions of the Shakespeare's Head Tavern was to provide food and drink to theatergoing patrons, but it quickly gained a reputation for dissipation. In the late 1740s a waiter called Jack Harris, who worked at the tavern, assembled a list of prostitutes who worked in the vicinity, providing details of their appearance, where they could be found, and recording notable features of their talents and trade. In the 1750s these lists, which originally existed in manuscript for Harris's use, began to be published and regularly updated as the notorious *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies.*[15]

Further evidence of the tavern's association with the sex trade can be found in James Boswell's journals, where we read that in May, 1762 Boswell took the "sensible, quite well-behaved" Miss Watts to the Shakespeare's Head, where he had been shown into a "handsom room, and had a bottle of choice Sherry."[16] After two hours of conversation, Boswell informed Miss Watts that he had no money to give her, so she made her excuses and left. Boswell then "sallied forth to the Piazzas in a rich flow of animal spirits, and burning with fierce desire," returning a few minutes later with two "very pretty girls" who he had met in the Covent Garden Piazza and who were less particular about his impecuniosity. He was once again shown into a good room, provided with a bottle of sherry, and proceeded to "solace [his] existence with them one after the other, according to their Seniority."[17]

In the 1780s the same tavern once again leaves a trace in the historical record, but for quite a different reason. At the time of the 1784 Westminster election, supporters of Charles James Fox regularly met at the Shakespeare's Head to campaign for Fox's election, and after his victory the tavern continued to be used as a meeting place for the Whig Club until the latter grew too large and had to move its meetings to more substantial premises. The tavern, however, continued to have connections to the Foxite Whigs and at the time of the 1790 Westminster election, letters from Fox's supporters, urging electors to vote and addressed from the tavern, appeared in the newspapers.[18] The following year when a large meeting in support of the French Revolution was held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, *The Times* reported

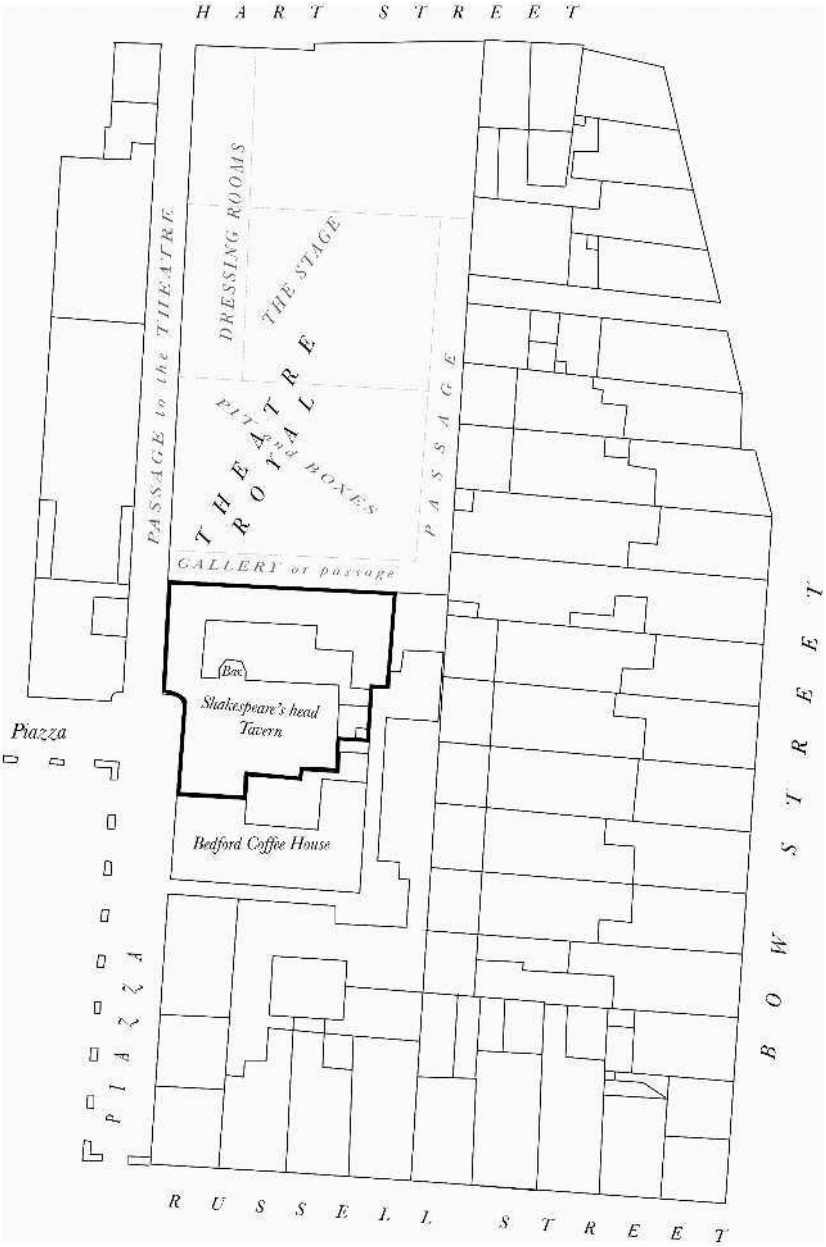


Figure 1 Site plan of the northeast corner of the great piazza of Covent Garden. Based on a plan from the Woburn Abbey Collection held at the London Metropolitan Archive, E/BER/CG/E/5/1/008.

(with admittedly questionable veracity) that John Horne Tooke, the leader of the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI) did not attend the dinner, because he was dining at the Shakespeare (as it was now often known) with James Boswell, Thomas Paine, William Seward, and Robert Merry (July 16, 1791).[19]

This alignment of the theater, prostitution, and elite politics should come as no surprise. Accounts of the theater have frequently acknowledged the association between the public display of female bodies on the stage and the sex trade that was ubiquitous in the areas surrounding the patent theaters, and it has long been recognized that theaters accommodated a broad spectrum of patrons, from artisans and shopkeepers to elegant members of the *beau monde*, with the latter's close ties to the elite ruling class. The rakish behaviors of the Foxite Whigs, meanwhile have been well documented; their excesses of drink, gambling, and sex provide countless anecdotes that are regularly circulated in both scholarly monographs and popular histories of the eighteenth century. But while these associations have been acknowledged, the tavern brings them together materially and lends them a clarity, focus, and vividness of detail that few other institutions could achieve. Taverns have the capacity to reveal connections between aspects of metropolitan behavior that are more often treated separately, forcing us to confront new and unexpected constellations of social life, which in turn find expression in literary form.

As I will explore in greater detail in the first two chapters, other taverns share the Shakespeare's capacity for making visible alternative arrangements of the relationship between literature, conviviality, and politics. As a location in which debates about the French Revolution took place and in which the East India Company entertained visiting dignitaries, the London Tavern reveals connections between revolutionary politics, imperialism, and commerce. The Crown and Anchor, meanwhile, as a lecture hall where Hazlitt and Coleridge delivered talks on Shakespeare, a concert venue for performances of symphonic music and convivial song, and as a meeting place for both the elite of Fox's Whig party and members of the largely plebeian London Corresponding Society (LCS), brings to light new intersections between literature, music, and radicalism.

While one could reasonably argue that any physical location can bring into focus connections that we might not otherwise detect, there is something distinctive about the kinds of links that taverns challenge us to confront. Taverns were designed to facilitate meetings, so they are explicitly concerned with forging connections. As material mechanisms for making these connections possible, they can reveal ideas about what it meant to meet, and how evolving notions of individualism interacted with long-standing views about the social embeddedness of identity, thereby pointing us towards a clearer understanding of the significance of community in the period. Moreover the close association of the tavern with

literary culture means that taverns can reveal ideas about shared experience and shared identity that were considered intrinsic to both social gathering and literary community. Taverns are thus uniquely placed to reveal relations between literature and politics.

## What is a Tavern?

In order to demonstrate this better I will need to state more precisely what is meant by the word "tavern," which, in the early eighteenth century, was not a generic word for an old pub, as we tend to use it today, but a much more legally precise term used to refer to a public house that sold wine and that, from both a legislative and social perspective, was quite distinct from an alehouse or an inn. In this sense, I am arguing for a very different understanding of the tavern than that proffered by Beat Kümin and B. Ann Tlusty's *The World of the Tavern*, which takes a more capacious approach to the term. For Kümin and Tlusty, "tavern" is a word that facilitates comparisons between different European contexts and whose meaning includes inns, ale-, beer-, brandy-, and gin houses. My purview is more precise. It is primarily the metropolitan tavern of late eighteenth-century Britain that concerns me here. Nevertheless, Kümin and Tlusty's emphasis on the "multifunctionality of public houses and their importance as social centers" and on the need for a "heterogenous and multidimensional" approach to the topic helpfully delineates how even the study of more localized contexts demands a flexibility that can take into account diverse frameworks for understanding tavern culture.[20]

In the early modern period a strict hierarchy existed between inns, taverns, and alehouses. Inns were the most respectable, associated predominantly with travel, and provided lodging, food, and drinks for guests as well as stabling and refreshment for horses. Their image of relative propriety develops alongside the increasing respectability of mercantilism and alongside the importance of the circulation of people, goods, and ideas to England's cultural identity. Taverns, which sold wine, were in the middle of the triumvirate, with alehouses a source of constant threat to the social order at the bottom.

From the Licensing Act of 1552 onward, if a law-abiding person wanted to sell ale or beer (the difference between these being the inclusion of hops in beer, which made it easier to preserve and transport), they were required to go to their local justice of the peace to acquire a license.[21] The history of alehouse licensing is a densely complicated affair that has been discussed at length, most notably by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in their classic work of social history *The History of Liquor Licensing in England*.[22] Tavern licensing was not subject to the same persistent scrutiny as alehouse licensing, largely because while alehouses were frequently considered a threat, wine – a much more expensive commodity

imported largely from mainland Europe – was consumed primarily by wealthier people, who were understood to be more capable of self-policing.

As long as records had existed, dating back at least as far as the twelfth century, the wine trade in England had been controlled by the Worshipful Company of Vintners, one of the twelve great livery companies that exerted immense power in the medieval economy. The Vintner's Company were granted a royal charter in 1364, granting it a monopoly over importing wine from Gascony, which ultimately enabled it to dominate the medieval wine trade, granting advantages including the right for members of the company to sell wine without a license. These privileges were curtailed in the early modern period, but as late as 2006 members of the Vintner's Company had the right to sell wine in certain areas such as in the City of London. Alongside these ancient practices, other forms of licensing developed. An act for licensing retailers of wine (known as "vintners") was passed in 1553, which specified the prices at which wine was to be sold, and decreed that only towns, not villages could have taverns, with licensees to be appointed by town officers. The act listed twenty-two towns that were permitted more than two taverns, specifying that London could have forty – even though it already had over 300.[23] Despite considerable confusion these laws remained unchanged until 1623, when an act was passed making it illegal for anyone to profit from issuing licenses except the Crown, effectively centralizing tavern licensing, and creating a situation that was quite different from the practice of applying to local magistrates for a license to sell ale. The passing of laws, however, can only tell us so much, and a great deal depends on their implementation. My interest is less in legal frameworks than in their social and cultural effects.

By the eighteenth century the clear distinctions between inns, taverns, and alehouses that had operated in the early modern period were beginning to erode, and it would become increasingly common for all three, as well as coffeehouses, to serve a wide variety of drinks, including beer, wine, coffee, and punch; gradually, licensing laws adapted to retailing practices. Nevertheless, distinctions between the *reputation* (i.e. the assumptions engendered in representations) of taverns and alehouses remain broadly intact throughout the eighteenth century.[24] In his *Observations and Facts Relative to Licensed Ale-houses* (1794), Patrick Colquhoun categorizes the public houses in London and its environs (of which he calculates there are 6,000) in order of importance, in ways that continue to echo early modern hierarchies. It ranges from "Large Inns for the reception of travellers, coaches and wagons &c," at the top of the list, to "Large houses of entertainment and taverns, having taps of their own" as the second item, down to "A second class of ale-houses, drawing from 10–14 butts of beer per month" at the bottom.[25] Though the legal distinctions between these different institutions may have begun to blur, their social meanings remain stubbornly persistent. In Robert Bage's *Man*