By the end of the Falklands War, as we saw in the previous chapter, Margaret Thatcher had not only manufactured a vision of the nation that perfectly matched the Conservative Party's political agenda but, by taking on a role comprising part warrior queen, part Winston Churchill and part mother of the people, had put herself in an almost unassailable position. Challenges to the Thatcherite interpretation of the Falklands War were not likely to have much success, therefore, without a radical reassessment of Thatcher’s dual function as maker and hero of the Falklands myth. In this chapter I will look at three works – Don Shaw and Colin Bucksey’s television play, The Falklands Factor (broadcast on BBC 1 in 1983), Steven Berkoff’s stage play, Sink the Belgrano! (performed in 1986 and published in 1987), and Steve Bell’s cartoon strip, If... (published in the Guardian, April–June 1982 and in book form in 1982 and 1983) – that have taken on this daunting task. Although their revisionist views of Thatcher are remarkably similar in broad outline, in that they all locate a deceitful and self-interested politician in the space previously occupied by an honourable and inspirational national leader, each work approaches its subject from a very different direction.

At one extreme is Shaw’s television play which stands well back from the events of 1982 and views Thatcher from the perspective provided by Samuel Johnson’s experience of and thoughts about the immediate and broader issues at stake in the
Falklands crisis of 1770–1. At the other is Berkoff’s agitprop stage play which, in a thinly fictionalized account of the political events leading up to the sinking of the Argentinian cruiser *The General Belgrano*, confronts Thatcher head on by substituting a grotesque and deliberately offensive caricature for the almost regal figure familiar to the British public during the Falklands War.

The ground occupied by Bell’s cartoon strips lies somewhere between these two extremes. Although they appeared on a daily basis in the *Guardian* while the Falklands War was in progress, and therefore reflect their author’s spontaneous reaction to unfolding political and military events, the *If...* cartoons manage to maintain a greater detachment from their subject matter than does *Sink the Belgrano!* This detachment derives from the repeated shifts in perspective that Bell achieves by blending real and fictional characters and by moving back and forth between good-humoured comedy and more savage satire. No one approach is definitive. Rather, the power of the three works is a combined one because, by coming at Thatcher from a variety of angles, they are able to trim down the almost iconic status she enjoyed during the Falklands War to more fallible human or, in Berkoff’s case, subhuman proportions.

**THE FALKLAND, FACTOR: THATCHER FROM A JOHNSONIAN PERSPECTIVE**

*The Falklands Factor*, which was broadcast in April of 1983, is on the face of it a piece of literary archaeology inspired by the current interest in all things Falklands. The general subject of the play is the crisis experienced by the Ministry of Lord North following the expulsion of the small British garrison from Fort Egmont in the Falkland Islands by a Spanish fleet in 1770. More specifically, it deals with the ways in which Samuel Johnson responded to North’s demands that he write in defence of the unpopular peace settlement achieved in 1771. Shaw’s interests, however, as should be obvious to anyone who notes the source of his title in Thatcher’s Cheltenham speech, are rather more contemporary than his immediate topic might suggest.

In choosing as the basis of his plot an incident from the eighteenth century, Shaw is not seeking disengagement from the events of 1982 but a strategic vantage point from which to examine and