

BRITISH SATIRICAL REBUSES ON THE U.S. ALLIANCE WITH FRANCE, 1778

In February 1778, after months of negotiations in Paris, France and the United States signed a treaty of alliance, news which Britain dreaded as a harbinger of defeat. Two months later, a British delegation arrived in America in a last-ditch attempt at reconciliation, which Congress rejected. In May, an English printmaking house published two rebuses satirizing the plea of the rejected mother (Britain) and the reply of the rebellious daughter (U.S.) **Full-page rebuses appear on pp. 2-3, and the solutions on p. 4.**

■ Rebus #1: Britannia to America, 6 May 1778.

Britannia to America.

My dear daughter, I cannot behold without great pain your headstrong backwardness to return to your duty in not opposing all the good I long intended for your sole happiness, and being told that you have given your hand to a base and two-faced Frenchman, I have sent you over five wise men,¹ the greatest of all my children, to put you to rights and hope you will listen to them and mind what they say to you. They have instructions to give you those things you formerly required. So be a good girl, discharge your soldiers and ships of war, and do not rebel against your mother. Rely upon me and do not trust to what that French rascal shall tell you. I see he wants to bring on an enmity to all unity between you and I, but listen not to him. All the world takes notice of his two faces. I'll send him such messages from my great cannons as shall make his heart repent and know that one good or ill turn merits another. N.B.² Let not hate take too much hold of your heart.

I am your friend & mother.

¹ The British reconciliation commission that offered autonomy within the empire but not independence. Congress rejected the proposal.

² *Nota Bene*: Note well; commonly used abbreviation of the time.

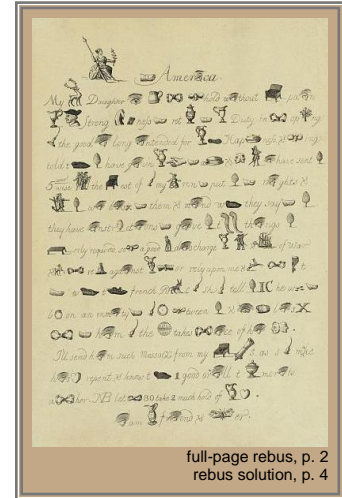
■ Rebus #2: America to Her Mistaken Mother, ca. 12 May 1778.

America to her mistaken mother.

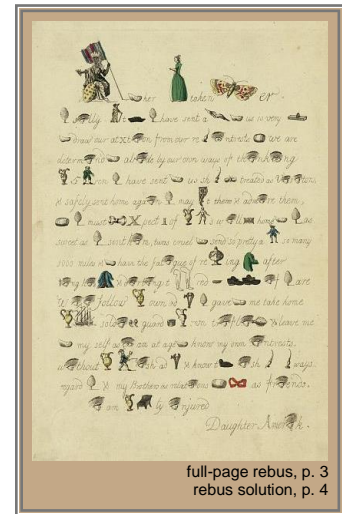
You silly old woman, that you have sent a dove to us is very plain, to draw our attention from our real interests, but we are determined to abide by our own ways of thinking. Your five children you have sent to us shall be treated as visitors and safely sent home again. You may trust them and admire them, but you must not expect one of your puppets will come home to you as sweet as you sent him. 'Twas cruel to send so pretty a man so many thousand miles and to have the fatigue of returning back after bobbing his coat and dirtying those red-heeled shoes. If you are wise, follow your own advice you gave to me. Take home your ships [and] soldiers. Guard well your own trifling³ and leave me to myself, as I am at age to know my own interests without your foolish advice, and know that I shall always regard you and my brothers as relations but not as friends.

I am your greatly injured
Daughter Amerik.

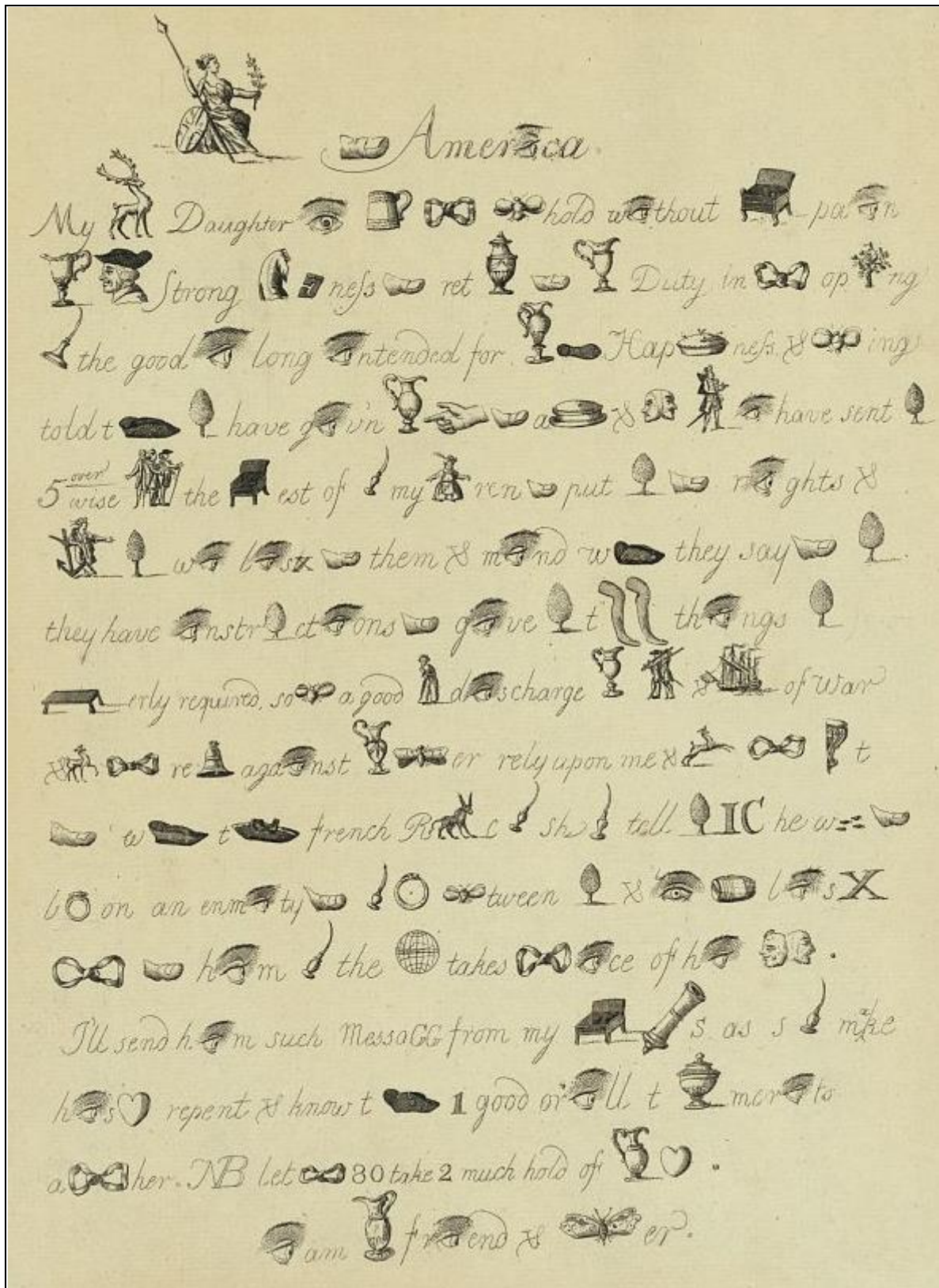
³ *trifling*: trivial matters.



full-page rebus, p. 2
rebus solution, p. 4



full-page rebus, p. 3
rebus solution, p. 4



Britannia to America, satirical rebus puzzle, engraving, Matthew & Mary Darly, London, 6 May 1778

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, British Cartoon Prints Collection, LC-DIG-ppmsca-17533.



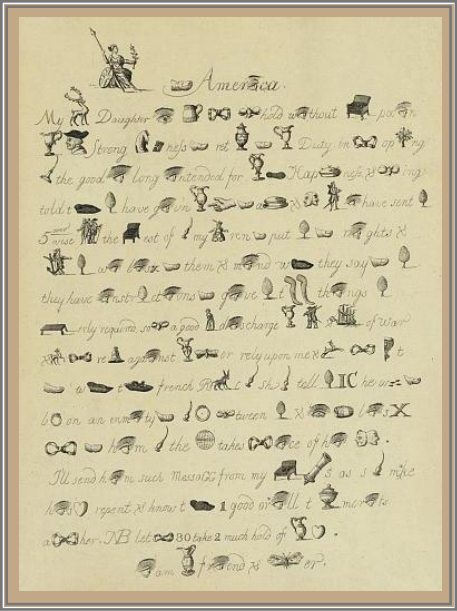
America to Her Mistaken Mother, satirical rebus puzzle, engraving, ca. 12 May 1778
 orig. publ: Matthew & Mary Darly, London, May 1778; reprint 1794, Laurie & Whittle

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, British Cartoon Prints Collection, LC-DIG-ppmsca-19160.

■ **Rebus #1: Britannia to America, 6 May 1778.**

(Britannia) (toe) Amer(eye)ca.

My (deer) Daughter (eye) (can)(knot) (bee)hold w(eye)thout (grate) pa(eye)n (ewer) (head)strong (back)-(ward)ness (toe) re(turn) (toe) (ewer) Duty in (knot) op(posy)ing (awl) the good (eye) long (eye)ntended for (ewer) (sole) Hap(pie)ness & (bee)ing told t(that) (yew) have g(eye)v'n (ewer) (hand) (toe) a (base) & (double-faced) (Frenchman) (Eye) have sent (yew) 5 ^{over} _{wise} (men) the (grate)est of (awl) my (child)ren (toe) put (yew) (toe) r(eye)ghts & (hope) (yew) w(eye)[ll] l(eye)s(ten) (toe) them & m(eye)nd w(hat) they say (toe) (yew) they have (eye)nstr(yew)ct(eye)ons [instructions] (toe) g(eye)ve (yew) t(hose) th(eye)ngs (yew) (form)erly required so (bee) a good (girl) d(eye)scharge (ewer) (soldiers) & (ship)s of war & (doe) (knot) re(bell) aga(eye)nst (ewer) (moth)er rely upon me & (doe) (knot) (console)t [consort] to w(hat) t(that) french R(ass)c(awl) sh(awl) tell (yew) IC he w(ants) (toe) b(ri)ng on an enm(eye)ty (toe) (awl) (union)* (bee)tween (yew) & (eye) (but) l(eye)s(ten) (knot) (toe) h(eye)m (awl) the (world) takes (knot)(eye)ce [notice] of h(eye)[s] (doubleface). I'll send h(eye)m such MessaGG [messages] from my (grate) (gun)s as s[h](awl) make h(eye)s (heart) repent & know t(that) (one) good or (eye)ll t(urn) mer(eye)its a (knot)her. NB⁺ let (knot) (eighty) [hate] take (two) much hold of (ewer) (heart).



(Eye) am (ewer) fr(eye)end & (moth)er.

■ **Rebus #2: America to Her Mistaken Mother, ca. 12 May 1778.**

(America) (toe) her (miss)taken (moth)er.

(Yew) s(eye)lly (old woman) t(that) (yew) have sent a (dove) (toe) us is very (plain) (toe) draw our at(ten)t(eye)on [attention] from our re(awl) (eye)ntrests (butt) we are determ(eye)n'd (toe) ab(eye)de by our own ways of th(eye) th(eye)nk(eye)ng (Ewer) (five) (child)ren (yew) have sent (toe) us sh(awl) (bee) treated as V(eye)s(eye)tors, & safely sent home aga(eye)n (Yew) may (console)t them & adm(eye)re them, (butt) (yew) must (knot) (x)pect (one) of (ewer) (puppet)s w(eye)ll (comb) home (toe) (yew) as sweet as (yew) sent h(eye)m, twas cruel (toe) send so pretty a (man) so many 1000 miles & (toe) have the fat(eye)gue of re(urn)ing (back) after (spike)(eye)ng h(eye)s (coat) & d(eye)rt(eye)ng [dirtying] t(hose) red (heel) shoes [shoheels] (Eye)f (yew) are w(eye)(eye) [wise] follow (ewer) own ad(vice) (yew) gave (toe) me take home (ewer) (ships) sold(eye)(ears) guard (well) (ewer) own tr(eye)fl(eye)(ling) & leave me (toe) my self as (eye) am at age (toe) know my own (eye)ntrests. W(eye)thout (ewer) (fool)(eye)sh ad(vice) & know t(that) (eye) sh(awl) (awl)ways regard (yew) & my Brothers as relat(eye)ons (butt) (knot) as fr(eye)ends.



(Eye) am (yewer) (grate)ly (eye)njured
Daughter Amer(eye)k.