

THE POLITICS OF PRIVATE LIFE:
PROPAGANDA, MORALITY AND THE FAMILY, 1789-1820

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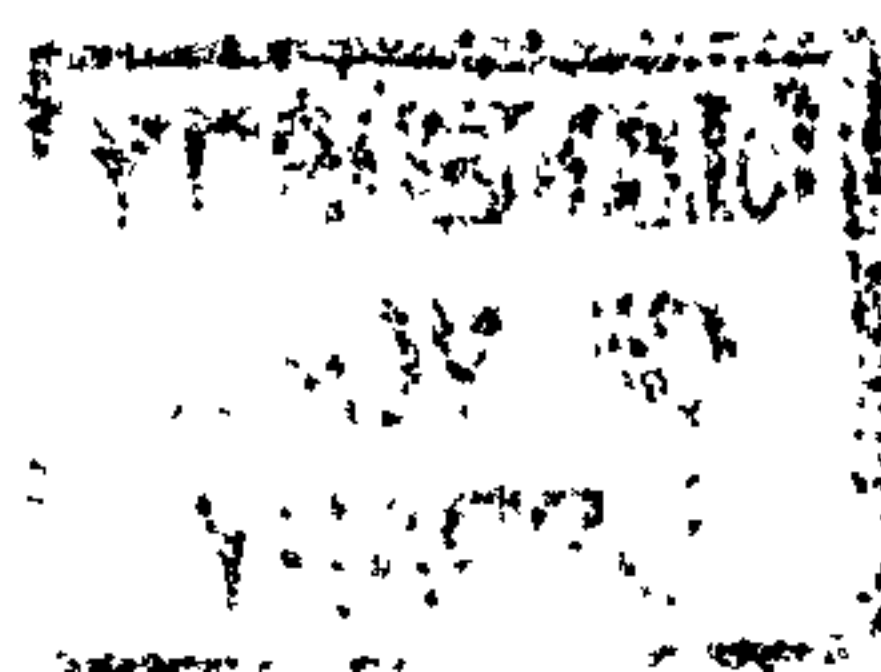


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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

Chapter 2 has previously appeared in a different form as 'Loyalist Propaganda and the Scandalous Life of Tom Paine: 'Hypocritical Monster!'' in the *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28:1 (Spring 2005), pp. 97-115.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores discursive representations of the family in political propaganda in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain. In response to the French Revolution, ideas about what constituted proper relations between men and women, parents and children, and the state and its citizens infused verbal and visual forms of political expression. The family became a locus of debate in a propaganda war between radicals and loyalists—a war of words and images waged in political pamphlets, lengthy philosophical treatises, ribald caricatures, popular novels and defamatory broadsides. This project shows how in this period of uncertainty and flux, British propagandists from all along the political spectrum increasingly adopted moralizing discourses that conflated private vices with public disorder and personal virtue with political integrity.

More specifically, this thesis examines how, within the realm of political debate, the lives of certain figures were scandalized (Tom Paine, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, George IV) and others celebrated (George III and his granddaughter Princess Charlotte). This public focus on the marriages, affairs and familial relationships of famous and infamous personalities both reflected and encouraged the interdependence of private life and public duty. In an effort to maintain political and social order, propagandists used private lives as tools to promote and enforce domesticity, familial harmony and conjugal fidelity—and to define those values as distinctly British ideals. Throughout the 1790s and into the first decades of the nineteenth century, public figures were increasingly cast as either models for emulation or as examples of conduct to be avoided. As this study reveals, the belief was that maintaining a secure and prosperous nation meant much more than repelling the French enemy; rather, libertinism, profligacy and any other threat to the family had to be battled—wherever they were found.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

General

LCS	London Corresponding Society
n. d.	no date of publication
n. p.	no place of publication
n. pub.	no publisher

Manuscript Sources

BL Add. MS	British Library Additional Manuscript
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Newspapers and Periodicals

<i>AJ</i>	<i>Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine</i>
<i>AR</i>	<i>Analytical Review</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>British Critic</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Courier</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Morning Chronicle</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Morning Post</i>
<i>SJC</i>	<i>St. James Chronicle</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>True Briton</i>

Other Texts

Claeys	<i>Political Writings of the 1790s</i> , ed. Gregory Claeys, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995).
GR	<i>William Godwin Reviewed</i> ed. Kenneth W. Graham. (NY, NY: AMS Press, Inc., 2001).

INTRODUCTION

In its campaign against the popular reform movement, the British government under Prime Minister William Pitt arrested more than thirty members of five reform societies in the summer of 1794.¹ The ensuing public debate focused on the circumstances surrounding the arrest of the founder of the London Corresponding Society, the shoemaker Thomas Hardy, on a warrant alleging treasonable practices. In their published statement, the LCS described how, in the early morning hours of 12 May, the government runners sent to arrest Hardy had stormed into his house in Piccadilly. After restraining and removing him, they made their way into the bedroom where the pregnant Mrs. Hardy had just been disturbed from sleep.² Refused a moment's privacy, she was forced to dress in front of her husband's uncouth persecutors, one of whom was armed with a pistol. Though her indignant protestations prevented the further ignominy of having her bed searched, the men did not leave without one last insult: the wife, they allegedly jeered, would yet see her husband hanged outside the doors of her own home.

In its *Account of the Seizure of Citizen Thomas Hardy*, the LCS declared that 'such discourse to an affectionate wife, considerably advanced in her pregnancy,' clearly demonstrated the 'inhumanity' of 'the present administration'.³ The 'outrages' committed against Lydia Hardy proved how easily 'the personal freedom of every

¹John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 190.

² [n.a.] *Account of the Seizure of Citizen Thomas Hardy, Secretary to the London Corresponding Society; with some remarks on the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.* ([London]: LCS, [1794]).

³*Account*, p. 2.

individual Briton' could be 'subjected to the malice of the king's ministers'.⁴ This account of the incident purposely recalled another violation on a woman's bedroom four years earlier—a violation that had since become etched on public memory. The LCS had appropriated and reworked Edmund Burke's famous description of the storming of Marie-Antoinette's bedroom at Versailles in October 1789.⁵ In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke had, with dramatic flourish, described how 'a band of cruel ruffians and assassins' had

rushed into the chamber of the queen and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked ... to seek refuge at the feet of a kin and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment'.⁶

For Burke, this unnatural, sexually violent attack on the queen was an incestuous and matricidal act. The mob stabs—repeatedly—the spot where their queen-mother had just lain; metaphorically, they penetrate her in a frenzied, orgiastic assault. The king is thus deposed in his own home, his rightful place as father and husband usurped by his own children.

The violation of the queen, the centrepiece of the *Reflections*, forms a climactic focal point to Burke's anti-revolutionary polemic. What horrors awaited a society in which even the king himself could not defend his wife, a woman so 'full of life, and splendour, and joy,' from being devoured by their own 'children'?⁷ For Burke, the security of home and the values nurtured there—loyalty, fidelity, honour, compassion, sympathy, communion—were crucial to the political and moral universe. That the sanctuary and privacy of the home could be breached in such a way, Burke warned,

⁴ *Account*, p. 3.

⁵ See Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 200.

⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), p. 105-6.

⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 112.

heralded the end of social and political order. The mob, set free by the revolution to indulge in 'orgies' of 'promiscuous slaughter' and all the 'unutterable abominations of the furies of hell,' would not only make 'a delicious repast' of the royal family, but they would turn their hungry gaze on the homes of all French families.⁸ If the revolutionary mob would leave 'the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world ... swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewn with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses,' they would likewise leave the cottages of their neighbours in the same condition.⁹ The two attacks, one on the French palace and the other on the humble quarters of a radical shoemaker, could hardly be more different in terms of context and circumstance. Yet both were unrestrained violations on the sanctity of the family, the very heart of civilized society. Both incidents demonstrated that it was 'everyman's castle' that was at risk: these were violations of a man's right to defend his wife and children and a woman's right to expect privacy and protection in her own home.

The fates of the two families would again take a similar course when, on 11 June 1794, one month after her husband's arrest, Lydia was attacked a second time in her home. That night she had allegedly failed to illuminate her windows in celebration of Lord Howe's naval victory over the French, as patriotic Londoners had done. A shouting crowd gathered outside and attempted to break in the house. Terrified, she tried to escape through a small back window with her neighbours' assistance, but in an advanced stage of pregnancy, she had to be pulled forcibly through the window. She was left bruised, battered and traumatized. As a result, her health began to decline until

⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 164-5.

⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 164.

27 August 1794 when, according to Hardy's memoirs, she visited him in prison for the last time, went home, gave birth to a stillborn child, and died.¹⁰

The LCS fashioned this second attack on the Hardy home into even more of a reversed re-enactment of Burke's description of the attack on Marie-Antoinette. In *Reformers No Rioters*, they entwined sentimental elegy with political polemic, blaming the king and his ministers for convincing the people that Hardy and other reformers were enemies of the state. They had misled Britons and thereby incited a lawless mob; moreover, they had ensured that there were no government soldiers to keep the peace. The LCS accused the king's ministers of terrorizing the most defenceless Britons: the king and his ministers had attacked the homes of Mrs Hardy and Mrs Thelwall whilst they suffered under 'the severest anxiety for their husbands'.¹¹ 'The enemies to the liberties of man may dare to defend' their appalling deeds with 'the principle, that wives should suffer for the political sins of their husbands,' but the LCS could never support sentiments that were so obviously lacking in 'manliness'.¹² Raising the spectre of Burke's apostrophe to Marie-Antoinette, the LCS contended that the government had acted toward a vulnerable, innocent woman with such a lack of 'manliness' that they would actually agree 'with Mr. Burke,' for clearly, "the age of Chivalry is gone!"¹³ The government had forfeited all the usual considerations shown mothers, wives and daughters and had struck 'wantonly' at 'the delicate sensibility of the female character'.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Memoir of Thomas Hardy, Founder of, and Secretary to, the London Corresponding Society, for Diffusing Useful Political Knowledge Among the People of Great Britain and Ireland ... Written by Himself* (London: James Ridgway, 1832), *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working Class Politicians, 1790-1885*, ed. David Vincent (London: Europa Publications Ltd., 1977), pp. 33-102 (p. 61).

¹¹ [John Bone; with Joseph Burks and James Parkinson], *Reformers no Rioters*, p. 4n.

¹² *Reformers no Rioters*, p. 4n.

¹³ *Reformers no Rioters*, p. 4 n.

¹⁴ [John Bone; with Joseph Burks and James Parkinson], *Reformers no Rioters* ([London: [J. Smith for] LCS, [1794]) p. 4n. For more on this pamphlet, see Mary Thale, ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), p. 215-6.

In his monody 'On the Death of Mrs. Hardy,' Richard 'Citizen' Lee contended that when Lydia Hardy had 'declared in her last moments, that she died a martyr to the sufferings of her husband,' she had left no question as to the authors of her fate.¹⁵

Lydia's martyrdom allowed the LCS to identify a set of criteria that clearly differentiated them, as defenders of British values, from a government that had willingly trampled them.

Not only were the king's ministers unmanly, but they had also done everything in their power to unman reformers themselves. The government had stripped Thomas Hardy and fellow radical John Thelwall of their independence, their good name, their families, their livelihoods, and their ability to protect their families.¹⁶ The government's efforts to unman the reformers was underscored when Hardy was forced to petition George III for the return of his confiscated property, long after his acquittal in 1794. The 13 November 1797 edition of the *Courier* printed his petition, in which Hardy described how he had once been able to address the king as a fellow 'father--a husband--a man' and 'on the pledge of these relations,' would have been entitled to ask for the king's pity, but that he was now destitute of all that had earned him those titles.¹⁷ The implicit suggestion here is that by unmanning Hardy, the king, his government and their representatives had actually unmanned themselves.

Indeed, whilst the government had driven Hardy into poverty, fellow LCS members raised funds for his support. They had effectively stepped into the role that the king and his ministers could not fulfil. Lee's poem 'On the Death of Mrs. Hardy' concluded with a notice that any profits arising from its sale would go toward the

¹⁵ Richard 'Citizen' Lee, *On the Death of Mrs. Hardy, wife of Mr. Thomas Hardy, of Piccadilly; Imprisoned in the Tower for High Treason* (London: J. Smith and J. Burks, 1794), p. 3.

¹⁶ *Reformers no Rioters*, p. 4n.

¹⁷ Hardy, *Memoir of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 85-86.

support of the wives and children of imprisoned reformers. In addition, society members offered their imprisoned fellows familial sympathy, as John Thelwall makes clear in his 1795 *Poems written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate*. In a sonnet 'To Thomas Hardy,' Thelwall describes how he and fellow patriots shed 'responsive drops' at the vision of the bereaved Hardy bent over his wife's grave.¹⁸ This contrast between the familial generosity and care of reformers and the cold-heartedness of the government was underscored that same year by a set of newspaper advertisements inserted in the *Courier* on 5 March 1795. There, on the front page, beneath a notice informing Londoners that Louthembourg's 'Grand Historical Pictures of Earl Howe's Victory over the French Fleet' would be exhibited 'under the Gracious Patronage of his Majesty,' was a notice to the public from Thomas Hardy. He thanks his political allies who, in an effort to offer financial assistance, had sent in scores of orders for shoes.¹⁹ The juxtaposition of these ads was likely tactical: whilst the king merrily celebrates the very event that occasioned the fatal attack on Mrs. Hardy, the radical shoemaker is left to rely on the generous patronage of sympathizers. Even more significant are the final few lines of print appended to Hardy's note of gratitude, which advertise 'an elegant First and Second Floor above Mr. Hardy's Shop to let, unfurnished, with kitchen, Cellars, and other Conveniences, fit for a genteel family'.²⁰ Here then was a reminder that Hardy's once-happy home was no more: both his loving wife and his child were gone.

II

¹⁸John Thelwall, *Poems Written in Close Confinement* (London: J. Ridgway et al., 1795), p. 10.

¹⁹ *Courier*, 5 March 1795.

²⁰ *Courier*, 5 March 1795.

Though he begrudgingly admired the affective power of the dramatic language Burke had used to create such scenes as the attack on Marie-Antoinette, John Thelwall criticized the 'madness' of such 'cumbustible' discourse.²¹ He joined other reformers, most notably Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, in deeming Burke's emotive language an inappropriate medium for the discussion of serious political issues, largely because its affective power was seen as antithetical to rational debate. Yet, as we have already seen, Hardy's supporters, including Thelwall, used an affective language that conflated private experience with political purpose and the domestic affections with political patriotism. The family was the point at which the private and the political met; in fact, for political commentators, most of whom responded in some way to Burke's *Reflections*, the family—and the affections it inspired—provided an affective ideological image around which notions of virtue and patriotism could be negotiated.

Many of Burke's respondents reacted, as John Barrell points out, as if he had created 'this political language of sentiment, this privatized language of politics'.²² In reality, however, the practice of linking the British family with the form and fortunes of the nation had been established in an earlier era. In her study of political discourse in Stuart England, Rachel Weil has observed that 'men and women of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries readily made connections between the family and the state, marriage vows and political allegiance, husbands and kings,' such that 'political events often took on the character of a family drama writ large'.²³ In his study of the second half of the eighteenth century, Jay Fliegelman has identified a continuing

²¹ John Thelwall, *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Gregory Claeys (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995), pp. 396, 395.

²² Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 54.

²³ Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680-1714* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1999), p. 2.

tendency to view the body politic as an extended family.²⁴ But, as he points out, the earlier patriarchal model of authority was restructured in this era. The demand for strict obedience from dependents was replaced with much more affectionate familial arrangements. This familial reordering greatly influenced late eighteenth-century ideas about political relations, so that in the revolutionary 1770s, for example, pro-American propaganda consistently represented the colonists' declaration of independence from England as a new generation's assertion of its right to live free from paternal tyranny.

These ideas may have greatly informed the political culture of late eighteenth century Britain, but the French Revolution *reshaped* it. In revolutionary France, as Suzanne Desan has argued, 'reforming marriage was integral to inventing and negotiating the gendered meaning of citizenship'.²⁵ In Britain, reforming marriage was integral to maintaining political, social and cultural stability. At a time when many Britons believed they were at war with new ideas and principles that threatened their very way of life, the atmosphere of political urgency impelled political writers to articulate much more clearly the relationship between private and political life. As John Dwyer has identified, the 'view of the domestic arena as the critical ethical environment' became a firmly established principle in the 1790s'.²⁶ In fact, I would say that three key ideas, critical to this study, became much more sharply articulated in the last decade of the century than they had previously. Writers from both sides of the political scale insisted, first, that for a nation not only to prosper but to survive, it must be ordered on a familial model, second, that the affectionate family was the indisputed

²⁴ Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982).

²⁵ Suzanne Desan, 'The Politics of Intimacy: Marriage and Citizenship in the French Revolution,' in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, eds., *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 630-666.

²⁶ John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse; Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987), p. 113.

‘home’ of morality, and third, that public and private virtue were effectively inseparable entities. So although historians have shown that ‘a stress on domestic virtues, on marriage, home and children was by no means new,’ by the turn of the century, the affective family had emerged as the nucleus of social and political life.²⁷ As private life became increasingly invested with political meaning in the era of the French revolution, a model of the British family—along with all of its prescribed traditions, laws, codes, and gendered patterns of behaviour—became circumscribed, mythologized and culturally entrenched. To serve the public good, individuals, whether directly involved in politics or not, were required to display moral probity in their private lives.

Mark Philp has rightly drawn our attention to the ‘protean’ nature of radicalism and the ‘fragmented ideology of reform’.²⁸ Yet whilst we must be attentive to the ideological diversity and generic variety of both conservative and radical propaganda, the extent to which reformers and anti-revolutionaries consistently shared opinions about the political and cultural role of the family and its values is also remarkable. Almost without exception, commentators from all along the political spectrum underscored the importance of the family, often in surprisingly similar terms, by employing a kind of language that, as Barrell states, ‘sought to represent all virtues as private, indeed as domestic virtues, all affective relations as aspiring to the condition of family relations’.²⁹ This type of language is there, most obviously, in the *Reflections*. ‘We have given to our frame of polity,’ Burke wrote,

the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom

²⁷ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987, 1997), p. 155.

²⁸ Mark Philp, ‘The Fragmented Ideology of Reform,’ in Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), pp. 50-77.

²⁹ Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 51.

of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars.³⁰

The nation and the family, the state and the home, political and private virtues are practically indistinguishable here. The family could not exist without the protection and security of government, but neither could the body politic survive without the family.

For Burke and for other conservatives, the existing political and social order was as ‘naturally ordained’ as the relationships between God and his people, between masters and servants, between civilized and ‘uncivilized’ nations, and between father, mother and child.³¹ Subjects were arranged, as God intended, beneath parliament and king in the same way as the family was ordered. As the conservative evangelical Hannah More put it, Providence ordained that ‘the woman is below her husband, and the children are below their mother, and the servant is below his master’.³² According to the conservative historian and economist Alexander Dalrymple, government was quite simply an extension of the biological family, a natural outgrowth of an instinctive relationship. In a 1792 pamphlet, he argued that Nature did not simply suggest the best structure of government, but determined its course: ‘the Individual, in every civilized Country,’ he argued, was first a child ‘under a *parental Government*’ before he or she became a subject of the state.³³ Nature also produced the emotional bonds that tied parent and child, monarchs and subjects. ‘The *pains of child-bearing*, and all the *anxious solicitude of parental affection*, for the *welfare of their offspring*’ made a child a ‘*Slave to*

³⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 49.

³¹ Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870: Politics, History and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 23.

³² Hannah More, *Village Politics. Addressed to all Mechanics, Journeymen, and Day Labourers in Great Britain*, 4th ed. (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1792), in Claeys, vol. 8, pp. 2-15 (p. 5).

³³ Alexander Dalrymple, *Parliamentary Reform, as it is called, Improper in the Present State of this Country*, 2nd ed. (London: George Bigg, 1792), in Claeys, vol. 7, pp.159-172 (p. 162).

Gratitude and the *tender Sensibilities*’ of the parent, and not of arbitrary Power’; likewise, the ‘Infant and Childish’ individual entered the state to which she or he was bound ‘with the *tie* of *Obligation* for *Protection*’.³⁴ Neither the child nor the subject needed to be legally coerced. ‘The celebrated virtue of patriotism,’ wrote the Pittite MP John Somers Cocks in a 1791 pamphlet, emerged from the ‘natural affection’ that ‘excites our public love to our country, as it does our private regard to our parents, our children, and our other nearest relatives’.³⁵

Although very few radicals would have viewed hierarchical social and political arrangements as naturally ordained, they very often identified the same correlation between familial affection and love of country that Burke and More described. Capel Lofft, a founding member of the Society for Constitutional Information, spoke for his associates when he identified ‘Nature’ as the force that produced the ‘sympathy’ that linked ‘the private and the public affections’.³⁶ The family was the crucible within which the individual imbibed the values necessary for communal and national membership. Many reformers echoed Burke’s statement that the family provided ‘elemental training to those higher and more large regards, by which alone men come to be affected ... in the prosperity of a kingdom’.³⁷ In her *Civic Sermons to the People*, the dissenter and educational reformer Anna Letitia Barbauld described in detail how the family—‘the beginning of order, and kind affections, and mutual helpfulness and

³⁴ Dalrymple, p. 162.

³⁵ John Somers Cocks, *Patriotism and the Love of Liberty Defended, in Two Dialogues* (London: R. Faulder, 1791), in Claeys, vol. 7, pp. 2-27 (p. 7).

³⁶ Capel Lofft, *Remarks on the Letter of the Rt. on. Edmund Burke, Concerning the Revolution in France*, third ed. (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1791) in Claeys, vol. 2, pp. 275-315 (p. 312).

³⁷ Burke, *Reflections* p. 315.

provident regulations’—was the ‘first society’ and the foundation for ‘that large society called a *State*’.³⁸

Significantly, Barbauld juxtaposes words like ‘order’ and ‘provident regulations’ with words like ‘kind affections’ and ‘mutual helpfulness’. Such terms remind us that political writers referred to a *particular* vision of the British family, in terms of its structure, function and values. As Barbauld’s word choice indicates, the British family was loving, co-operative, supportive and reliable, but it was also regimented by a strict code of values and duties, so that the home and the nation could be kept ‘pure’.³⁹ ‘The truest patriotism,’ the liberal Whig Vicesimus Knox maintained, was located in the ‘pure’ motives of ‘him who secretly serves his country in the retired and unobserved walks of private life’.⁴⁰ On issues of moral reform, radicals and loyalists were very often in agreement; indeed, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have shown how the ‘commitment to an imperative moral code and the reworking of [the] domestic world into a proper setting for its practice’ was ‘one of the strongest strands binding together urban and rural, nonconformist and Anglican, Whig, Tory and Radical’.⁴¹ Note, for instance, the similarity between the following statements, culled from a very small sample of radical and conservative pamphlets: ‘The character of a master of a family, a husband, and a father forms the citizen imperceptibly, by producing a sober manliness of thought, and orderly behaviour,’ the radical early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft

³⁸ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Civic Sermons to the People*, II (J. Johnson: London, 1792) pp. 6, 8.

³⁹ Barbauld, *Civic*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Vicesimus Knox, ‘An Idea of a Patriot,’ *Essays, Moral and Literary*, 3 vols., 17th ed. (London: J. Mawman et al., 1815), vol. 1, pp. 53, 49, in Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000), p. 185.

⁴¹ Davidoff and Hall, p. 25.

declared in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*.⁴² ‘A bad husband, a bad father, a profligate and an unprincipled man,’ insisted the Whig Viscemius Knox, ‘cannot deserve the name of a patriot’.⁴³ ‘The good citizen or subject, the good husband, parent, and child, and the good Christian exist *together*, or they exist *not at all*,’ echoed William Cobbett in his ultra-loyalist phase.⁴⁴

Although by mid-decade radicals became deeply discredited by the taint of immorality; they had, very early on in the Revolution, made the claim to speak for the virtuous part of their communities. In 1792, ‘the reflecting mind’ of the radical Joel Barlow could not help but ‘bewail the terrible inroads’ that had been ‘made upon morals public and private’.⁴⁵ Radicals blamed the privileged orders for effectively giving birth to the nation’s tyrants: Wollstonecraft rebuked unscrupulous and neglectful parents who had produced the ‘misery that wanders, in hideous forms, around the world’.⁴⁶ Men who had been ‘rendered unnatural by early debauchery’ and women who had accepted their role as ‘standing dishes to which every glutton may have access’ had weakened the familial foundation of the nation.⁴⁷ Debauchery, Thelwall argued, had corrupted all spheres of social and political life: whilst pleasure-seeking and politically apathetic Britons revelled in luxury—that ‘fell opiate of the soul!’—tyrants had gained

⁴² Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, second ed. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1790) in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 22.

⁴³ Knox, in Guest, p. 185.

⁴⁴ William Cobbett, *Cobbett’s Review of the Life of Thomas Paine* (London: n. p., 1797) p. 9. This pamphlet is a reprint of ‘The Original Life of Thomas Paine,’ which Cobbett wrote (under the pseudonym Peter Porcupine) for his *The Political Censor; or Review of the Most interesting Political Occurrences, relative to the United States of America* (Philadelphia: J. Wright, 1796), p. 1-49.

⁴⁵ Joel Barlow, *Advice to the Privileged Orders, in the Several States of Europe, etc.*, part I, first ed. (London: n. p., 1792), in Claeys, vol. 3, pp. 261-317 (p. 309).

⁴⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, second ed. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792) in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 236.

⁴⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 217.

easy access into the halls of government.⁴⁸ The same arguments underpinned the narratives of the pro-revolutionary novels of Charlotte Smith, Robert Bage and Thomas Holcroft. In their novels, the defeat of political corruption and aristocratic profligacy most often coincided with the marriage of two virtuous central characters who re-established justice and honour in their communities. When, for instance, the eponymous protagonists of Holcroft's *Hugh Trevor* and *Anna St. Ives* began lives of 'lasting and indubitable happiness' with affectionate and worthy marriages, the depravity of villains once 'guilty of hateful crimes' gave way to virtuous example and the pull of the finer affections.⁴⁹

Domestic bliss, whether represented in novels, political pamphlets, caricatures or poetry, could only exist in a well-ordered family, and for most writers (loyal, radical and in-between), a well-ordered family had clearly defined gender roles. Familial harmony and conjugal fidelity were important to male and female lives, but whilst these attributes prepared men for *both* public office and private life, they prepared women for purely domestic roles. The LCS pamphlets that narrated the family tragedy of Thomas Hardy made clear that whilst men and women might share the domestic sphere, they had clearly differentiated roles within it: the husband was obligated to defend the spotless honour of his wife and to ensure that she was secure in her home. The LCS response to Hardy's arrest demonstrated, as Anna Clark has noted, that a significant part of the process by which radicals defined 'themselves as husbands and citizens,' was to portray 'women as passive and helpless'.⁵⁰ Indeed, throughout his *Poems Written in*

⁴⁸ John Thelwall, *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, Under a Charge of High Treason* (London: J. Ridgway, et al., 1795), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Thomas Holcroft, *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor*, ed. Seamus Deane (Oxford: OUP, 1973), p. 495, 496.

⁵⁰ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1995), p. 150.

Confinement, Thelwall engaged in this process of manly self-definition. The tears Hardy shed over his 'lov'd Consort' and his acts of 'social Tenderness' were testaments to his 'manly virtues'; in turn, these private virtues correlated to political integrity.⁵¹ Public virtues were inspired, he contended, only in the breast of 'the Sire'; that is, only in a man who had fulfilled the dictates of manhood and had come of age personally and politically. The true patriot was a father, husband and master of his house.⁵² He was inspired 'to deeds of manly Virtue' by 'the smiling face/Of a lov'd Infant' or 'the soft smile/Of a lov'd Consort'.⁵³ Such patriotic dedication could never, however, be inspired in a man

To whose lone bosom for protection clings
No tender Bride—to whose embraces springs
No smiling infant, to awake the mind
To social tenderness.⁵⁴

A family-less man could not possibly be trusted to act in the best interest of the public weal, for he could not be expected to feel any social tenderness towards the citizens he was meant to represent. Such discourse reveals how in this decade, bachelorhood had become 'morally suspect' (to use Thelwall's words), whether it was of the freewheeling, licentious variety associated with the court circles of the Prince of Wales or of the coldly abstemious variety personified by William Pitt.⁵⁵ (Indeed, this distrust of bachelors was not only expressed in poetry but in French law: the Revolution levied a tax against unmarried men.)⁵⁶ By criticizing those who had neither tender bride nor smiling infant, Thelwall was articulating a general principle, but it was likely he had a much more specific target in mind. For post-1794 readers, the lone bosom to which

⁵¹ Thelwall, *Poems in Confinement*, p. 10.

⁵² Thelwall, *Poems in Confinement*, p. 14.

⁵³ Thelwall, *Poems in Confinement*, p. 14-15.

⁵⁴ Thelwall, *Poems in Confinement*, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Clark, *Struggle*, p. 153.

⁵⁶ Desan, p. 634.

neither bride nor child clung must have called to mind the bachelor Pitt, one of Thelwall's greatest political enemies and the author of the 'Terror' against 'real' patriots.

III

There were those radicals who were much less hesitant to name their targets explicitly. Although an aristocratic libertine himself, the radical Charles Pigott had, a few years earlier, shared with readers the scandalous amours of fashionable society in his *Jockey Club* pamphlets. Like many fellow radicals, Pigott contended that the profligate private lives of the 'polite' classes provided sure signs of an infected polity; unlike many of them however, he was willing and able to describe those profligate lives in detail.⁵⁷ As political uncertainty increased and the gap between the private and the public narrowed, political commentators began to enquire much more closely into the lives and characters of their political representatives and social 'superiors'. By re-fashioning a pre-existing genre of scandal journalism to suit their political purposes and to appeal to a wider public, scores of writers named and shamed degenerate members of the political and social aristocracy in newspaper gossip columns, pamphlets, memoirs and caricatures. In the 1790s, the 'lived,' observable lives of families—whether Bourbons, Hapsburgs or humble Hardys—were discussed, dissected, censured and celebrated within the context of political debate. Private lives made political principles and events meaningful.

Chapter one of this thesis demonstrates how French private lives were fashioned into a very effective propaganda tool. Anti-monarchical pornographers who

⁵⁷ There were three *Jockey Club* pamphlets and one *Female Jockey Club* pamphlet. Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club, or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, Part 1, 7th ed. (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792); *The Jockey Club, Or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, Part 2, 4th ed. (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792); *The Jockey Club, Or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, Part 3, second ed. (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792), *The Female Jockey Club, Or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, sixth ed. (London: H. D. Symonds, 1794).

portrayed Marie-Antoinette as a bad mother, an adulterous wife and a political schemer in the preceding and early years of the revolution effectively enabled her beheading to be construed as a politically virtuous act. In Britain, her reputation became so sullied that Burke's sentimentalized description of her as a roman matron in the *Reflections* met with amused derision—'so vast was the gap between his account of her and what was known or believed of her private life'.⁵⁸ Radicals like Thelwall were shocked that Burke would suggest that 'a woman whose monstrous vices would have rendered her an object of disgust, but for the particular situation in which the accident of birth had placed her' was any kind of a benefit to humankind.⁵⁹

Yet as Chapter one will also show, when the excesses of the revolution—the terror, the guillotining of Louis XVI, the trial of Marie-Antoinette, the reign of Robespierre—proved Burke's prediction about seeing a guillotine at the end of every *visto prescient*, it became possible to rehabilitate even the person of Marie-Antoinette.⁶⁰ When British anti-revolutionaries refashioned Louis XVI into a loving father and his consort into a victimized mother, they shifted the charge of moral depravity, sexual libertinism and similar crimes against the family onto the heads of republicans and radicals. In the years 1792 and 1793 especially, attention was refocussed much more intensely than it ever had on the private lives of political reformers. In a 22 February 1793 letter to his loyalist association, one correspondent insisted that it was in the interest of national security to publish pamphlets that were 'very suitable to the Intention of exposing the Private Intentions of some Public

⁵⁸ Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 55.

⁵⁹ John Thelwall, *Politics of English Jacobinism*, p. 220.

⁶⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 115.

Characters'.⁶¹ 'It behoves us at all times,' a conservative pamphleteer urged in 1793, 'to inquire into the private character and circumstances of those who aspire to take the lead in political disputes, but particularly at present'.⁶² Even those loyalists who believed the people had no business in political decision-making were forced to admit, however begrudgingly, that though it was 'of very little importance to the reader to know who, or what sort of person, the writer of any thing is,' the present circumstances made it 'material to consider who the men are whose writings on public matters are recommended to your perusal'.⁶³

In *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism, War, Popular Politics and English Radical Reformism, 1800-1815*, Peter Spence argues that 'the radical claim to a political and moral virtue' did not find itself 'under attack' until late 1809 and 1810 and that 'the personal improprieties and inconsistencies of earlier reformers such as Wilkes, Paine and Fox did little to dent their popularity'.⁶⁴ However, as Chapter two will show, radicals and reformers found themselves, without question, under what could only be termed 'serious attack' by 1792. Scandal—and specifically the charge of moral impoverishment—had by then become for British loyalists, an efficient means of mobilizing public opinion against reformers and their causes. Moreover, as far back as the 1760s and 70s, when Wilkes challenged monarchical power by airing unsavoury details about royal private lives, he had unwittingly incited public censure about his own licentious private life—thereby raising questions as to his fitness for political

⁶¹ *Reeves Papers*, BL Add. MSS 16992, vol. IV, p. 93.

⁶² [n. a.] *An Address to the People of Great Britain; Containing a Comparison between the Republican and Reforming Parties* (Edinburgh: n. pub., 1793), in Claeys, vol. 7, pp. 300-355 (p. 344).

⁶³ *Ten Minutes Caution, From a Plain Man to his Fellow Citizens*, Tract No. 2 in Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers, *Publications Recommended to the Public, in the Present Crisis* (n. pub. 1792), no. 1, in Claeys, vol. 7, pp. 291-99 (p. 291).

⁶⁴ Peter Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism, War, Popular Politics and English Radical Reformism, 1800-1815*, p. 169.

office.⁶⁵ And as securely ensconced as he was in the bosom of his Whig circle, Charles James Fox was so scurrilously attacked by reporters and caricaturists that even the morally delinquent Prince of Wales eventually dropped him from his acquaintance.

Yet surely Spence has most misinterpreted Paine's 'popularity.' Contrary to Spence's appraisal, Paine was undoubtedly the real casualty of 1790s political scandal. As chapter two demonstrates, he was, to use William Cobbet's description, so completely fashioned into 'a brutal and savage husband, and an unnatural father' that he was not only personally discredited, but virtually untouchable politically.⁶⁶ Indeed, as E. P. Thompson pointed out some years ago in *The Making of the English Working Class*, public hatred that had previously been directed at 'Sin and the Pope,' underwent 'a drastic redirection' in the 1790s so that Tom Paine deposed the Pope from the 'seat of commination'.⁶⁷ Read against the stream of 'eyewitness' reports that recounted the desecration of the family and the end of morality in France, biographical accounts of British radicals such as Paine went some distance to promote the idea that they, like the French Jacobins, were more than willing to destroy their own families for the untenable doctrine of the rights of man.

Chapter three will explore the effects of William Godwin's candid detailing of his wife's intimate relations and pregnancies in his 1798 *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*. This badly timed publication coincided with the commencement of a campaign, largely instigated by evangelicals, against moral laxity and political disloyalty. Even though Godwin's *Political Justice* was a strongly worded 'appeal to stern puritan and republican virtue,' Godwin's 'apparent surrender to authenticity of desire,' as

⁶⁵ Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), p. 52.

⁶⁶ Cobbett, *Review of Life of Paine*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, rpt. 1980), p. 430.

Gregory Claeys put it, provided moralists with the ammunition needed to identify him 'with the loose hedonism of the upper classes' which he himself deplored.⁶⁸

Furthermore, once Mary Wollstonecraft's private history was publicized, it was used to counter her political arguments, to disgrace other female radicals, and to circumscribe female influence in public matters. Otherwise disparate groups became more than willing to join forces against immorality in the late 1790s: not only evangelicals, but Anglican clergy, the government, loyalists and radicals were all keen to 'play the morality card'.⁶⁹

The fourth chapter examines how lives at the opposite end of the social and political scale also became the object of the moralizing gaze, so that in the 1790s, the personal lives of the British royal family became subjected to intense public scrutiny. The greatest target of this reform or ruin movement was unquestionably George III's eldest son, whose unrestrained sexual appetites and maltreatment of his father, his wife Princess Caroline and his daughter Princess Charlotte was deeply incompatible with an unstable political climate and with the familial values of his subjects. As prince, as regent and then as King George IV, he was represented as an example of the type of personal immorality that threatened the social order. In contrast, propagandists celebrated the familial and domestic George III and, as Chapter five reveals, his granddaughter Charlotte, as models of domestic virtue. Increasingly, the British public insisted that the private lives of future generations of monarchs would be at the heart of their public roles, and they defined just what kind of private life that must (and must

⁶⁸ Gregory Claeys, 'Introduction, *Political Writings of the 1790s*, 8 vols., ed. in Claeys (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995), vol. 1, pp. xvii-lvi, p. l, xlix, li.

⁶⁹ Gregory Claeys, 'Introduction,' Claeys, vol. 1, p. li.

not) be. Monarchs were pressured to demonstrate personally – and thereby publicly promote—domesticity, familial harmony and conjugal fidelity.

The publicizing of famous and infamous lives enabled society to define and to monitor its own moral boundaries. Britons increasingly espoused the idea that the security and prosperity of the nation depended on the suppression of not only French principles, but also French or Jacobinical manners—libertinism, profligacy, infidelity, domestic disharmony, the collapse of defined sexual categories. Patriotic duty was defined as the denunciation of these so-called Jacobinical manners and the enthusiastic performance of one's familial roles as father, husband, wife, mother, child, brother or sister. In an era when the very existence of civil society seemed to be at stake, it became incumbent on every Briton to penetrate into, and to regulate their own lives and to be sure that family members, neighbours, politicians, peers, kings and queens did the same.

PART ONE
FRENCH LIVES

CHAPTER 1

‘PURIFYING’ THE BODY POLITIC:
FAMILY SCANDAL AND THE REPUBLIC

In the inaugural scene of her *Letters Written in France, in the Summer of 1790*, Helen Maria Williams gives an eyewitness account of the spectacular celebrations and elaborate pageantry of the Paris commemoration of the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Williams singles out one particularly ‘sublime’ image from all the colourful activity of the Fête de la Federation: with outstretched arms, the mothers offer their young children up to the soldiers that file past.¹ These tearful women, Williams recalls, ‘promised to make their children imbibe, from their earliest age, an inviolable attachment to the principles of the new constitution’.² This extraordinarily significant act demonstrates that the new generation of French citizens belonged to the republic; as the older children’s banners proclaimed, they were ‘the Hope of the Country,’ the raw material from which would emerge an equitable and liberal society.³ There is, for Williams, a great deal to celebrate in this symbolic act, for she shared with the French people a faith in the state’s ability to rehabilitate a nation of families that had become either as corrupt as the Old Regime or completely broken by it. In the Old Regime, parents ruled as mercenary autocrats, brothers vied with brothers for inheritance and daughters were compelled to prostitute themselves for wealth and position, but the

¹ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England; containing various anecdotes relative to the French Revolution; and Memoirs of Mons. and Madame Du F---*, fifth ed. (London: T. Cadell, et al., 1796) p. 9.

² Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 9-10.

³ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. n.11.

new republic promised to reconcile these deeply divided families and to reunite fractured communities.

In a statement undoubtedly calculated to appeal to her reader's sensibilities, Williams proposes that the best measure of a nation's political fitness was the state of its families. It had been 'in vain,' she writes, that 'Aristocrates have explained ... the rights of kings, and Democrates have descanted on the rights of the people' when the decision as to which 'system of politics must be the best' ultimately hinges on whether 'those I love are made happy'.⁴ For this reason, she declares her intention to eschew a detailed analysis of the finer points of revolutionary politics in favour of a comparative study of French families, before and after the revolution. One of her key case studies is the du Fossés, a family whose fortunes were bound intimately to the politics of the nation: the personal and public character of the family patriarch, the Baron du Fossé reflected the political priorities of the Old Regime, whilst his eldest son, who believed 'that domestic happiness was the first good of life' embodied the principles of the new republic.⁵

In his family, the Baron 'preferred the exercise of domestic tyranny to the blessings of social happiness' and in his role as estate-owner and counsellor of Normandy, he ruled with an iron fist.⁶ In keeping with the dictates of custom, the Baron 'looked upon marriage as merely a convention of interest, and children as a property' so that even 'the endearing name of father conveyed no transport to his heart, which, being wrapt up in stern insensibility, was cold even to the common

⁴ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 195-6.

⁵ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 129.

⁶ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 123, 124.

feelings of nature'.⁷ When his eldest son and heir, Augustin François Thomas du Fossé, marries for love rather than social advancement, the infuriated Baron arranged for his son to be jailed and forced his new daughter-in-law into penniless exile in England. The Baron is able to imprison his son legally under the auspices of a *lettre de cachet*—one of the infamous legal orders, which bore the king's signature, thereby entitling a family member to imprison another. Whilst the appellation of 'father' normally communicated 'all the ideas of protection, of security, of tenderness,' the Baron's natural 'instinctive affection' had been extinguished.⁸ Such heartlessness had infected his entire family: his wife, 'feeble in mind and body' and devoid of maternal sympathy submitted 'almost with the thoughtlessness of a child, to the imperious will of her husband' whilst the younger son plots for his elder brother's inheritance.⁹

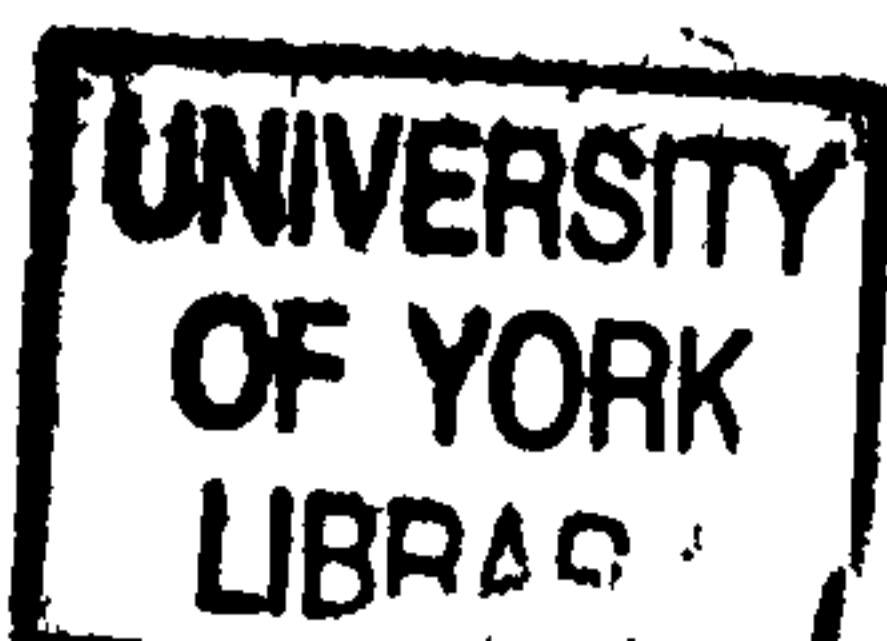
William's retelling of this family story is a powerful indictment of the ways in which the Old Regime had suppressed human affection and blasted domestic peace. The du Fossés, the Rouen Society of Friends of the Constitution wrote in a letter to Williams, would 'stand for all generations as an example of the crimes of arbitrary power' both from outside and from within the family. They demonstrated how 'despotism exercised its wrath,' the Society contended, through what was 'held most sacred' and it operated on the most defenceless and 'unblemished victims'.¹⁰ As these comments indicate, revolutionaries were deeply interested in the link between parental and state tyranny. The father's *lettre de cachet* against his son was the definitive symbol of the entwined nature of political tyranny and familial degradation under the

⁷ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 126, 123.

⁸ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 140.

⁹ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 125; see also Letter XX.

¹⁰ 'Society of Friends of the Constitution at Rouen,' in Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2001), pp. 225-26 (p. 225).



Old Regime. These legal orders demonstrated how, under the authority of corrupt laws and the sanction of a distant father-king who cared little for his subjects, family members were entitled, even encouraged, to persecute their own flesh and blood. Lettres de cachet had spread vice, destroyed manners and stifled the finer sentiments of the heart. 'It was not uncommon,' M. du Fresnoy wrote in his rejoinder to Burke's *Reflections*, 'to see sons or daughters, actuated by the unnatural ambition of appropriating to themselves a fortune, ... to confine [their parents] for life, on the false pretence of insanity,' or some other charge.¹¹ By the same means, 'a troublesome husband or an unpleasant wife' or 'an inhuman mother, jealous of the growing beauty of her daughter' or a kept mistress tired of hearing the 'advice of a father, brother, relation, or a too sincere friend' could all rid themselves of inconvenient family members.¹²

The revolution rejected exactly the type of patriarchal authority that the king's signature on these letters embodied. British observers who were sympathetic to the revolutionary cause rejoiced that France was rejecting her adulterated 'patrimony'.¹³ No longer content to be passively obedient, French citizens rebelled against their corrupt and authoritarian fathers, both political and familial. Defining 'obedience' as 'the catch-word of tyrants of every description,' Mary Wollstonecraft sharply criticized the ways in which 'one kind of despotism support[ed] another'.¹⁴ Tyrants lurked in government and in the home, 'from the weak king to the weak father of a family,' she

¹¹ M. du Fresnoy, *An Address to the National Assembly of France; Containing Strictures on Mr. Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Cambridge: J. Archdeacon, 1792) in Claeys, vol. 2, pp. 30-58 (p. 40).

¹² du Fresnoy, in Claeys, vol. 2, p. 40.

¹³ James Macintosh, *Vindicae Gallicae: Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers against the accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, 3rd ed. (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1791) in Claeys, ed., vol. 1, pp. 270-386 (p. 358).

¹⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 232.

declared, they were 'all eager to crush reason' and to exploit their dependents.¹⁵ In an effort to control such arbitrary power, French and British political writers attacked those odious legal traditions that gave fathers inordinate amounts of power. Early revolutionaries, as historian Lynn Hunt has observed, attempted 'to eliminate or contain "bad" fathers' by instituting laws which thwarted their 'despotic tendencies'.¹⁶ During a debate about lowering the age of majority, for instance, one member of the French Legislative Assembly declared that "a father ought to be more flattered by the respect of a free child than by the regard of a slave," whilst another government deputy declaimed against "the tyranny of parents".¹⁷ In Britain, radicals contested the idea that the family, in its current form, was cemented by 'natural' affections and urged reform of inheritance law in particular. The truth, Tom Paine contended, was that the customs and laws of England that were supposedly intended to regulate the family were instead insults to 'Nature herself'.¹⁸ Prejudicial customs, Wollstonecraft argued, forced family members to 'do violence to a natural impulse,' for children were taught to restrain their affections and to habitually display obedience and partiality, in hopes of financial gain.¹⁹ Since, under the laws of primogeniture, only the first born son was worthy of his parent's notice, English landowners, to use Paine's phrase, partook of an 'unnatural repast' of their second, third and fourth born children: those leftover offspring, he argued, were simply 'begotten to be devoured'.²⁰

¹⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 67.

¹⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Family*, p. 43, 42.

¹⁷ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: U of California Press), p. 41, 40.

¹⁸ Tom Paine, *Rights of Man*, Part 1, fourth ed., Part 2, sixth ed. (London: J. S. Jordan, 1791, 1792), ed. Eric Foner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985) p. 82.

¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men*, p. 21.

²⁰ Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 82.

In those hopeful days of the early revolution, Williams was able to give her readers a happy ending to the du Fossé saga. In 1790, 'the voice of public indignation' that cried out against the plight of the son and the 'universal clamour' that was raised against the sins of his father obtained justice for a new generation.²¹ Only when the Bastille fell, could the eldest du Fossé son, his wife and young daughter trade their exile and poverty for the 'domestic comforts' of home in France: the revolution guaranteed that a son would 'no longer [be] embittered with the dread of being torn from his family by a separation more terrible than death itself'.²² Williams describes how the du Fossés were reborn as a family, an event marked by a day of celebration witnessed by Williams in the late summer of 1791. On this particular day, Williams recalls, the young du Fossé daughter, born during her parents' difficult times, delivered a celebratory opening address to her father. In the warm company of friends and relations, she expressed her hope that she would always contribute to the happiness of her tender parent and offered to him her 'duty,' 'gratitude' and her 'best affections'.²³ On this day, the family and their tenants addressed each other with 'affectionate familiarity' and with such appellations as 'Ma petite' and 'Mon enfant'.²⁴ Singing 'La Federation, ou La Famille Patriotique,' this circle of kinship was extended still further to take in the nation that had made this scene of fraternity possible.

Williams describes the realization of one of the great promises of the revolution: that the state would restore children to parents, wives to husbands, brothers to brothers and sisters to sisters. This vital promise underwrote the assembly's introduction of tribunaux de famille or family councils that brought families together to

²¹ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 168.

²² Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 189-90.

²³ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 202n.

²⁴ Williams, *Letters 1790*, p. 114.

disentangle their difficulties. As the radical editor of the *Analytical Review* Thomas Christie explained for his British audience, ‘when a parent, or tutor, has weighty grounds of dissatisfaction with the conduct of a child or pupil, whom he can no longer restrain’ or when disagreements arose between ‘grandfather and grandchild, brothers and sisters, uncles and nephews’ they appeared before a council of relatives for judgment.²⁵ These tribunals, Christie explained, were an expression of the Assembly’s desire ‘to democratize family life’ by ‘removing its despotic and aristocratic characteristics, while leaving it in place as the bedrock of society’.²⁶

The new state was keen to rebuild families, and families were intent on rebuilding the state as a family. Anna Letitia Barbauld illustrated cleverly this model of familial-political interdependency in her image of the single, small waterway that, as it meanders along, naturally combines its forces with numerous other waterways, until it eventually feeds into one large reservoir. Each family had a part in the process of nation-building, when in similar fashion it joined to other families to create a nation. But Barbauld cautioned her readers to be aware that political participation was a serious responsibility. If a ‘spring be pure,’ she reasons, then ‘what proceeds from it will be pure’; however, ‘if it be polluted, the broader water will be discoloured’.²⁷ If the body politic was to be reformed, each family must also reform itself. Familial purity was essential: the state of the nation’s families determined the state of the nation itself.

II.

²⁵Thomas Christie, *Letters on the Revolution in France*, vol. 2 (London: J. Johnson, 1791), in Claeys, vol. 1, pp. 154-269 (pp. 260-1).

²⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Family*, p. 41.

²⁷ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Civic Sermons*, Number II, p. 6.

There was, in the French imagination, one particularly impure stream in the system of familial waterways that made up the nation. Of all the corrupt families in need of reform, to many observers, the Bourbons were the worst. In the years before the fall of the Bastille, France's king had been increasingly desacralized, brought down to earth, and depicted as a comic figure in anti-royalist propaganda. This familiarization of the king took a markedly nasty turn, as Lynn Hunt and other critics have observed, following the June 1791 flight to Varennes. After that event, the king became represented as that lowest of animals, the grunting, grubby pig. He was portrayed as such both in print (in his newspaper, Camille Desmoulins had asked citizens to return the "fat pig" that had "escapd from the Tuilleries ... to its pen") and in pictures (Hunt counts at least fifteen swinish prints).²⁸ Hunt is right to point out that these representations paved the way 'for the destruction of kingship and political fatherhood'.²⁹ What needs to be emphasized here, however, is not only how damaging such insulting representations were, but also the degree to which portrayals of much more *private* sins became entwined with—and amplified—the political sins of the monarchy.

According to the popular literature of the day, the royal family was the most degraded, impure, corrupt family in the nation: propagandists gave eyewitness accounts of sexual orgies, appalling parental abuse, and unbridled decadence in the royal court. Such behind-closed-doors immorality, they argued, demonstrated complete unfitness for leadership. Pamphlets and prints connected the king's perceived impotence to his political incapacity; the sexual licentiousness of his brothers and the queen was linked to their alleged political plotting against the people. The anonymous author of

²⁸ Lynn Hunt, *Family*, p. 51.

²⁹ Lynn Hunt, *Family*, p. 51.

Description of the Royal Menagerie characterized ‘the Bourbon race’—each member of which bore ‘on their muzzle the mark of their reprobation and infamy’—as ‘the descendants of Cain’.³⁰ The king’s brother, the infamous duc d’Orleans was not only ‘incestuous,’ but like Cain, he was ‘fratricidal’.³¹

This is just one example of a genus of exceedingly scurrilous pornographic pamphlets that attacked the French monarchy. Some of these pamphlets, including *Description of the Royal Menagerie* express a perverse sort of sympathy for a king who, though spineless, submissive, impotent and dim-witted, was horribly exploited by his manipulative and power-hungry wife and brothers. Compared to his wife, he may not have been the worst villain of these tales, but the depiction of his ‘unmanning’ at the hands of his consort eroded his political legitimacy. Pamphleteers were often ruthless about certain of his private functions, particularly his willingness or ability to father his own children:

It is well known that that poor Gent,
Condemned three or four times
By the salubrious Faculty [of Medicine],
For total impotence,
Cannot satisfy Antoinette.
Thoroughly convicted of this calamity,
Since his matchstick
Is about as thick as a bit of straw,
And always limp and curled up,
His Cock’s only good for his pocket.³²

The king is more than desacralized here. His power—his manliness—is miniaturized to an innocuous piece of straw. As the words ‘limp’ and ‘curled up’ suggest, it is as if

³⁰ *La Ligue Aristocratique ou Les Catalinaires Françaises* [*The Aristocratic League, or the French Catalinas*] (Palais-Royal: Josseran, 1789), in Chantal Thomas, *The Wicked Queen: The Origins of the Myth of Marie-Antoinette* (New York: Zone Books, 1999) pp. 229-237 (p 243).

³¹ *Description de la Menagerie Royale D’Animaux Vivans* [*Description of the Royal Menagerie of Living Animals*] (n. pub details) in Thomas, pp. 239-246 (p. 243).

³² *Les Amours de Charlot et Toinette* [*The Love Life of Charlie and Toinette*] (n. pub.: 1779) in Thomas, pp. 185-90 (p.186).

the king's organ were itself coiled up in a foetal position, an image that denoted utter weakness, vulnerability, abjectness, withdrawal.

The suggestion in many pamphlets is that Louis's personal failure is at least partially to blame for driving his wife into the arms of other men, in search of pleasure and children. In *The Royal Dildo*, for example, the queen accuses her husband of preferring the company of men: 'my husband's treacherous balls,' she sighs, 'Of which I'm so often starved, shoot their broth/Into secret places that make Nature blush'.³³ It was, the pamphleteer claimed, because Louis was enticed by 'any arsehole,' that the queen felt justified to avenge 'this outrage' with any man or woman she desired.³⁴ Louis had failed so miserably in his manly duties that he provided at least a partial excuse for the otherwise inexcusable licentiousness of his detested wife.

Yet the fact remained that the French public viewed Marie-Antoinette as the most depraved member of the royal household. Whether the king was victimized or vilified, treated sympathetically or ruthlessly, he could never be the real villain in this perverse family. Propagandists emphasized the queen's 'unfamiliarity,' that is, her foreignness, her unnaturalness, her deviance and perversity. 'No queen,' Madame de Staël observed in her *Réflexions sur le procès de la Reine*, had 'ever seen herself libelled so publicly'.³⁵ She was, as Chantal Thomas has shown, 'fantasized as the incarnation of an extreme debauchery' and labelled, among other things, 'adulteress, traitor, sodomite, lesbian, incestuous mother, infant murderess'.³⁶ Using extremely crude, and at times, sexually violent language, pornographers stripped the queen of every shred of her protective 'drapery,' to use Burke's word. Even more damaging, she was made to

³³ *Le Godmiche [The Royal Dildo]* (n. pub: 1789) in Thomas, pp. 193-201 (pp. 193-4).

³⁴ *The Royal Dildo*, in Thomas, p. 194.

³⁵ Mme de Staël, *Réflexions sur le procès de la reine* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1996), p. 58, in Thomas p. 25.

³⁶ Thomas, pp. 20, 25.

articulate her own illicit desires: in *The Royal Dildo*, she demands, in the coarsest language, that her 'father,' her 'children' and the 'sons of Venus' perform the most illicit acts on her body. Not only, she declares, is her 'cunt' so 'amorous' that it would 'fuck its own father,' but she directs an army of 'delectable children' to satiate her.³⁷ In *The Austrian Woman on the RAMPAGE, OR THE Royal Orgy*, she is an incestuous, cuckolding wife who has forever sullied the French throne by producing bastard sons. At a secret rendezvous, the king's own brother tells her he will be careful not to 'give my brother another son tonight'.³⁸ Paternity is also at issue in *The Aristocratic League, or the French Catalinas*, but this time the dauphin's father is Vaudreuil, the lover of Madame La Polignac, who had so graciously 'lent him to the Queen, as a producer of boys'.³⁹ In *The Royal Bordello*, it is the Cardinal de Rohan who reminds the queen that since he is 'the father of the Dauphin and perhaps the Dauphine,' she should show him 'more consideration'.⁴⁰ Obliging, the queen consoles the cardinal: 'You will always be my Husband,' she assures him, promising that 'tonight we'll work on a new Duke of Normandy'.⁴¹

These pamphlets represent the queen as a harridan whose unrestrained desires have not only corrupted the highest reaches of the religious, social and political hierarchy, but have forever tainted the royal blood. Since Marie-Antoinette favoured her lovers over her husband and allowed them to father the royal heirs, it only stood to reason that she would perform the role of mother in name only. Scandal mongers

³⁷ *The Royal Dildo*, in Thomas, p. 201.

³⁸ *L'Autrichienne en Goguettes, or L'Orgie Royale [The Austrian Woman on the RAMPAGE, or the Royal Orgy]* (n. pub, 1789), in Thomas, pp 203-215 (p. 205-6).

³⁹ *The Aristocratic League*, in Thomas p. 231.

⁴⁰ *Bord ... R [The Royal Bordello, Followed by a Secret Interview Between teh Queen and Cardinal de Rohan After his Entry into the Estates General]* (n.pub. details), in Thomas, pp. 217-227 (p. 225).

⁴¹ *The Royal Bordello*, in Thomas, p. 225, 227.

appeared to point a finger straight into her face, accusing her of treating her children with an inhuman coldness:

Perverted mother, you abandon your son on his death bed! Oh, you know only too well who pushed him into the grave! His last words denounce you. He said to his governor, "Take this lock of my hair to my mother, so that she will remember me" ... Answer, cruel mother! ... He is dead!⁴²

The writer's direct address is sandwiched here with the quoted speech of the deceased dauphin, thereby urging readers to join with him in the condemnation of a pitiless mother and a cruel queen.

Crucially, propagandists strategically connected the queen's heartlessness, debauchery and licentiousness to the political affairs of France. The same honest, hardworking people whose labour supported the queen's orgies and funded her political scheming, were also the unwitting victims of those schemes. The queen used her money, her influence and her sex to buy and sell favours, to corrupt magistrates and to have 'the Tribunals shut down to deprive us of distributive justice'.⁴³ The queen sought not only to turn France into a den of iniquity, but to thwart any attempts at political reform. If the queen had her way, one pamphleteer declared, she would destroy the nation's families by starving the people or by grinding 'all our grains ... with poison, forcing us to buy death while overcharging us for life'.⁴⁴

The idea that the state of the royal household and the state of the nation were inseparably connected underwrote virtually all of this type of pornographic propaganda. The most private domestic scenes in the royal home were depicted as sites of the most underhanded political machinations and opened to public view. One pamphlet, for instance, presents a domestic tableau, in which the king relaxes after his

⁴² *Description of the Menagerie*, in Thomas, p. 245.

⁴³ *The Aristocratic League*, in Thomas, p. 231.

⁴⁴ *The Aristocratic League*, in Thomas, p. 232.

meal: although he accepts a glass of champagne from the queen, he declines a second one. He wishes, he explains, to be alert in council the next day (even though 'there's no point in wanting to do the right thing; those gentlemen always manage to get me to do something stupid').⁴⁵ 'Still,' the queen replies, urging more champagne, 'that's good enough for *the frogs of the Seine*' and together they chant:

Let's laugh, let's revel,
Make use of our power;
Squander all the money
Of our good Parisians.⁴⁶

When the drunken Louis passes out, the 'Mother of Vice,' the 'whorish queen' quite literally has sex on her somnolent husband's back with both Mme de Polignac and her brother-in-law, the comte d'Artois (who appreciates an 'obliging brother, and a drunken scepter').⁴⁷ The queen, the message is, performed the same acts on the backs of the French people.

No longer protected by privilege, scandal freely entered the royal family's private domestic space and penetrated into the darkest corners of their lives. The victims of scandal become the creation and property of those impudent propagandists who wrote about them. The queen of the pamphlets *became* the real queen: anti-monarchists gained control of her image and fashioned her into a creature that unquestionably *deserved* execution. This progression from pamphlet to scaffold can be traced through a three part progression: first, 'calumny, the monster with a thousand eyes and a thousand voices,' as Chantal Thomas puts it, shaped the queen into a strange, monstrous, threatening, debauched effigy of herself.⁴⁸ That effigy was then

⁴⁵ *The Austrian Woman on the RAMPAGE*, in Thomas, p. 208.

⁴⁶ *The Austrian Woman*, in Thomas, p. 209.

⁴⁷ *The Austrian Woman*, in Thomas, p. 209.

⁴⁸ Thomas, p. 46.

used to provide revolutionary fervour with a powerful impetus, by giving it an object upon which to focus its discontent, and finally, once scandal had become accepted as fact, the agents of the revolution could then use such facts as evidence against the queen at an official trial. In such a way, propagandists made 'the hatred directed at the effigy *effective*'.⁴⁹ Scandal demolished those 'reflexions' or customary observance of royal deference that, as Burke argued, kept the anti-monarchical 'appetite within some bounds of temperance'; the stories of royal debauchery had unleashed a voracious appetite, rendering the king and queen an even more 'delicious repast' for those 'sort of palates' that already had a taste for 'the sufferings of monarchs'.⁵⁰

The sense of animosity, even fury, which French pamphleteers directed at Marie-Antoinette also informed British political writing. The philosopher, scientist and dissenting minister Joseph Priestley, for instance, scoffed at Burke's apostrophe to the queen. "'Ten thousand swords,'" he wrote, would not "leap from their scabbards" in defence of 'a Medusa' whose unspeakable crimes had tumbled her 'from the height of popularity, to the abhorrence and contempt into which ... she is sunk'.⁵¹ Thomas Christie also ridiculed Burke's attempt to elevate the French queen above the realm of the merely mortal: he viewed her, a woman who had allegedly acted so disgracefully toward her husband, 'in a very different light'.⁵² For many British radicals, the scandalous private life of Marie-Antoinette demonstrated the need to restrict female political participation, in both the public sphere and behind the scenes. 'How,' Christie asked his readers, 'could there be morals in a country ... where women are nominally

⁴⁹ Thomas, p. 54, italics mine.

⁵⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 165.

⁵¹ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France*, third ed. (Birmingham: Thomas Pearson, 1791) in Claeys, vol. 2, pp. 316-385 (p. 238).

⁵² Burke, *Reflections*, p. 169; Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 245.

excluded from the Throne, and yet the country was really governed by a set of prostitutes?’⁵³ Female political influence, he argued, was a symptom of the dark, superstition-filled days of medieval France: the age of chivalry, and its culture of female adoration had been deplorable, for ‘every individual was constantly at the mercy ... of his mistress’.⁵⁴

For this reason, Christie approved strongly of France’s decision to forever exclude females from the throne. The National Convention had shown ‘superior wisdom’ and had known ‘where to draw the line’ when it reduced the queen’s ability to ‘endanger the welfare of society’.⁵⁵ The French nation should be grateful to the convention for confining women to ‘their natural sphere’ since ‘neither their frame nor their minds’ were capable of bearing the ‘weight of a sceptre, which they scarcely ever sway but in appearance.’⁵⁶ At the same time that Christie accuses women of being manipulative, influential schemers, he charges them with being weak and ineffectual, or in his words, of being incapable of swaying the sceptre—a symbol of male potency and a reminder of women’s lack. Women were thus caught in a double-bind, but whether characterized as competent schemers or ineffectual weaklings, the conclusion was the same: political power rendered women monstrous and unnatural. Marie-Antoinette had demonstrated that.

The decision to confine the roles of female monarchs to the private sphere was not only an immense benefit to the nation, but was also a boon to women themselves. Under the new constitution, the French queen was no longer ‘known as a public character,’ but this was a life that ‘Charlotte of England, to her immortal honour, has

⁵³ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p.205.

⁵⁴ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 204.

⁵⁵ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 245.

⁵⁶ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 245.

voluntarily chosen'.⁵⁷ Not for the first time or the last, Charlotte is held up as the exemplar of female domesticity. Her 'choice' to shun public life and to devote herself to her husband and children kept her largely beyond the reach of any serious calumny. Her life demonstrated, according to Christie, that women were the most content in the bosom of their family, safe within the confines of their home. It was ridiculous, he argued, adopting Burke's inflated prose style, that 'Maria Antonietta -- the daughter, sister, and wife of kings -- the paragon of beauty, brilliant as the morning star' should be 'doomed for ever to be a -- a good mother, and a faithful wife!'⁵⁸ Though it might make 'Mr. Burke ... very angry, that a Queen should be thought *only a woman*,' Christie reasoned, it was 'an undeniable truth, that the real happiness of a Queen, is exactly of the same kind, as that which constitutes the felicity of the humblest female of her dominions'.⁵⁹

Christie's discourse demonstrates how the stories surrounding Marie-Antoinette's private life raised questions not only with regard to who she 'ought to be' or 'how she ought to act,' as Dena Goodman points out, but also about 'what precisely it meant to be a woman and a queen'.⁶⁰ For many observers, Marie Antoinette confirmed that all women were innately domestic beings whose inherent untrustworthiness in the political realm meant that they must be excluded from it. The queen's alleged crimes justified support for the masculinist politics of revolutionary France, which as Joan Landes has explained, developed out of 'the ideology of

⁵⁷ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 245.

⁵⁸ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 253.

⁵⁹ Christie, in Claeys, vol 1, p. 246.

⁶⁰ Dena Goodman, 'Introduction,' *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, ed. Dena Goodman, pp.1-15 (p. 1).

republican motherhood' articulated so influentially by Rousseau.⁶¹ Women's 'chaste power,' Rousseau had recommended, should be 'exercised solely in conjugal union' and should 'make[] itself felt only for the glory of the state and public happiness'.⁶² He had urged his countrywomen to be what nature supposedly intended them to be; that is, 'chaste guardians of morals' who were entitled to 'the rights of the heart ... for the benefit of duty and virtue'.⁶³ In his reading of Rousseau's influence on revolutionary politics, Keith Michael Baker makes the point that one of the reasons given for women's removal from the public sphere in revolutionary France was that they had not only failed to fulfil their intended roles as moral guardians, but that they were largely responsible for the social misdemeanours and cultural failings of the Old Regime aristocracy. In particular, women were linked to that type of 'public ostentation' that was 'emblematic of all that was theatrical, artificial, and corrupt'.⁶⁴

III

In less than two years, the queen would again be the object of scrutiny, but this time she would be on trial for her life. Although the circumstances were different, both the legislative assembly of 1791 and the revolutionary tribunal of 1793 shared some of the same aims and administered the same moral lessons. In fact, as Adriana Craciun has remarked, the queen's trial 'was staged virtually as a morality play on the evil impact of women on the body politic' and a spectacle of the 'institutionalized

⁶¹ Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1988), p. 129; see pp. 129-138.

⁶² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses* (1750, 1754), trans. Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters (New York: St Martin's, 1964), p. 89; in Landes, p. 68; see also Baker, p. 199.

⁶³ Rousseau, in Landes, p. 69; see also Keith Michael Baker, 'Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas,' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, pp. 181-211, p. 199.

⁶⁴ Baker, p. 199.

elimination of women from the public political sphere'.⁶⁵ Since one of the aims of the republican government was to combat vice and to rid the nation of adulterous wives and bad mothers, the vice-ridden Marie-Antoinette had to be completely removed from the body politic.

At her trial, the queen was charged with having committed crimes against the state, against her children, and against nature itself. Scores of testimonials provide varying recollections of the words spoken against her, but in all versions, the queen is accused of committing the most shocking crime possible for a woman and a mother. According to 'Adolphus,' the author of the *Biographical Memoirs of the French Revolution*, the tribunal had declared:

"That the widow Capet, in every respect immoral ... is so dissolute and so familiar with all crimes, that forgetting her quality of mother and the limits proscribed by the law of nature, she has not hesitated to prostitute herself with Louis Charles Capet her son".⁶⁶

The queen is so debauched—'so familiar with all crimes'—that she appears hardly human. She is a creature who is governed neither by the laws of the nation nor of human nature. More damning still, stories circulated that her son had himself testified that his mother had 'committed indecencies with him, the very idea and name of which strike the soul with horror!'"⁶⁷

The role of the popular press in bringing the queen to trial should not be underestimated: the scandalous stories that had been circulating in the years before the trial and during it ensured that she *could* be accused of such a crime as incest. Scandal played a very large part in Marie-Antoinette's removal from the throne, and it went far

⁶⁵ Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 10.

⁶⁶ 'Adolphus,' *Biographical Memoirs of the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, Jun. & W. Davies, 1799), vol. 1, pp. 149-50.

⁶⁷ 'Adolphus,' p. 150.

toward relieving the people of their residual qualms about killing a queen. In a pseudo-confession, her alleged *Testament*, a proud Marie-Antoinette is fashioned into her own accuser, made to admit her guilt publicly, thereby legitimating the tribunal's decision to put her to death.⁶⁸ She was used to administer a salutary moral lesson to other bad mothers and false wives. In such a way, the tribunal had 'set women a good example, which will no doubt not be lost on them,' one 1793 edition of the *Moniteur universel* proclaimed in triumph, 'for justice, ever impartial, always combines severity with a lesson.'⁶⁹ Not just public figures, but many, many regular citizens would become the recipients of similarly severe lessons.

III

The joyful hopefulness of Helen Maria Williams' earlier account of mothers offering their children to soldiers in a gesture of support for the revolutionary cause, was long dissipated by the time Marie-Antoinette was tried, found guilty and guillotined in 1793. The scenes Williams recorded in that year contrasted sharply with those she witnessed at the Fête de la Federation in 1790. She describes how parents still offered their children up to the state, but their reasons for doing so were very different. The city of Paris, that centre of the revolutionary dream, had turned on her inhabitants, and seemed to be devouring each of them, one by one. Her prisons swallowed scores of men and women who were expelled only to be sent to the steely mouths of guillotines. It was as if, one mother sent to execution declared, the republicans wished 'to leave in

⁶⁸ *Testament de Marie-Antoinette, Veuve Capet* [*The Testament of Marie-Antoinette, the Widow Capet*] (1793? n. pub.) in Thomas, pp. 249-255.

⁶⁹ *Moniteur universel*, 19 November 1793, in Thomas, p. 62.

this unhappy land ... none but orphans and monsters'.⁷⁰ Williams, one of the few to be liberated from prison, returned to the streets of Paris, to find that the city of hope had become a city of orphans. Children were abandoned, left to roam the decimated streets. 'Along the silent and deserted streets of the faubourg Germain,' she writes, 'I saw inscribed in broad letters upon the gate of every hotel, "propriété nationale," while the orphans whose fathers and mothers have perished on the scaffold, and who live upon the alms of charity, pass in silence by the dwellings which are their rightful inheritance'.⁷¹ Paris had become an unwilling and incapable mother to a contingent of unwanted children and she had locked them out in the cold.

For all her hopefulness and steadfast belief in the principles and aims of the revolution, things had undeniably changed since she had written her first letter from France. Regret and disappointment infuse Williams' prose as she wistfully looks back to 'those civic festivals, which hailed the first glories of the sublime federation of an assembled nation ... and exulted in its new-born freedom!'⁷² In just a few years this 'newborn' freedom had undeniably altered its form, had become drained of its youthful promise, so that it was twisted into a gross distortion of itself. 'What was become of those moments when no emotions were pre-ordained, no feelings measured out, no acclamations decreed;' she lamented, 'but when every bosom beat high with admiration, when every heart throbbed with enthusiastic transport, when every eye

⁷⁰ Louis Du Broca, *Interesting Anecdotes of the Heroic Conduct of Women, Previous To, and During the French Revolution*, 1st Amer. ed. (Baltimore: Fryer & Clark, 1804) p. 15.

⁷¹ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, From the Thirty-first of May 1793, till the Twenty-eight of July 1794 and of the Scenes which have passed in the prisons of Paris*, 4 vols. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), vol. 1, p. 177-78.

⁷² Williams, *Letters 1793*, vol. 2, p. 87.

melted into tears, and the vault of heaven resounded the bursts of unpremeditated applause!’⁷³

In a language steeped in sentiment, Williams mourns the loss of the genuine emotion that distinguished the early days of the revolution, for in France there were no more hearts throbbing with collective patriotism or eyes overflowing with the tears of warm communal sentiment. The nation had proven to be a strict and tyrannous parent who had made impossible demands of its children, crushing their affectionate devotion in their very chests. In orchestrated ceremonies, state agents had to force a show of loyalty from citizens who felt nothing but fear and disappointment. These ‘spectacles,’ as Angela Keane has noted, were ‘mere simulacra’ of the joyous, familial celebrations of the early Revolution.⁷⁴ Co-ordinating the show, Jacques Louis David pre-arranged the precise moments that ‘mothers are to embrace their daughters ... fathers to clasp their sons ... the old are to bless the young ... the young to kneel upon the old’.⁷⁵ Long gone were the demonstrations of spontaneous familial cohesiveness; they had been replaced by forced festivals that made ‘a mockery of private affections by demanding their performance’.⁷⁶

To British observers, the cold hollowness that characterized such displays contrasted sharply with the warmth Britons felt towards their own families and the affectionate attachment they felt toward king and queen, constitution and custom. The reams of eyewitness accounts from France which informed Britons of just how coldly the republican government meted out its justice were converted into propaganda

⁷³ Williams, *Letters 1793*, vol. 2, p. 87.

⁷⁴ Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 68.

⁷⁵ Williams, *Letters 1793*, vol. 2, p. 86.

⁷⁶ Keane, p. 68.

that contrasted republican heartlessness with loyal patriotism. This contrast seemed to be most vividly demonstrated by the execution of Louis XVI, an event that, as John Barrell has detailed at some length, provided British anti-revolutionaries with a veritable treasure trove of propagandistic material. There is not the room here to offer any detailed discussion of the countless tokens, engravings, potteries, plays, poems, pamphlets and newspaper accounts that re-cast the king as the protagonist of a 'domestic tragedy,' to borrow Barrell's phrase; and others have undertaken this task admirably.⁷⁷ However, four key features of the loyalist appropriation of Louis are crucial to our understanding of the ways in which loyalist propaganda appropriated the private for political purposes, and so need to be outlined here. First, the guillotining of the French king allowed loyalists to establish a clear contrast between the humanity of loyal Britons and the bloodthirstiness of her republican neighbours: such a violent act revealed, one clergyman declared, 'the different characters of the two rival nations, much to the advantage of our own. Britain mourns the premature fall of a foreign prince ... France, on the contrary, revels in the blood of her native prince ... who, under Providence, conferred upon her that very liberty which she ... is abusing shamefully'.⁷⁸

Second, loyalist propaganda transformed Louis from a weak, ineffectual character to a sympathetic father, a gentle, loving husband, a compassionate brother. As Barrell shows, in verbal and visual accounts of the 'last interview' with his family, Louis was represented in a public capacity, 'as a king, a public hero or martyr,' but that more importantly, he was represented as 'a private individual whose chief concerns as

⁷⁷ See Barrell, Chapter 1, 'The Last Interview,' in *Imagining*, pp. 49-86; see David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution* (London: British Museum Publications, 1989).

⁷⁸ Henry Hunter, *A Sermon, preached Feb. 3, 1793, at the Scots Church, London Wall, on Occasion of the Trial, Condemnation, and Execution of Louis XVI. late King of France* (London: the author, 1793), pp. 14-15, in Barrell, *Imagining*, p.74.

he contemplated his end were such as those who thought of themselves as ordinary people would expect to feel'.⁷⁹ British writers appealed to reader's sensibilities in their descriptions of how, at the king's last 'affecting' meeting with his family, 'the Princess Royal fainted in his arms—the Queen, Madame, and the dauphin hung round him, all drowned in tears—the King sunk under the weight of his affliction and wept much'.⁸⁰ These representations of the king's family tragedy—and this is the third point—were then employed to polarize British public opinion in support of king and country and against anything that smacked of French republicanism. Once the Bourbons were 'rehabilitated *as a family*,' Barrell observes, their alleged 'domestic virtues could be mobilized' to reveal how destructive were 'republican attitudes to the natural family affections'.⁸¹ At the same time, this sympathy for the fallen French father-king could be channelled into a similar protective affection for George III, a king renowned for his own fatherliness and domestic nature. Armed with shocking images of the inhuman destruction of Louis's family, propagandists encouraged Britons to revile those who might be willing to commit similar crimes on English soil.

The fourth key feature of loyalist propaganda surrounding Louis's death is the degree to which the mantle of personal morality he had acquired was a reflection of what were typically defined as British virtues. Early in 1795, a journalist for the virulently anti-revolutionary newspaper the *Tomahawk*, celebrated Louis for his moral probity and his keen sensibility. He argued that republican scandalmongers had assumed that it would be just as easy to degrade the king's reputation, by portraying him as a 'beastly and 'blind husband' as it had been to slander the innocent Marie-

⁷⁹ Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 62.

⁸⁰ *Murder of Lewis XVI. King of France* (no pub. details, [1793]), author's own.

⁸¹ Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 55; see also John Brewer, 'This Monstrous Tragi-Comic Scene: British Reactions to the French Revolution,' in Bindman, pp.11-25 (pp.23-4).

Antoinette.⁸² However, 'as Louis XVI was a virtuous and inoffensive man, it was found impossible to attack his moral character':

While the lives of most Kings afford but a chequered piece of intermixed virtues and vices—a Mosaic work of black and white, good and bad—that of LOUIS presents but one tissue of virtue, one consistent series of tenderness, beneficence, good-nature and mercy. He was a man whose *private life* would, in the days of superstition, have consecrated him a saint, and whose virtues and unmerited fate would have entitled him to the Crown of a Martyr'.⁸³

The king's worthiness rested on his private life. That he could be cast, after death, as a virtuous man who had acted toward his family and his subjects with 'tenderness and good-nature' might yet prove to be 'a fatal blow to the cause of Republicanism,' for with the world as witness, they had sent a completely innocent, virtuous man to the scaffold.⁸⁴

The Tomahawk also connected Louis' death with an alleged plot against the fatherly George III. In a November 1795 issue, it claimed that 'the mode practised with success against the king and men of property in France, was so successful, that the same was considered as fit for succeeding against the King and people of England'.⁸⁵ Almost seamlessly, the journalist goes on to interweave Louis' plight with a defence of (and a subtle warning to) the notoriously dissipated and hugely unpopular Prince of Wales:

The assassination of a king is useless to regicides, if his successor bears as good a claim to public esteem as himself; and it is upon this plan that they have always gone. The abuse, levelled at the Heir Apparent of this country, is a part of the plan of our regicides. And we own, that we blush for some men, who certainly were both the companions and advisers of this Royal Highness.⁸⁶

⁸² *Tomahawk*, 26 January 1795.

⁸³ italics mine, *Tomahawk*, 26 January 1795.

⁸⁴ italics mine, *Tomahawk*, 26 January 1795.

⁸⁵ *Tomahawk*, 5 November 1795.

⁸⁶ *Tomahawk*, 5 November 1795.

Not only does this passage raise the ugly possibility that the crime of regicide might occur on British shores, it also shifts blame for the prince's irresponsibility to his dissolute acquaintances, the Whigs. It not only obliquely associates whiggism and reform with regicide, it also suggests that members of the British public who had grumbled against the prince had somehow contributed to making him vulnerable to the machinations of 'our regicides'.

Even the reputation of that most reviled member of the royal family, Marie-Antoinette, underwent intense rehabilitation immediately following her death. The Scottish loyalist Thomas Hardy (not the LCS radical) appended the *Testament of Louis XVI* to his 1793 anti-Paine pamphlet *The Patriot*. In this, his final address, Louis commends to God those who were related to him by 'the ties of blood,' particularly, 'my wife, my children, and my sister, who for a long time have been suffering with me'.⁸⁷ He expresses his deep faith in the queen: 'I recommend my children to my wife,' he writes, for 'of her maternal tenderness for them I have never doubted'; in turn, he trusts that his children will 'maintain mutual union, submission, and obedience to their mother'.⁸⁸ This powerful testament to the queen's domestic virtues, given freely by the person most intimately connected to her, becomes even more compelling when Louis takes responsibility for her own impending death sentence. He publicly asks his wife to forgive him for 'all the evils' that she suffered during their union and assures her that he can 'remember nothing against her, if she thinks she has any thing to reproach herself with'.⁸⁹ This type of first-hand testimony pushes, or attempts to

⁸⁷ Thomas Hardy, *The Patriot, Addressed to the People, on the Present State of Affairs in Britain and in France*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: n. pub., 1793), p. 76.

⁸⁸ Hardy, *Patriot*, p. 76-77.

⁸⁹ Hardy, *Patriot*, p. 77.

push, those scandalous details of the queen's private life from public memory and to replace them with images of her as a loving mother and devoted wife.

The queen's trial offered another golden opportunity for British loyalists. They reported how, with dignity and forbearance, she had presented herself before the bloodthirsty tribunal. According to the memoirist 'Adolphus,' the queen had responded to the charge of incest with a statement that was both stately and indignant: "I remain silent," she had simply stated, "because nature holds all such crimes in abhorrence."⁹⁰ She then turned 'with an animated air to the people' assembled in the courtroom, and addressed them: "I appeal to all mothers who are present in this auditory, -- is such a thing possible?"⁹¹ In Helen Maria Williams' version of the event, the queen had said: "I appeal to the conscience and feelings of every mother present, to declare if there be one amongst them who does not shudder at the idea of such horrors."⁹² In both these accounts, as in others, the queen speaks as a mother to a nation of mothers. If she could commit such a crime, so too, could *all* mothers. As for the other charges, including the unlawful flight to Varennes, she was, she claimed "only the wife of Louis XVI," and as such, "it was requisite ... to conform to his will."⁹³ This suggests that the revolutionary tribunal was punishing her for demonstrating wifely devotion—a devotion that had made it equally impossible for her to have committed any crimes against her husband's nation: "I loved my husband too much to dilapidate the treasure of his country."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Adolphus, p. 150.

⁹¹ Adolphus, p. 150.

⁹² Williams, *Letters 1793*, vol. 1, p. 154.

⁹³ Adolphus, p. 151.

⁹⁴ Adolphus, p. 153-4.

The defence of the king's sister, the Princess Elizabeth, also hinged on the fact that she had simply and dutifully fulfilled the roles assigned her. She presented herself as a devoted sister whose actions had been prescribed by 'her unshaken friendship for her brother, and her piety and resignation to God'.⁹⁵ She had fled to Varennes with the king only because 'every consideration led me to follow my brother; and I made it a duty then, as I should have done on any other occasion'.⁹⁶ She also emphasized her maternal role as the caretaker of the dauphin, the young Louis Capet, but as was the case with her sister-in-law, the tribunal was not moved by the appeal to maternal devotion. By acting the mother to the dauphin, she had threatened the state's parental role. She had 'fed the little Capet with hopes of succeeding to his father's throne,' and in doing so had proved herself a monstrous mother figure who threatened the nation by attempting to fashion the child into another tyrant.⁹⁷ The tribunal charged Elizabeth and Antoinette with a different sort of infanticide: they were bloody, intrusive mothers who sought 'to exterminate and annihilate liberty in its birth'.⁹⁸

British loyalists, however, celebrated such appeals to motherhood and familial duty. In the *Last Testament* appended to Hardy's pamphlet against Paine, Louis expressed how content he was to know that his children were in Elizabeth's affectionate care; he hoped that she would continue as their 'second mother' whether or not they should 'have the misfortune to lose their own'.⁹⁹ Similarly, in his *Biographical Anecdotes of the Heroic Women of the French Revolution*, Louis du Broca described for his British and American audiences how Elizabeth had never wavered in her

⁹⁵ Du Broca, p. 156; for the 'Trial of Madame Elizabeth, as published at the Time by the Tribunal,' see Williams, *Letters 1793*, vol. 2, pp. 52-63.

⁹⁶ Du Broca, p. 156.

⁹⁷ Du Broca, p. 159.

⁹⁸ p. 157, check.

⁹⁹ Hardy, *Patriot*, p. 77.

devotion to her brother and his family. On one occasion, when a mob had gathered outside the Temple demanding the head of the queen, she willingly sacrificed herself, without hesitation, by saying "I am the Queen".¹⁰⁰ Instructing her horrified attendants to keep silent about the truth of her identity, she asked simply, 'is it not better they should shed my blood than that of my sister?'¹⁰¹ In prison, she had acted, du Broca recounts, as the unselfish 'guardian angel' and the affectionate consoler of her family.¹⁰² Even at her death, the princess displayed the same feminine resignation and purity of sentiment: when, as she made her way to the guillotine, her handkerchief slipped from the front of her dress, she demanded 'in the name of modesty,' that the executioner cover her bosom.¹⁰³ Such actions, propagandists maintained, must dispel any remnants of the scandal that had circulated in pre-Revolutionary France. As for any insinuation that she had 'yielded in secret to the licentious disorders of the court,' Du Broca had only dismissive words. 'Whatever imputations the breath of calumny may have spread upon her fame,' he insisted, 'her worst enemies must unite to admire and praise the benevolence of her heart, and her tender and generous affection for Louis XVI her brother, and his unhappy queen'.¹⁰⁴ What mattered was that, when the republicans threatened her life, Elizabeth refused to leave the side of her family; though she died childless and husbandless, she had displayed the sacrificial instincts of a mother and a wife.¹⁰⁵

The fashioning of the Bourbons into exemplars of domestic felicity allowed propagandists to promote both a political and moral programme, for in these personal

¹⁰⁰ Du Broca, p. 103?

¹⁰¹ Du Broca, p. 103.

¹⁰² Du Broca, p. 103.

¹⁰³ Du Broca, p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ Du Broca, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Du Broca, p. 102.

anecdotes, patriotism is linked not just to political conservatism, but also to personal probity, to filial and marital fidelity. Du Broca's commentary on Elizabeth's character and her behaviour is striking in this regard. 'No distinctions of party,' he insisted, could 'detract from the grandeur of [the] sentiments' Elizabeth had displayed in private life.¹⁰⁶ The message is clear: if Britons felt affection for their own families, fear for their safety; if they admired goodness and sympathized with those less fortunate, then they must feel compassion for the persecuted Elizabeth. 'Every heart that is accessible to the feelings of humanity must applaud her heroism, and regret that this courageous [sic], tender, and celebrated woman, was not born to a happier fate'.¹⁰⁷

IV

The glowing images of the rehabilitated French royal family contrasted sharply with representations of their republican tormenters. Perhaps no image was more effective at representing the profound opposition between cruel republicans and their innocent victims than that of the cannibal. As we have seen above, Tom Paine had used the motif of the unnatural, monstrous cannibal-parent to denote how, under the existing laws of primogeniture, the second and third born children of the landed classes were simply 'begotten to be devoured'.¹⁰⁸ Almost immediately, he received at least one heated response that accused him of indulging in deception by exaggeration with such a ridiculous, fantastical image: how could a parent have consumed the child,' an outraged pamphleteer asked, 'if he still lived?'¹⁰⁹ It was the sign of things to come, for very quickly the cannibal became a fiercely contested image and an incredibly powerful tool

¹⁰⁶ Du Broca, p.103.

¹⁰⁷ Du Broca, p. 103.

¹⁰⁸ Tom Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁹ *A Rod in Brine, or a Tickler for Tom Paine, in Answer to his First Pamphlet, Entitled the Rights of Man* (Canterbury, n. pub., 1792) *Political Writings*, vol. 6 pp. 2-37 (p. 13).

in the public opinion game of the 1790s. Radical and anti-revolutionary caricaturists, writers and orators appropriated, transformed, and reformed the cannibal to suit their purposes. For reformers, it was an image that captured the self-consuming quality of the existing structure of public and private life. Whilst kings and their politicians devoured the resources of the nation, the wealthy feasted on the entrails of the poor; in the home, despotic fathers and insensible mothers preyed on the very bowels of their own young. Under the existing laws and customs of unreformed Europe, family members willingly consumed their kin to satisfy a hunger for financial and social gain.

After 1792, however, it would be fair to say that the cannibal became the property of anti-revolutionaries. By this time, events in France indicated clearly that the state—with its phalanx of cannibalizing deputies—had become a voracious, monstrous parent that quite literally seemed determined to consume each one of its numerous children. Indeed, on 13 March 1793, the Girondin leader Pierre Vergniaud stood in the assembly and compared the course of the revolution to the mythical Saturn's consumption of his own children. He articulated what would become a catchphrase which encapsulated the state of affairs in France: 'The revolution devours its own children'.¹¹⁰ With frightening immediacy, the cannibal recalled, as Ronald Paulson notes, not only the image of 'the king killed and supplanted' but also the way in which 'the generations of the revolution' seemed to be 'succeed[ing] each other with frightening rapidity'.¹¹¹

As the ultimate crime against nature, cannibalism captured, for British loyalists, the unbounded destructiveness of republican fervour. Indeed, the image is everywhere:

¹¹⁰ Qtd. in Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1983), p. 24.

¹¹¹ Paulson, p. 24.

the revolutionary tribunal was comprised, Du Broca exclaimed, of 'beasts of prey, fed with human blood!'¹¹² 'We have seen the time,' William Cobbett declared, 'when man was becoming the *food* of man'.¹¹³ 'Blood was the food of the republican cannibals,' wrote the loyalist Thomas Hardy.¹¹⁴ France was ruled by 'bloody minded barbarians' who were 'worse than the Antipoads that kill'd and chop'd our brave sailor Captain Cook to pieces,' John Nott told a Birmingham audience, 'they cut out Gentlemen's hearts, and squeezed the blood into wine and drank it'.¹¹⁵ 'The practice of *cannibalism*,' Edmund Burke exclaimed in his signature style, had spread throughout France, so that the republicans were 'devouring, as a nutriment of their ferocity, some part of the bodies of those they have murdered': they not only drank 'the blood of their victims,' but also forced 'the victims themselves to drink the blood of their kindred slaughtered before their faces'.¹¹⁶ During the September massacres, Du Broca recalled, the 'sight of blood continually flowing seemed only to increase the rage of the assassins' so that they literally forced their victims to join in their monstrous feast of blood.¹¹⁷ When one young girl flung herself between the republican's sword and her aged father, 'one of the monsters' promised to save her father's life if she drank a glass of another victim's blood.¹¹⁸ That 'the French my Friends have been known to drink the warm-Life Blood

¹¹² Du Broca, p. 136.

¹¹³ William Cobbett, *The Bloody Buoy, Thrown out as a Warning to the Political Pilots of America; or, a Faithful Relation of a Multitude of Acts of Horrid Barbarity, such as the Eye never Witnessed, the Tongue never Expressed, or the Imagination Conceived, until the Commencement of the French Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: n. pub., 1823), p. 36. *The Bloody Buoy* had been published in London by J. Wright in 1797.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Hardy, *Patriot*, p. 45.

¹¹⁵ John Nott, Button-Maker, *An Appeal to the Residents of Birmingham: Designed as an Answer to Job Nott, Buckle-maker* ([Birmingham], n. pub. 1792), in Brewer, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Edmund Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, from *Two Letters ... on the proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France* (London: F. C. Rivington, 1796), *The Impact of the French Revolution*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 302-315, p. 308.

¹¹⁷ Du Broca, p. 68.

¹¹⁸ Du Broca, p. 68.

of those they have murdered,' one Suffolk loyalist wrote to his association leader in December 1792, was a 'shocking idea to a tender-hearted Englishman'.¹¹⁹

In *A Bone to Gnaw for Democrats* (1795) and in *The Bloody Buoy* (1797), Cobbett described how republicans had turned France into a 'theatre of carnage' with their 'menaces and cannibal gesticulations'.¹²⁰ Referring to the various eyewitness accounts then circulating in France and England, Cobbett paraphrased the scenes of devastation, as district by district, family by family, the population fell prey to the revolutionary appetite. In Nantes, the 'subaltern cut-throats' under the command of the 'assassin-general' Carrier, had taken an oath 'to spare neither *parents* nor *relations*; to sacrifice ... even friendship itself; and to acknowledge for parents, brothers and friends, nobody but the patriots, the ardent defenders of the republic'.¹²¹ Loyalist pamphleteer Thomas Moore described for his readers how 'innocent children were butchered in the presence of their unfortunate and distracted parents—and the knife, reeking with the blood of a beloved child, was transferred in to the breast of its tender mother, rendered insensible by he agonizing grief'.¹²² It was as if the republicans had declared war on the family, on decency, on morality, on human sympathy. The revolutionary committees were so merciless that 'neither sex nor age had any weight with them; above two hundred women, thirty of whom had children at their breast, whom conjugal love had led to follow their husbands; more than fifty old men, whom filial piety had snatched from the assassin's stab, were all most savagely butchered'.¹²³

¹¹⁹ au. = 'G. X' (Bungary, Suffolk, 20 December 1792) *Reeves Papers*, BL, MSS 16, 919, vol. 1, p. 193.

¹²⁰ William Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats; or, Observations on a Pamphlet entitled 'The Political Progress of Britain'*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia; Thomas Bradford, 1795) *William Cobbett: Selected Writings*, ed. Leonora Natrass, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998) vol. 1, p. 136.

¹²¹ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 43.

¹²² Thomas Moore, *An Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain on the Dangerous and Destructive Tendency of the French System of Liberty and Equality, with an Historical Account of the French Revolution, the Imprisonment and*

Not only did the state destroy families; sons and daughters publicly accused their own parents before the Tribunal and sent them to the guillotine. In Nantes, one bloodthirsty assassin had bragged that he had given a brother who ‘threw himself into my arms ... up to the guillotine’ because he ‘was an enemy of the Republic’.¹²⁴ In another case, Cobbett recalled how, at a meeting of the Paris Jacobin Club, a ‘monster’ named Philippe, had mounted the dais and declared that anyone

who preferred the ties of blood and of nature to that of patriotic duty, was an aristocrat worthy of death; and, to convince them of the purity and sincerity of his own principles, he ... held up by the gray hair, the bloody and shrivelled heads of his father and mother, “which I have cut off,” said the impious wretch, “because they obstinately persisted in not hearing mass from a constitutional priest.”¹²⁵

At least one edition of the *Bloody Buoy* included a frontispiece illustration of this diabolical scene, providing readers with a visual record of crimes otherwise unimaginable (Pl. 1). The image portrays the fratricidal and matricidal Phillipe, clutching the severed heads of his parents, his liberty cap settled into the shape of a distorted skull, his eyes bulging out ferociously, staring unblinkingly, unfeelingly at his father. In a sexually violent gesture, he grasps his mother’s hair in a closed fist in front of his torso, a further sign of his debasement of her.

It was this sexualized aspect of the republican appetite that inspired Burke to expand the definition of ‘cannibalism’ to include those ‘nameless, unmanly, and abominable insults’ that were perpetrated ‘on the bodies of those they slaughter’.¹²⁶

Sufferings of the Royal Family, and the Deliberate Murder of the Unfortunate King of France (York: G. Peacock, 1793), in Claeys, vol. 8, pp. 28-48 (p. 35).

¹²³ Cobbett, *Bone* p. 132.

¹²⁴ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 107. This anecdote was first given as eyewitness testimony at the trial of Carrier and his henchman and recorded in the *Procès-Criminel des Membres du Comité Revolutionnaire de Nantes*.

¹²⁵ Cobbett, *BB* p. 24.

¹²⁶ Burke, *Regicide*, in Hampsher-Monk, p. 308.



Pl. 1. Artist unknown, Frontispiece to William Cobbett's *The Bloody Buoy* (Philadelphia: P.M. Davis, 1823).

For memoirists, this frightening combination of sex and violence truly differentiated revolutionaries from civilized peoples. Cobbett related how one member of the popular revolutionary society made female prisoners kiss his collection of the ears of dead men. He also carried with him 'a handful of private parts, which he had cut from

the men whom he had murdered; and these he showed to the women, whenever an occasion offered'.¹²⁷ Using slightly more oblique language, Cobbett describes how General Duquesnoy, 'the butcher of the Convention' slaughtered nursing infants and when he had not the stamina to rape all their mothers, 'he had the operation performed another way. This he called *electrifying*'.¹²⁸ When one woman in a queue with other pregnant women waiting to be drowned 'with the fruit of their conjugal love' went into labour, 'the horrid villains tore the child from her body, stuck it on the point of a bayonet, and thus carried it to the river'.¹²⁹

Memoirists underscored how this sexualized violence recognized no bounds: the republicans were described as taking particular glee in directing their almost unspeakable appetites at those who were the most vulnerable, the most beautiful, the most innocent, the most pure. In their catalogues of republican atrocities, eyewitnesses described a category of crime that, they contended, surpassed all others by combining violence and sex with religious blasphemy. So great was their hatred of purity and love of depravity, that 'beastly libertines' took the greatest pleasure in cruelly congratulating young and pious nuns on their introduction to 'the *pleasures*' of the world—before they 'performed the most wicked acts upon their innocent bodies'.¹³⁰ In another case, revolutionary apostates were so incensed that a couple had chosen to have their marriage ceremony in a church, that they attacked the newlyweds in their bed on the wedding night. Taking the husband's place, the ruffians 'gratified their brutal passion,

¹²⁷ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 109.

¹²⁸ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 110.

¹²⁹ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 110-1.

¹³⁰ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 168.

without gratifying their ferocity,' so that after raping the young woman, they tore her breasts off her body with their bare hands.¹³¹

In revolutionary France, the sacred institution of marriage had thus been reduced to a form of violent gratification. British journalists were shocked at rumours of what were described as 'Republican marriages,' a ceremony in which naked men and women were tied tightly together (either face to face or back to back). The newly 'married' strangers were then 'pinched and pricked with pointed instruments, and tormented till their diabolical torturers were satiated, and then thrown into the river Loire to be drowned'.¹³² The name of 'decency' prevented *The Tomahawk* from giving a full account of the details, but the paper told how the hated Carrier performed a most depraved sort of wedding 'rehearsal, in a room, upon the miserable victims' before their death.¹³³ The journalist for the *Courier* directed readers to 'let the monster [Carrier] be figured before you' and conjured up a leering, grotesque face which 'contemplat[ed] with sparkling eyes, this horrid union, this dreadful *coupling* for DEATH'.¹³⁴ With protruding haunches and a thin waist that made 'him appear cut in two, like a wasp,' Carrier spoke from 'lacerated entrails ... like a tiger' and 'seemed to *penetrate* the bodies and the entrails of his victims—to *sanscullotise* the WOMEN was his favourite expression'.¹³⁵

As alarming as these images must have been, they would have been much more so when they occurred outside French borders. The republican appetite would not be confined, propagandists claimed, for it did not recognize the sovereignty of other

¹³¹ Cobbett, *BB* p. 190-1. Cobbett is paraphrasing from Abbé Barruel's *History of the French Clergy*.

¹³² *Tomahawk*, 30 October 1795 (number III), p. 3.

¹³³ *Tomahawk*, 30 October 1795 (number III) p. 3; see also Cobbett, *BB*, p. 46.

¹³⁴ *Courier* 18 December 1794.

¹³⁵ *Courier* 18 December 1794.

nations. In the *Cannibal's Progress* (1803), Cobbett described for his British and American audiences almost the same horrifying scenes of violation as he had in *A Bone to Knaw* and the *Bloody Buoy*, but the violence was perpetrated on other Europeans. He described how in Germany republicans had cooked their food with utensils that had been used to kill people, how in front of expiring husbands, they had violated heavily pregnant wives, how 'these monsters in human shape' had satiated their 'infernal lust' on the corpses of dead women and how German survivors were left with nothing more than sexual diseases when the revolutionary soldiers moved out.¹³⁶ There is then, the same emphasis on the unquenchable thirst for blood and the insatiable hunger for depravity, but the republican's feeding ground has terrifyingly expanded. Britain would be next.

V

Such scenes contrasted sharply with the British view of the culture and people of pre-revolutionary France. Before 1789, 'the whole civilized world' had admired and adopted the manners, language and fashions of the 'amiable' French.¹³⁷ Whatever their faults (frivolity, a tendency to social spitefulness), the French were celebrated for their refinement, their dislike of cruelty. Before the Revolution, the French refused to participate in animal sports such as bear-baiting and cock-fighting and would not even exhibit a corpse on a theatre stage as 'such a spectacle was thought to be too much for the feelings of the audience'.¹³⁸ French writers had always expressed 'the greatest tenderness and humanity' and poets such as Marmontel and Racine had captured the

¹³⁶ Cobbett, *Cannibal's Progress*, p. 11, 32, 33, 21.

¹³⁷ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 121.

¹³⁸ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 121.

‘respectful deference and attention’ the French showed ‘to the softer sex,’ as well as their ‘veneration for old age’.¹³⁹

However, to many British observers, it seemed that France had undergone an almost instantaneous metamorphosis. In light of the troubled relationship between the two nations, Burke’s description of France as a ‘once generous and gallant nation’ might have been rather an overstatement, still by 1791 it was obvious that her ‘civilized subjects,’ as he put it, had undergone a ‘strange and frightful transformation’.¹⁴⁰ To many Britons, France increasingly appeared almost otherworldly and her people seemed to inhabit, to use critic Frans De Bruyn’s designation, a ‘mundus inversus’ or a ‘world upside-down’.¹⁴¹ Having progressed to an advanced stage of civilization, France now seemed to reject abruptly everything that had come to mark it as such. Sending ‘news of the day’ from Paris to his loyalist association, John Neville captures something of the British attitude in early 1793: ‘You justly exclaim, Sir, ‘What a poor Devil a Frenchman is!’ ... he was an entertaining Animal when chained, but since the Monkey was let loose by its Keeper, too civil by Half, instead of amusing with Antics, the Monster lives upon Blood, & conceiving itself a Philosopher seems desirous, in its folly, to overturn the very System of Nature----’.¹⁴² Perhaps Britain had always viewed the French national character with suspicion, but it had tended to be a source of entertainment, of exasperation, of competitive resentment even, but not a source of such fear.

¹³⁹ Cobbett, *BB*, pp.121-2, 125-6.

¹⁴⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, p. 111.

¹⁴¹ Frans De Bruyn, ‘Theatre and Countertheater in Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,’ *Burke and the French Revolution*, ed. Steven Blakemore (Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1992), pp. 28-68 (p. 42).

¹⁴² John Neville (Paris, Dec. 1792), *Reeves Papers* BL MSS 16924 vol VI p. 35.

By emphasizing how profoundly the French had obliterated civility, refinement, sympathy and decency from their national character, British propagandists sought to inspire precisely those things in their readers. With their eyewitness accounts, propagandists sought to inspire readers to feel a sense of jealous protectiveness toward the British national character—renowned for its loyalty, honesty, reliability. They sought to transform the shock, repulsion, fear, and despair that readers invariably felt into feelings of patriotism. Here for instance is Cobbett pausing, in the midst of his cataloguing of French atrocities, to share his own feelings: ‘God forbid,’ he writes, ‘that I should enter into particulars on this subject. The bowels of the reader would not admit him to proceed’.¹⁴³ Cobbett’s self-conscious reticence—his ‘compassion for the feelings of [his] readers’—tactically highlights the marked contrast between the monstrous French and civilized individuals, like himself, who could not possibly stomach more explicit detail.¹⁴⁴

Cobbett also calls attention to his own physical responses to the process of writing, at times actually pausing in his narration in order to give vent to his own distress. ‘Great God!’, he interjects in one emotionally-charged moment, ‘my heart dies within me’; then at another time: ‘Fifty times, has the pen dropped from my trembling hand’.¹⁴⁵ ‘The pen trembles in my hand’ Thomas Moore writes; the violence in France ‘harrows up the soul, and arrests the powers of nature—it is too much for a feeling man to bear’.¹⁴⁶ This emotional susceptibility, this irrepressible infusion of sentiment and this visceral response to the act of writing not only highlight the crucial cultural

¹⁴³ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁴ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁵ Cobbett, *BB*, pp. 111, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Moore, in *Claeys* vol. 8, p. 34.

difference between French republicanism and English loyalism, but also communicate a powerful sense of immediacy.

Just as Cobbett and Moore could not maintain emotional distance (nor as warm-hearted Britons, should they), neither was the British reader allowed to feel indifference. 'Pity with me, reader,' Cobbett implores, 'pity the aged parents and the helpless babes ... If you are not endowed with uncommon fortitude, I could almost advise you to advance no further'.¹⁴⁷ Moore urges his readers to consider empathetically for themselves 'what must be the feeling of that parent, brought up with so much delicacy, and whose sentiments must be so refined ... to behold the offspring of her womb (which she had brought up with so much solicitude and care) cut to pieces'.¹⁴⁸ 'No generous Briton,' he writes, could possibly prevent 'the tear of sensibility, which flows from the soul of those only who participate in the distress of others' from spontaneously tracing its way down his or her cheek.¹⁴⁹ Thus propagandists like Moore and Cobbett place an onus on Britons to feel, to react, to engage actively with the events unfolding before them: in one section, Cobbett even pauses so 'that the indignant reader may tear out the leaf, and commit it to the flames'.¹⁵⁰

Paradoxically, whilst access to the types of violent scenes recounted in newspapers, caricatures and pamphlets such as the *Bloody Buoy* was meant to elicit an outpouring of emotion, propagandists emphasized that those scenes had been performed publicly in France with the intention of eliciting the exact *opposite* response. Having discovered that 'conscience' was 'a troublesome guest,' republicans had

¹⁴⁷ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁸ Moore, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 36.

¹⁴⁹ Moore, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 34.

¹⁵⁰ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 108.

'resolved to banish' it: the convention declared pity a crime, so that 'children durst not ask after their parents, nor parents ask after their children' and tribunals used violence to 'brutify the minds of the populace' and 'to extinguish the remaining sparks of humanity'.¹⁵¹ Once feeling was obliterated, manners quickly followed; once manners were destroyed, morals followed suit. By 'design' and by employing every 'institution' possible, Burke observed, the French legislators sought to 'pervert the moral sense' of the people.¹⁵² Believing 'everything unworthy of the name of public virtue, unless it indicates violence on the private,' republicans sought to sever the bonds of social life, to expunge all personal morality and to destroy all domestic felicity.¹⁵³

The success of the campaign against human emotion, affection and morality was proved when the people began to resemble their own oppressors, taking on the hideous forms of their torturers. 'The source of my tears is dry,' said *Madame Laviollette de Tournay* on the evening before her execution, 'I have not shed a tear since yesterday. This once feeling heart is callous to every impression of sensibility. Those affections that constituted the happiness of my life, are all extinguished. I do not regret any blessing past, nor anticipate any evil to come, and I took with perfect indifference on the moment of death.'¹⁵⁴ But nothing illustrated more clearly how thoroughly victorious the republicans had been in their war on humanity than when it was Robespierre's turn at the guillotine. Parisians then displayed the same ferociousness, the same 'thirst for human blood,' that he had shown them, for both men and women,

¹⁵¹ Cobbett, *Bone*, p. 134, 32; *BB* p. 28.

¹⁵² Burke, *Regicide*, p. 305.

¹⁵³ Burke, *Regicide*, p. 305.

¹⁵⁴ Du Broca, p. 153.

it was reported, had demonstrated how fully they had ‘contracted such a *taste* as excites horror even to believe it possible’.¹⁵⁵

IV

One of the most skilfully executed images of the transmogrification of French citizens is James Gillray’s *Un petit soupèr, a la Parisienne:--or—A Family of Sans-Culotts refreshing, after the fatigues of the day* (Pl. 2). Printed on 20 September 1792, just as newspapers related the shocking news of the Paris massacres, Gillray’s image portrays not hired assassins or members of a bloodthirsty tribunal, but a simple peasant family at a cannibal’s feast. This image might be the antithesis of the graceful and dignified images of British families executed by Gainsborough, Reynolds or Raeburn, but this is a family portrait nonetheless—a violent and ludicrous family portrait. The contrast could not be more marked between the ‘legitimate’ representations of childhood, as sympathetically rendered by Gainsborough in his bittersweet and serenely youthful faces that stare out from the canvas and Gillray’s young subjects, oblivious to everything but their terrible feast.

The title of this piece significantly situates the scene at the communal table—the symbol of domestic felicity, the emblem of the most routine of activities—but it is a monstrous communion. Family togetherness is expressed through shared depravity. Gillray’s fattened little monsters gorge on an appetizer of entrails as they await their next bloody meal and a child not unlike themselves being basted over the fire like a Sunday roast. In a twisted version of maternal protectiveness, the cook delicately ‘bathes’ the sacrificial child—an action which, under different circumstances might

¹⁵⁵ Cobbett *BB*, p. 34, 36.



Pl. 2. James Gillray, *Un petit Souper a la Parisienne:—or—A Family of Sans-Culotts refreshing, after the fatigues of the day* (London: H. Humphrey, 1792). By permission of the British Museum.

attest to her filial dedication. But this twisted version of maternal protectiveness, the mother has become the facilitator of their depravity. Maternal care is still evident in this act of domestic labour, but it has become horribly deformed by revolutionary principles. The trouserless patriarch of the family—traditionally a figure of wisdom and maturity—is here a perverse creature whose position atop a young woman with a slit throat is a doubly unnatural image, for whilst it is violently sexual, it is also *asexual*. Although he sits upon the full, naked breasts of an obviously beautiful woman, he is in some way oblivious to her charms. Rather than expressing a natural desire for her, he

prefers to *literally* consume her. At the same time, her humiliating position parallels that of the sack of plundered money opposite; in other words, her personal degradation mirrors the political degradation suffered by a nation ransacked by its own children.

The *democratic* nature of the violence portrayed in Gillray's image, both in terms of its victims and its agents, is striking. Women and men, parents and children, young and old, were equally the purveyors of violence in this scene. Indeed, cannibalistic men were not the only ones to straddle carcasses: in France, 'base strumpets, who boast ... of their numerous band of illegitimate children,' the Irish loyalist William Hamilton informed his readers, 'sit astride on dead bodies, intoxicated with wine and blood'.¹⁵⁶ British propagandists described the most disturbing accounts gender role reversals in the upside-down world of the republic. The eponymous memoirist of the *Narrative of the Incarceration of Count O'Neil, and the Massacre of his Family in France* informed his readers that 'a strange metamorphosis' had taken place in France, and 'men have become furious as tygers, and women as wolves'.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the French revolutionaries had so 'entirely changed the national physionomy' of their nation, that it was no longer recognizable.¹⁵⁸

Even mothers, society's moral pillars, had been transformed by the revolution into the most unnatural of creatures. Mothers were the last connection to civility, to domestic harmony, to human decency, but now, Burke declared, they made 'no scruple to rake with their bloody hands in the bowels of those who came from their own' in

¹⁵⁶ William Hamilton, *Letters on the Principles of the French Democracy and their Application and Influence on the Constitution and Happiness of Britain and Ireland* (Dublin: G. Bonham, 1792-93), in Claeys, vol. 7, pp. 138-72 (p. 144).

¹⁵⁷ *Narrative of the Incarceration of Count O'Neil, and the Massacre of his Family in France, etc.* (London: Charles Squire, 1814), p. 22.

¹⁵⁸ O' Neil, p. 75.

order 'to demonstrate their attachment to their party'.¹⁵⁹ Mothers still nurtured their children, but as in Gillray's image, they fed them a diabolical food: just as 'the republic was suckled with blood,' so had French babies 'sucked in blood with their mother's milk'.¹⁶⁰ Mothers tied miniature guillotines about the necks of their children, in an effort to school them early in the art of brutality.¹⁶¹ 'When assassinations became the sports of children,' Cobbett affirmed, 'it was no wonder that ... inhumanity took place of gratitude, filial piety, and all the tender affections'.¹⁶² For this reason, the *Anti-Jacobin* gendered 'Jacobinism' as a female who came to destroy 'Morals' and 'Domestic Virtue': she was the 'Daughter of Hell' to whom 'Gallia' had given 'monstrous birth'.¹⁶³

Within just a few years, propagandists argued, the revolution had transformed women from the objects to the perpetrators of violence. If the sheer number of publications and their panic-stricken tone is any indication, the nadir of woman's descent into brutality and shamelessness occurred in 1792. In August of that year, the establishment of the French Republic was heralded by a mob attack on the Tuilleries and the massacre of the royal family's Swiss guards. What was most disturbing about this attack, according to the reports, was that women had participated gleefully in the scenes of death and gore. In *The women of Paris dancing on the bodies of the Swiss Guards after the assault on the Tuilleries, 10 August 1792*, Johan Zoffany depicted, in an otherwise beautifully manicured and ordered landscape, unruly, bare-breasted women dancing on the bodies of the dead. Their knives slice through the air, symbols of their unnatural masculinity.

¹⁵⁹ Burke, *Regicide*, p. 307.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Hardy, *Patriot*, p. 49; Cobbett, *BB*, p. 35.

¹⁶¹ Cobbett, *BB* p. 34-5.

¹⁶² Cobbett, *BB*, p. 35.

¹⁶³ 'Ode to Jacobinism,' *Anti-Jacobin or Weekly Examiner* 20 (26 March 1798), p. 55.

A month after the attack on the Swiss Guards, under the headline, *The Amazons, A Parisian Society*, the *Bon Ton* reported how men and women of France had seemed to have exchanged places. The periodical described how this particular society of women accepted members of any class and at any age who were able to carry weapons like a man. Since these ‘maids, wives, widows, wantons, and vestals’ had solemnly promised ‘to exterminate by every possible means, all men that favour royalty, aristocracy, and inequality’ they had effectively sworn ‘to give up their persons to the indiscriminate enjoyment of every man who wishes for the possession of them’.¹⁶⁴ The author goes on to describe how, as part of their inauguration ceremony, new members of the Parisian Amazons performed a certain horrifying ‘act of emasculation’ in which they held the sexual organs of their male enemies in their hands.¹⁶⁵ The purpose of doing so, the *Bon Ton* writer explained, was to inform the world of their intention to ‘separate and destroy’ those ‘parts of the human body’ necessary for ‘the perpetuity of the species’.¹⁶⁶

Whilst the *Bon Ton* joked about women forming their own society in Paris, other Britons looked far less humorously at the possibility of women joining political societies at home. On 2 December 1792, James Hutton, one ‘very infirm’ seventy-eight year old member from Gladstone, Surrey wrote to the Reeves Association for Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers to warn them about the violence of women who acted in politics. The association should consider, he wrote how ‘the Female Part of the Rabble’ in France had been ‘as sanguinary in their Expression, as

¹⁶⁴ *Bon Ton*, September 1792, p. 241.

¹⁶⁵ *Bon Ton*, September 1792, p. 241.

¹⁶⁶ *Bon Ton*, September 1792, p. 241.

the men, emulating I suppose the Parisian Poissardes.¹⁶⁷ Hutton then described how the French women who had occupied the front line in battle had become 'tenfold cruel,' as was the case with every 'immodest women in such causes.'¹⁶⁸ As Hutton's comments indicate, in the 1790s many Britons were shocked to hear that the French had used women soldiers: it revealed something of the extent of their cultural regression. As Davidoff and Hall have noted, the report of female soldiers led anti-revolutionaries to deride the supposed 'effeminacy of the French'.¹⁶⁹

Not only were women acting as ferociously as men, but memoirists recounted how French men were violently emasculated at the hands of other men. O'Neil recalls how, when he was imprisoned at Pontivy, his cellmate, a merchant shipman, was 'stripped naked' by French guards looking for concealed coins. The brutality of the guards knew no bounds and they 'were even guilty of indecencies toward him, which, out of a regard to the beauteous part of the creation, I decline to name'.¹⁷⁰ In this way, O'Neil emphasizes his British values to avoid being contaminated with the patina of sexual perversion: he is far removed, he claims, from the scenes he recounts. Although he might describe male rape, he refuses to lose his own sense of civility and a polite respect for his female readers. O'Neil's masculinity remains intact; only a Frenchman would descend so far into debauchery that he would sexually violate a man as though he were a woman. Only a Frenchman, he suggests, would thrust his bayonet into a pregnant woman's belly, ignorant to 'the lamentable cries of her children'.¹⁷¹ Such cries 'would pierce the most obdurate heart' in Britain, but not in revolutionary France,

¹⁶⁷ Volume 1, MSS 16, 919, p. 48.

¹⁶⁸ Volume 1, MSS 16, 919, p. 48.

¹⁶⁹ Davidoff and Hall, p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ O'Neil, p. 48.

¹⁷¹ O'Neil, p. 53.

where as an old peasant had remarked helplessly: “‘God only knows the times have changed; Frenchmen are not Frenchmen—but we are French women’”.¹⁷²

Such propaganda plays on existing homophobic fears in an era when, as Anna Clark argues, such fears were exploited by a government that had increased the number of public executions for sodomy in order to distract the people from radical unrest.¹⁷³ Throughout the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, loyalists would continue to use the images of Amazonian Frenchwomen and sodomitical Frenchmen to incite a deep distrust of the republican cause. In one 1803 broadsheet, for instance, French soldiers declared that “‘They have called us Sodomites, and they shall not call us so for nothing; as their handsome Footmen, and Farmers, and their lusty young labourers will find ... And we will ravish their wives, and their daughters, in the bargain!’”¹⁷⁴ The greater purpose of such representations, however, was to tarnish, by association, the reputations of British reformers. Could any Briton possibly adopt any of the so-called principles of amazons and sodomites? ‘Are these the men,’ ‘A Downright Englishman’ asked, ‘whose politics ye would wish to copy; or, whose conduct ye could bear to imitate?’¹⁷⁵ ‘Can any man with the common feelings of humanity about his heart,’ Cobbett declared, ‘contemplate such scenes of horror, without execrating the revolution that gave rise to them?’¹⁷⁶

British radicals were the means through which the licentiousness and violence of France found its way across the channel. If given the chance British reformers would become equally as voracious as their French counterparts: they would not be

¹⁷² O’Neil, p. 53, 52.

¹⁷³ Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, p. 154.

¹⁷⁴ Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, p. 154.

¹⁷⁵ ‘A Downright Englishman,’ *A Letter to the People of England, on their Present Situation*, 2nd ed., In Claeys, vol. 7, pp. 239-246 (p. 240).

¹⁷⁶ Cobbett, *BB*. 187.

happy, the Scottish diarist Anne Grant contended, until they ‘cut up and dismembered’ that ‘good old lady, or gentleman,’ the British constitution to be cooked in ‘Medea’s old kettle’.¹⁷⁷ Excusing her inclination to ‘Burkify,’ Grant’s recalls Burke’s characterization of French republicans as ‘children’ who recklessly hacked their own ‘aged parent in pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations,’ they could ‘regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father’s life’.¹⁷⁸ But in Grant’s vision, Burke’s scene has been transplanted to British soil and the rash children who gather round the steaming pot are Whig reformers as ‘chief cooks,’ Tom Paine as ‘scullion’ and Mary Wollstonecraft and other ‘public-spirited ladies’ as assistants who bring ‘aprons-full of herbs, like witches, to the magic cauldron’.¹⁷⁹

British propagandists were exercised by events in France, but it was domestic affairs—in both senses—that was their foremost concern. Radicalism brought about ‘the subversion of States,’ but in many ways the more significant effect of political insurrection, the *Anti-Jacobin* claimed, was the erosion of ‘the foundations of Domestic Happiness’.¹⁸⁰ Events in France provided political warnings, but they also provided salutary lessons about the importance of traditional domestic values, familial love and personal probity. Louis du Broca’s *Interesting Anecdotes of the Heroic Conduct of Women, previous to, and during the French Revolution*, for instance, is a collection of anecdotes culled from various French memoirist that celebrate women who had demonstrated moral excellence in the face of revolutionary violence. It had been the case that in revolutionary France married women had ‘violated the vows they made at the altar, and

¹⁷⁷ Anne Grant, *The Letters of Anne Grant*, 3 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Longman et. al, 1807), vol. 2, p. 228.

¹⁷⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, p, 143.

¹⁷⁹ Grant, p. 228.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Letter from a Lady, *The Anti-Jacobin; or Weekly Examiner* 6 (18 December 1797) p. 195.

trod under foot all conjugal duties,' du Broca admitted, but the wives that had been 'constant in their attachment to their husbands' deserved to be celebrated publicly for their fidelity.¹⁸¹ The chapter titles give a sense of the values associated with female heroicism in this era. The anecdotes are grouped under the headings of: 'maternal affection,' 'conjugal affection,' 'filial affection,' 'affection in sisters for their brothers,' 'sacrifices made by the affection of lovers'. A last chapter, simply entitled 'Patriotism,' makes it clear that love of country is intimately bound to familial devotion and fidelity. Significantly, though these are anecdotes about women only, they are intended, as the 'Advertisement' notes, for the improvement of both sexes, everyone from 'the rudest savage' to the 'man in the most depraved state of artificial manners'.¹⁸²

The book might endorse domestic qualities for men and women, but it clearly promotes a gendered separation of the spheres. Heroic women might be politically well-informed, but for the most part, they stayed out of public affairs; their husbands could be politicians, but virtuous women kept themselves uncontaminated by the dirty politics of the revolution. The wife of the minister Clavierie, for example, 'was distinguished for her talents, for her devoted attachment to her husband, and for that sweet and modest character which had always kept her aloof from public affairs'.¹⁸³ Only when her husband was faced with death and she was forced to agitate for his release, did she involve herself in politics. There had been cases of exceptionally knowledgeable or influential women, Du Broca admits, but the real source of their fame was their feminine qualities and the love they had shown their families. The author of *Memoirs of a Prisoner* noted, for instance, that the exceptional Madame Roland

¹⁸¹ Du Broca, p. 18.

¹⁸² Du Broca, 'Advertisement,' (unnumbered page).

¹⁸³ Du Broca, p. 32.

may have spoken from her jail cell 'with the extent and greatness of mind of a man of the first order of talent,' but 'the susceptibility of her sex gained the ascendance' when she thought of her husband and daughter.¹⁸⁴ The anonymous author of *Biographical Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Republic* agreed: Madame Roland proved that 'now and then' a female could display talent and 'a dignity of demeanour'—a circumstance that owed much to her upbringing by a mother that had 'inculcated the purest principles of virtue'.¹⁸⁵

According to du Broca, the weak constitutions and gentle natures of women naturally inclined them to be compassionate, soft, unselfish, charitable and domestic beings. During the revolution, heroic women nursed their husbands and children through illness, risked everything for their families, and 'mitigated the deep melancholy which the sufferings' of the world had fastened upon their husbands.¹⁸⁶ There had been women who had been so devoted to their husbands that they had begged to share their sentence of death. When the tribunal had denied Mme du Chatelet the right to die 'at the same instant with her husband,' it had been the worst of punishments 'inflicted on the tenderest of affections'.¹⁸⁷ The beautiful and virtuous Mme Lavergne filled the courtroom with cries of 'Vive le Roi!' to ensure she would join her husband on the scaffold.¹⁸⁸ Young women who were forced to live after their fathers were guillotined existed in 'a state worse than that of death'.¹⁸⁹ Such examples showed how the conjugal and filial devotion of women had been capable of 'baffling the decrees of

¹⁸⁴ Du Broca, p. 158.

¹⁸⁵ [n. a.], *Biographical Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Republic*, new ed., 3 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1799), vol. 1, p. 239.

¹⁸⁶ Du Broca, p. 224-3.

¹⁸⁷ Du Broca, p. 44.

¹⁸⁸ Du Broca, p. 29-30.

¹⁸⁹ Du Broca, p. 71.

tyrants' for 'amid the ruins of almost all the virtues,' these women continued to stand as 'monuments of sensibility'.¹⁹⁰

Yet husbands, too, had a duty to be tender and devoted spouses: they must be worthy of their wife's affection. The sixty-year-old M. Lavergne only deserved the affectionate devotion of his twenty-year-old wife, 'one of the loveliest women of France,' because 'his amiable qualities first won her esteem, and his tenderness succeeded to inspire her with an affection as sincere and fervent as that which he possessed for her'.¹⁹¹ A husband had a duty to render himself worthy of his wife's affections, to live 'perfect patterns of peace and domestic union' with her, and to be 'deservedly beloved' by children who emulated him.¹⁹² The greatest concern of the revolution's male heroes was to convince their wives not to voluntarily join them in death, so that they might stay behind to raise their children. M. Phelippeaux, for instance, turned his wife's attention to those 'consolations proper to effect' a desire to live by reminding her of her motherly responsibilities.¹⁹³

Du Broca says surprisingly little about politics per se, although of course, political opinion underwrites the moralizing discourse of his anecdotes. His contribution to the effort to restore political order is to encourage moral reform and domestic stability. His 1804 publication is an extension of earlier forms of propaganda that attempted to contain the contagion of republican principles by associating those principles with immorality, licentiousness and the destruction of the family. Du Broca's text and the varieties of propaganda that have been addressed in this chapter demonstrate how the links between the private and the political realms were forged in

¹⁹⁰ Du Broca, p. 38, 59.

¹⁹¹ Du Broca, p. 23.

¹⁹² Du Broca, p. 75, 180.

¹⁹³ Du Broca, p. 53.

the 1790s and after. In the case of the French royal family, scandal about their private lives unquestionably hastened their downfall; after their deaths, those same lives could be refashioned and exploited for the loyalist cause and for the moral reform movement. Increasingly, political propaganda which shared personal details about an individual's family life and his or her personal morality made the links between the public and the private seem 'natural' or inherent, so that at times, the border between the two spheres seemed almost obscured.

PART TWO
RADICAL LIVES

CHAPTER 2

TOM PAINE, BRITAIN'S UNNATURAL SON

Prithee, Tom Paine, why wilt thou meddling be
 In others Business which concerns not thee;
 For while thereon thou dost extend thy Career
 Thou dost at home neglect thy own Affairs.¹

In 1776, Paine was still able to preface *Common Sense* with the declaration that 'who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the Object for Attention is the Doctrine itself, not the Man'.² The question of 'who' would become an increasingly important concern of British politics, so that 'the Man' was seen as very much a part of 'the Doctrine itself'. Indeed, when Paine published this preface, Britain was very much occupied with a political contest that pushed the question of personality ahead of the question of political doctrine. The John Wilkes controversy of the 1760s and 70s, as historians have noted, contributed greatly to 'a significant transition in British politics'.³ In his efforts to bring about constitutional reform, Wilkes had changed the temper and purpose of scandal by using it to undermine the monarchy. Publicly airing tales of illicit sexual affairs at the highest levels of influence had unintentionally opened the floodgates however: his challenge to the political hierarchy attracted the relatively extensive audience he sought, but he had also incited a controversy about his own scandalous personal life. In the end, Wilkes' self-

¹ Verse printed on a creamware mug now at the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton, Willett no. 521, in David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution* (London: British Museum Pub., 1989), p. 111.

² Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), in *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, 1998) p.4.

³ Anna Clark, *Scandal*, p. 15; see Harriet Guest, p. 159-60.

representation ‘as a libertine for the cause of liberty’ backfired when the public denounced his penchant for pornography and prostitutes, and for the deplorable way he treated his wife.⁴ Although Wilkes subsequently attempted to deflect criticism by arguing that a politician’s private affairs should remain distinct from his public role, he had done far too much to advance the opposite view. By taking such public aim at his enemies’ private lives, he had made—intentionally or unintentionally—political legitimacy dependent on private morality.

Arguably, an even more considerable change to the relationship between personal and political reputation occurred, however, in the wake of the *Rights of Man*. In the years following Paine’s 1791 publication, loyalists argued that the private lives of reformers clearly indicated just how much of a political threat they posed. This allegation became an established almost as a principle, thereby radically altering the way politics was conducted. The popularity of the *Rights of Man* made Paine’s statement in *Common Sense* about the insignificance of the author’s identity sound like very wishful thinking. Unquestionably, loyalists viewed Paine, of the 1790s radicals, as the greatest threat to public order—and thus their greatest target.

In 1792, the newly formed John Reeves Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers published a series of popular tracts aimed at countering the pernicious influence of the *Rights of Man*. *A Bird in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush* presents a dialogue between two labourers and fellow members of a local Painite revolutionary club, one of whom announces his decision to scratch his name from the club’s membership list.⁵ The honest John Frankly readily

⁴ Clark, *Scandal*, p. 52.

⁵ *A Bird in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush, or, A Dialogue between John Frankly and George Careful* ([London]: n. pub., 1792), in Claeyes, p. 287-290.

identifies the impetus for his political change of heart. He is deeply concerned that his 'character' will become tarnished through his association with the club president, who 'is certainly one of Tom Paine's People'.⁶ Such an 'association' is troubling, for details about Paine's private life had been making the rounds. Frankly explains how he had become familiar with Paine's character:

I don't like that Paine at all; for as I was waiting in a Gentleman's Hall for Orders, t'other Day, the Porter gave me, to read, the Life of Thomas Paine. The Gentleman who wrote it gives him a very bad Character; and I have heard since [the author] Parson Oldys knows him very well.⁷

The best-selling and exceedingly influential biography of Paine, to which Frankly refers, was the product of government propagandist George Chalmers, alias 'Francis Oldys'. Far from knowing him 'very well' however, Chalmers had never set eyes on Paine, yet this did not prevent him from offering his audience an 'eyewitness' account of the most intimate details of the revolutionary's life.⁸ The biography's simulated intimacy with its subject's private life, and the way it sought to initiate a conspiratorial relationship with its audience, are important textual features that mark it as both a harbinger *and* a consequence of a shift in the way politics was debated in the 1790s. Indeed, Chalmers' text reflected (and encouraged) the emerging belief that an individual's political intentions and capabilities could be gauged by how that person conducted his or her private life.

The motivating idea behind Chalmers' production and the anti-Painite propaganda that followed its example was that the same public that Paine had

⁶ *A Bird*, p. 287.

⁷ *A Bird*, p. 287-8.

⁸ George Chalmers [Francis Oldys], *The Life of Thomas Pain, The Author of the Rights of Man. With a Defence of his Writings*. (1791), fifth ed. (London: Stockdale, 1793). I am using the fifth edition here, with the added preface. In all of the many editions and printings of his 'defence,' Chalmers insisted on using the original spelling of 'Pain' instead of what he called the 'fictitious' appellation 'Paine,' for he believed the added 'e' was an example of how the lowly revolutionary had inappropriately 'exercised a freedom, which only great men enjoy for honourable ends' (p. 2).

addressed needed to be apprised of 'the truth' about the private affairs of an author who had become, at least for some, a political messiah. The attack on Paine was one way of dealing with those newly politicized individuals who were making a bid for citizenship status based on reason, rather than on traditional notions of custom and inheritance, political privilege and property-ownership. The aim of the *Life of Paine* is to counter those who attempted to defend Paine by insisting that 'IF he write a good book' then 'what signifies the *profligacy* of his *character*'?⁹ Chalmers insisted that the *Rights of Man* be judged by its author's domestic life; moreover, that life, as uncovered by Chalmers, must be worn by Paine as 'a badge' which would continue to announce his unworthiness for political and 'literary fame'.¹⁰ Chalmers sought to use Paine's life—an unconventional life, in that it appeared to lack familial affection and domestic security—to deftly counter his radical politics.

A survey of the political literature of 1792-3 reveals the degree to which Chalmers' *Life of Paine* seemed to have inspired a large number of political commentators to urge their readers to familiarize themselves with those 'truths' that lurked beneath the radical's public personae. The urgency of the times, and Paine's popularity, meant that even those who would otherwise avoid scandalmongering felt it necessary to address the unsavoury rumours that were making the rounds about Paine's private life. Making specific reference to Chalmers' biography, MP Sir Brooke Boothby conceded that 'of the private history of Mr. Paine, I neither know any thing, [n]or wish to enquire. But these questions arise out of the nature and tendency of his work'.¹¹

⁹ George Chalmers, p. vii.

¹⁰ George Chalmers, p. vii, 165.

¹¹ Sir Brooke Boothby, *Observations on the Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs, and on Mr. Paine's Rights of Man. in Two Parts* (London 1792), in *Political Writings of the 1790s*, vol. 6, ed. Gregory Claeys (London 1995), p. 287.

Certainly it would be negligent, others argued, not to make enquiries into the private life of an author who had so fired the spirit of insurrection. Alarmed members of the rank and file published their own views of Paine's private-political self. The 'Citizens of Caledonia,' for instance, published a 1792 New Year's address to Paine, in which they exercised their self-proclaimed 'right to try a man as well as to judge of his book'.¹² Their critique of the author of the *Rights of Man* was accompanied by an apropos warning, expressed in a forthright and rather bawdy language. When writers 'take their leave of their readers, and turn their backs,' they wrote, 'their *rear* becomes exposed; and if they are vulnerable at all, it is there the enemy will make his deepest impressions'.¹³ Politically influential writers must be prepared to have the private parts of their lives publicly exposed, and if such parts were found the least bit wanting, they must be ready to feel the piercing jab of public disapproval.

II

Chalmers confessed that producing the *Life of Thomas Paine*, had proved a very easy task, for the radical's history, even in his youth, provided plenty of incriminating evidence. From the very beginning of his adult life, Paine had apparently proved faithless even to those to whom he owed his very existence. His mother, described as 'the tenderest of parents,' had experienced great anguish over her son's 'undutiful behavior,' his 'ingratitude' and his 'want of duty'.¹⁴ Paine had been a prodigal son, but one who, rather than returning home to seek parental forgiveness and to reconcile himself to his community, remained immured in his corruption. As he abused his

¹² *New Year's Gift for Mr. Thomas Paine, In Return for his Rights of Man; humbly presented by the Citizens of Caledonia* (Edinburgh: n. pub. 1792), p. 6, 5.

¹³ *New Year's Gift*, p. 6, 5.

¹⁴ George Chalmers, p. 26.

mother, so he ceaselessly abused the country of his birth. He had, in the 1770s, advised rebellious Americans that to earn 'the name father, husband, friend or lover,' they had to secure for their children a future free of a 'mother country' which had proved such an 'unnatural parent'.¹⁵ Then in the 1790s, Paine's one-man 'civil war' against Britain had taken on the 'accustomed rancour of domestic feuds'.¹⁶ In a pamphlet likely published the year after Chalmers' biography, Isaac Hunt used a similar language to condemn Paine for 'alienat[ing] the Colonies from the Mother State' and for 'promot[ing] an unnatural war between the Parent and her Children'.¹⁷ Yet another virulent anti-Painite, Charles Harrington Elliot, also used familial terms to portray Paine's political rebelliousness and to urge his readers to take Britain's side against her seditious offspring. 'Injured *Britain*,' he declared, 'recognise an unnatural *son* in that stern, froward *bravo* of ambition, whose impious arm has for years been uplifted against the land of his nativity'.¹⁸ These propagandists impelled readers to see Paine not as the public creature he claimed to be, but as an insubordinate, disloyal son whose self-interested brand of liberty effaced both parental and national ties.

However since, as Chalmer's put it, 'marriage is the great epoch of a man's life,' it was Paine's disastrous and shadowy marriages that provided the greatest evidence of his temperamental deficiencies and political unsuitability.¹⁹ No one had ever been able to confirm, for instance, whether his first wife, Mary Lambert, had died as a result of a miscarriage brought on by his 'ill usage' or whether she still lived somewhere in

¹⁵ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, p. 23. See also Mark Philp, *Paine* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), pp. 42-3.

¹⁶ George Chalmers, *Life*, p. 93.

¹⁷ Hunt, Isaac, *Rights of Englishmen: An Antidote to the Poison now vending by the Transatlantic republican Thomas Paine* (London: n. pub., 1791), p. 13.

¹⁸ Charles Harrington Elliot, *The Republican Refuted; in a Series of Biographical, Critical and Political Strictures on Thomas Paine's Rights of Man* (London: W. Richardson, 1791), In Claeys, vol. 5, pp. 312-362 (p. 312).

¹⁹ George Chalmers, *Life*, p. 7.

‘extreme obscurity’ (presumably in hiding from her abusive husband).²⁰ In a second marriage to Elizabeth Ollive at Lewes, Sussex, it was alleged that the widowed or still-married Paine had falsely claimed bachelor status on their 1771 marriage record.²¹ Chalmers and other anti-Painite writers (most notably, William Cobbett) would make much of the personal and political deceit embodied in this type of blatant misrepresentation: privately, Paine had acted the knave; in legal terms, he was a felon.²² With relish, propagandists delved deep into the most intimate details of Paine’s marriages. They recounted his alleged sexual inadequacies—particularly his failure to consummate his three and a half year second marriage—in order to demonstrate how sharply his domestic life contrasted with the virtuous and honest lives of average Britons.

When James Cheetham, originally one of three radical Manchester brothers known as ‘the three Jacobin infidels’ in the 1790s, turned against Paine, he published a venomous biography that focused particularly on Paine’s alleged sexual lack. Cheetham had once been affiliated with the Constitutional Society and the Manchester Reformation Society and been described (by one of his *own* political enemies) as a troublemaker who had run “‘with the *Rights of Man* in one hand, and *Age of Reason* in another ... from tavern to tavern and from brothel to brothel, collecting and summoning together all that wickedness had rendered contemptible, drunkenness turned idle, and indolence made destitute.’”²³ When Cheetham was tried and acquitted on charges of conspiracy in 1794, he immigrated to New York where, after being

²⁰ George Chalmers, *Life*, pp. 12-3.

²¹ George Chalmers, *Life*, p. 17.

²² Cobbett, *Review*, p. 6. Chalmers claims that though this information is recorded on the parish register, the legal marriage affidavits had mysteriously gone missing, whether ‘by design, or accident,’ for 1771, the year of Paine’s marriage.

²³ Michael Drury, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Wichita 1997), p. 32.

unceremoniously ousted from the Republican party, he announced his break with both democratic politics and Paine with an 1809 *Life of Thomas Paine*. In it, Cheetham alleged that the community at Lewes had treated the young Paine with kindness, and when his impotence became known, had arranged for him to be seen by a team of doctors. When he was subsequently pronounced healthy, and yet still refused to fulfil his marital obligations, he became ‘despised by the women, jeered by the men, and charged with a want of virility’.²⁴ In such a way, the community had acted, as it should, both as an advocate for the virtuous, defenceless wife, and as a moral barometer against which Paine’s dissipation could be measured. Inevitably, against such a barometer, Paine appeared to lack ‘the ordinary sensibilities of an ordinary man’.²⁵

Charles Harrington Elliot’s *The Republican Refuted* takes Chalmers’ *Life* as a starting point, but focuses still more ‘intimately’ on the theme of Paine’s unnaturalness. Elliot expresses his shock that Paine not only failed to display a shred of civility or even decency, but that he lacked that most basic human instinct—the desire to procreate. Apparently, Paine had confided to the prostitutes with whom he cavorted (preferring them to his alluring and virtuous wife) that since he had ‘married for *convenience only*, his wife’s breeding would be subversive of that prudent object. And as for the tender emotions of nature, he had long since learned to keep them in due subjection’.²⁶ Paine’s refusal to have children and to perpetuate his family name (no matter how humble it was), bewildered and disgusted Elliot, who saw this as indicative of his monstrosity. By turning his back on the most fundamental of social responsibilities, he had not only defied the laws of nature, he had repudiated his very humanness.

²⁴ James Cheetham, *Life of Thomas Paine* (NY: Southwick and Pelsue, 1809), p. 30; see Drury, pp. 32-3, 36, 152, 271-3.

²⁵ Cheetham, *Life*, in Claeys, vol. 5, p. 33.

²⁶ Elliot, *Republican*, in Claeys, vol. 5, p. 314.

Paine's 'subjection' of nature gave rise to much more serious violations of the bounds of human decency. On one occasion, Elliot describes how, under the influence of 'beer, gin, and tobacco,' the 'tyrant' Paine had actually taken great delight in deflowering his innocent and beautiful wife by forcing the family cat 'where the reader must guess, for indignant modesty cannot be more explicit'.²⁷ Elliot's rhetoric of sensibility—his 'indignant modesty'—distances himself from the scandalous Paine and makes it clear that, though he would rather not speak of such shocking occurrences, public duty demanded it. Readers must be informed of Paine's sexual barbarism, for it was linked intimately to his treasonous politics:

The man who solemnly engaged before God to discharge all the tender duties of wedlock, with a predetermined, unyielding resolution to the *contrary*; who, *in stern despite of nature*, met all the unveiled charms of the bridal bed without enjoyment; ... that man, I say, is qualified by monster-making nature to hold the torch of *Guy Faux*, or the bloody knife of *Ravillac*.²⁸

Political and personal deviance is conflated here: as an anomaly of nature, Paine is grouped among history's most monstrous regicides. This collapse of the private into the political was reflected in the very words of these pamphlets. In fact, as passages such as these indicate, Paine's biographers used an overtly political vocabulary to describe the most intimate details of his life. Paine had an 'artificial, not *constitutional* insensibility to the charms of *bridal* youth and beauty,' Elliot wrote.²⁹ Chalmers also employed such a politico-private rhetoric, in one case speculating whether Paine's '*malicious impotence*' was due 'to natural imbecility or to *philosophical indifference*'.³⁰ Such

²⁷ Elliot, *Republican*, in Claeys, vol. 5, p. 314.

²⁸ Elliot, *Republican*, in Claeys, vol. 5, p. 314; François Ravillac was the assassin of Henry IV.

²⁹ Elliot, *Republican*, in Claeys, vol. 5, p. 313, first italics mine. Hannah More masterfully employed the strategy of appropriating and redefining radical keywords. In her popular tract *Village Politics*, for instance, the character Jack Anvil asks his *Rights of Man*-reading friend Tom Hood why he looks so miserable. To Tom's reply that he wants a new constitution, Jack scoffs: 'Indeed, I thought thou hadst been a desperate healthy fellow. Send for the doctor directly', in Claeys, vol. 8, pp. 2-10 (p. 3).

³⁰ George Chalmers, *Life* p. 23.

politically connotative language skilfully collapses what was perceived as Paine's grossly unnatural desires (or, in this case, simply his lack of natural ones) with the 'bodilessness,' or abstractness, of his political ideology.

James Gillray deploys a similar discursive strategy in his 1793 caricature *Fashion Before Ease: or, A good Constitution sacrificed, for a Fantastik Form* (Pl. 3), an image that makes reference to Paine's early career as a staymaker (a scandal in itself). Paine heaves roughly on Britannia's stay laces, a foot placed unceremoniously on her backside, as he tries to squeeze her into a French form. His pocked and reddened face attests to disease and hard drinking and his hard-set expression demonstrates, to borrow Chalmers' words, the '*usual attention*' Paine paid 'to the *rights of women*'.³¹ His brand of politics were as uncivilized as his character: toward the nation he was noxious, whilst 'to the sex, whether animated with liquor, or in his temperate moments depressed with reflection, he paid no sort of deference'.³² Gillray's image captures something of the double-sidedness of loyalist representations of Paine in the 1790s. He was portrayed, on the one hand, as a coldly impotent man who could only engage in offensive acts of (ultimately unfulfilling) sexual violence, and on the other, as a licentious seducer of married women. He compromised the daughters of reputable families, insulted English ladies with his 'French familiarity,' and gave 'proofs of his *virility*' to 'the companions of his amours *sub dio*'.³³ Scurrilous anecdotes about Paine's supposed seductions litter newspapers, correspondence, broadsides and indeed literature of all kinds. On 5 January 1793, one loyalist association member wrote to inform his fellow members about 'Tom Paine and Cuckoldom': the exiled Paine had been discovered 'in

³¹ George Chalmers, *Life*, p. 91.

³² Cheetham, *Life*, p. 171.

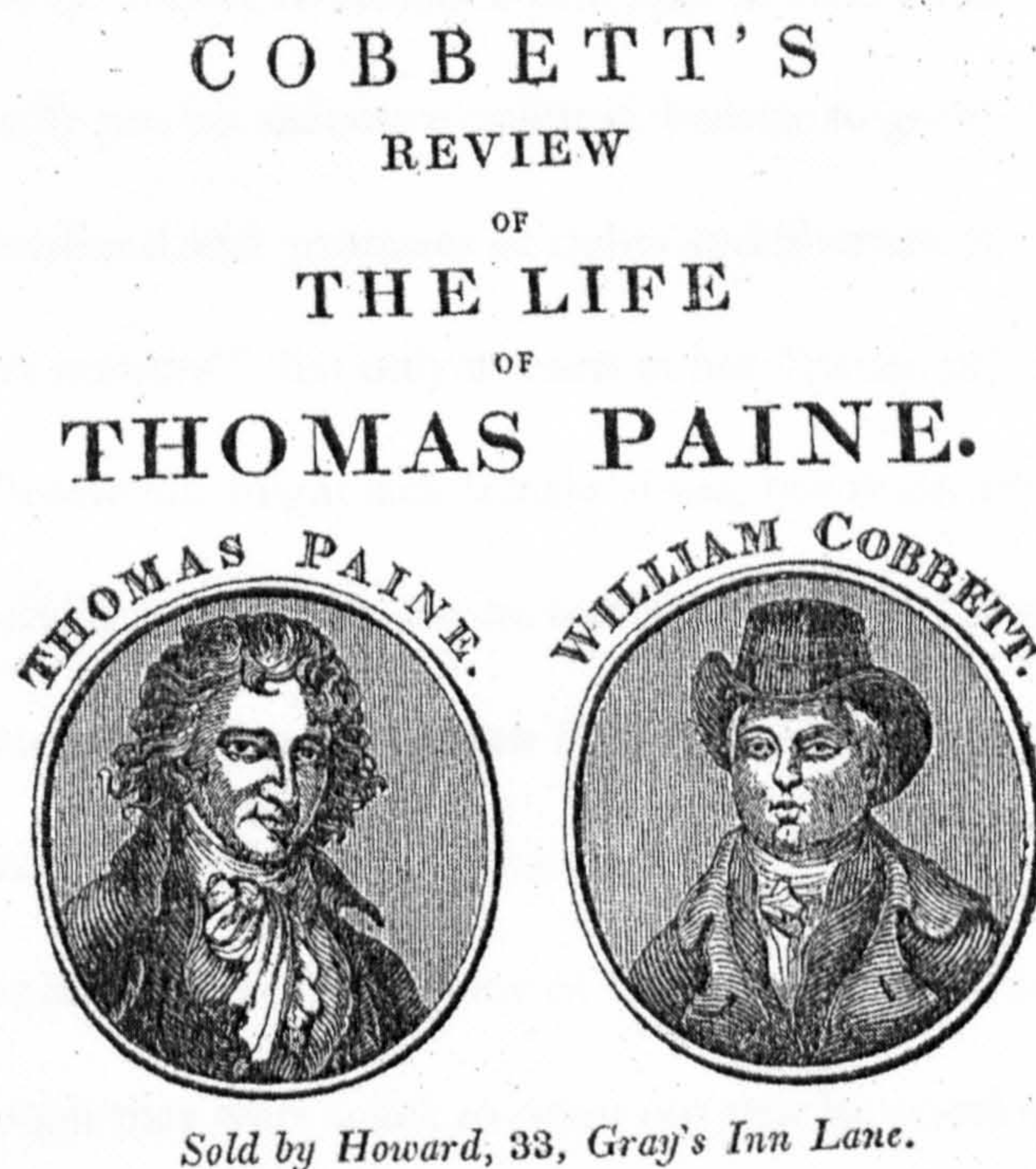
³³ George Chalmers, *Life* p. 54, 62; Elliot, *Republican*, p. 314.



Pl. 3. James Gillray, *Fashion Before Ease: or, A good Constitution sacrificed, for a Fantastick Form* (London: H. Humphrey, 1793). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

a situation, which would have been deemed critical in any other country but France—he was taken by a brother senator in the very act of measuring his wife ... for a Pair of stays, while the faithless fair one was singing “ah! ca ira-ca ira ca ira”.³⁴

This licentiousness separated Paine from virtuous men who may not have had ‘the proportional number of wives’ as he, yet proved daily they were far ‘more interested in their safety’.³⁵ The two frontispiece images of Cobbett’s pamphlet captures this allegedly lustful side of Paine’s character (Pl. 4). At first glance, it might



Pl. 4. Artist unknown, illustration to William Cobbett’s *Review of the Life of Paine* (London: Howard, 1797). By permission of the Director of Information Services of the University of Bristol.

³⁴ (5 January 1793), *Reeves Papers*, BL Add. MSS 16992, vol. 4, p. 35.

³⁵ *New Year's Gift*, pg. 8.

seem strange to front what is a deeply scurrilous biography with a dashing, attractive image of its detested subject. But once the eye takes in the juxtaposed image of the solemn, sincere, and buttoned-down Cobbett, Paine appears rakish, his wavy hair unruly, his grin leering, and his collar dandyish. Propagandists argued that such demonstrable dissoluteness made it impossible for Paine to establish any personal allegiances; therefore, he could not be expected to respect the sacred vows of others, whether they were strangers or acquaintances. He had not hesitated, for instance, to convince the wife of his Parisian host and political ally, Nicolas de Bonneville, to emigrate from Napoleonic France to America with him in 1802 (with her three children in tow). He had allegedly put his seductive political rhetoric to good use, luring Mme Bonneville from her husband with promises of rights and liberties in order to receive from her those “secret services” that only women in her “position” were willing to “perform.”³⁶ Mme Bonneville might lack female virtue, but make no mistake: in the final analysis the culpability was Paine’s, for he was ‘guilty of the worst species of seduction; the alienation of a wife and children from a husband and a father’.³⁷ She may have been unwitting, but he had been devious.

Several biographers also accused Paine of being the illegitimate father of the Bonneville sons, although they were quick to point out that he could never be described as ‘fatherly’.³⁸ The ‘credit’ for the boy’s biological patrimony might be his, but he was a counterfeit father who had usurped the position of Bonneville, the bona fide father. In fact, eyewitnesses reported that the eldest son had frequently cursed

³⁶John S. Harford, *The Account of the Life, Death, and Principles of Thomas Paine* (Bristol: J. M. Gutch, 1819), pp. 44, 43, 51.

³⁷Cheetham, *Life*, p. 314.

³⁸William Carver, quoted in Harford, *Account*, pp. 50-1. ‘Fellow democrat’ William Carver was Paine’s landlord and supposed ‘bosom friend’.

Paine, condemned his abusive and obnoxious character, and accused him of being the 'complete ruin' of his family.³⁹ This image of the anti-paternal Paine evolved alongside the sharply contrasting representation of the fatherly Edmund Burke. Loyalist writing had promoted the image of Burke as the guardian of the constitution, a devoted family man and even a friend of the people. Isaac Hunt, for example, claimed that, if the truth be known, whilst Paine bore a 'deep rooted malice' against Britons 'of all ranks and orders,' Burke had always been 'in habits of friendship with some of our most ingenious mechanics' (yes, the same Burke who had termed those labourers part of 'the swinish multitude').⁴⁰ After 1791, when Burke's predictions about the French Revolution proved prescient, propagandists placed him in a line of fathers who had acted, and would continue to act, in the best interests of their dependants. Chalmers suggested that even more than Burke's political wisdom, his eloquent rhetoric and his patriotic enthusiasm, it was his solicitousness and the fatherly care he showed for the people that had earned him their love.⁴¹ This trust in Burke's perceived paternalistic qualities only increased still further when his beloved only son Richard died in 1794. Some of the same devotion that Burke had supposedly shown the people, was returned to him in the form of sympathy for his loss. James Cheetham made the point that Burke may have lost his heir, but he had founded an expansive national family and had become one of the 'most conspicuous founders of a great empire'.⁴²

This personally and politically solicitous Burke was the antithesis of Paine, a man who was described, even at times by fellow patriots, as self-absorbed and

³⁹ Carver, quoted in Harford, *Account*, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Isaac Hunt, *Rights*, p. 5.

⁴¹ George Chalmers, *Life*, pp. 65-66, See also Robert Bisset, *The Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke, Comprehending an Impartial Account of his Literary and Political Efforts*, second ed. (London: George Cawthorn, 1800).

⁴² Cheetham, *Life*, p. iii.

personally isolated. This was the opinion of the Irish republican Wolfe Tone, who recorded a case that clearly demonstrated the contrast between the two political opponents. When Tone met the exiled Paine in Paris in 1797, he had shared the news of Burke's anguish over the death of his son's death, but Paine had responded by insisting that his political opponent's distress had nothing to do with his family tragedy. Rather, it was 'the Rights of Man that had broken his heart'.⁴³ Even further, Paine boasted that Richard Burke's death had conveniently given the father 'occasion to develop the chagrin which had preyed upon him ever since the appearance of that work'.⁴⁴ Tone's interpretation of Paine's reaction is significant: 'I am sure the Rights of Man have tormented Burke exceedingly;' he wrote, 'but I have seen myself the workings of a father's grief on his spirit, and I could not be deceived. *Paine has no children!*'⁴⁵ Tone's phraseology clearly identifies Paine's childlessness as the source of his self-importance and the explanation of his misreading of Burke's crippling grief. At the same time, Tone's empathetic language suggests that, if only for a moment, he and Burke—the two fathers—share something that overrides their political differences and supersedes any personal animosity.

According to loyalists, it was fitting that Paine had elected to trace his own lineage from Enlightenment philosophers such as the cold, self-important and hypocritical Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Not only was Rousseau 'the oracle of the regenerated French,' Burke contended, but he was also the figure that revolutionaries held 'next in sanctity to that of a father'.⁴⁶ Rousseau was the philosophical father to a

⁴³ Wolfe Tone quoted in Keane, *Paine*, p. 437; check quote.

⁴⁴ Tone in Keane, *Paine*, p. 437.

⁴⁵ Tone in Keane, *Paine*, p. 437

⁴⁶ Burke, *A Letter from Mr. Burke to a Member of the National Assembly in Answer to some Objections to his Book on French Affairs* (1791), in Paulson, p. 62.

generation of political troublemakers who followed his example. He had clothed his debased appetites behind the assumed dress of a false philosophy that had made the French people believe 'that the debauchers of virgins, almost in the arms of their parents, may be safe inmates in their house'.⁴⁷ His republican children 'endeavor[ed] to subvert those principles of domestic trust and fidelity' and ensured that 'every considerable father of a family los[t] the sanctuary of his house'.⁴⁸ The Assembly sought to open the doors of the family home to debauchers who claimed to be the 'active citizens' of revolutionary France, so that they might usurp the place of the legitimate father and have their way with his wife and daughters.

According to anti-revolutionaries, Rousseau's private life clearly demonstrated why there could be no more appropriate father-figure for the republicans. In his private life, he had lived off the generosity of an older woman who

had so great a regard for him, that she called him her *little darling*, and he called her *mamma*. *Mamma* had a footman, who served her, besides, in another capacity, very much resembling that of a husband; but she had a most tender affection for her adopted son *Rousseau*, and, as she feared he was forming connections with a certain lady that might spoil his morals, she herself, out of pure virtue, took him—to bed with her!⁴⁹

Cobbett refers here to Rousseau's affair with Mme de Warens, a woman with whom Rousseau had admitted in his *Confessions* to feeling that he 'had committed incest' by referring to her as 'Mamma' and at the same time 'treating her with the familiarity of a son'. Rousseau imbibed his mamma's lessons well, for as soon as he left her house, he slept with one man's wife and was 'tempted to seduce her daughter'.⁵⁰ Finally, he made a philosophical marriage, that is, without the benefit of a church; when that marriage

⁴⁷ Burke, *Letter*, in Paulson, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Burke, *Letter*, in Paulson, p. 62.

⁴⁹ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 144.

⁵⁰ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 144.

produced children, he also acted the 'philosophical father': he sent mother and children to the foundling house.⁵¹

When Cobbett accused Rousseau of being hypocritical, he had in mind the French philosopher's comments in *Émile*, where he had written that there was 'no more charming picture than that of family life' and in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* where he had defined 'conjugal love and paternal love' as 'the sweetest sentiments known to man'.⁵² Yet, Cobbett argues, whilst 'everlastingly babbling about his *genre humain*' and his 'cœur aimant et tendre,' the 'virtuous and tender-hearted and sympathetic Rousseau' had felt no compunction about abandoning his 'unfortunate bastards' and their mother to the poorhouse.⁵³ Such a condemnation of Rousseau is underwritten by the belief that one merited a public position only if one exercised—in politics and in the home—a patrimonial authority tempered by fatherly responsibility, personal fidelity, and a warm affection for one's circle of dependants.

Like his philosophical father, Paine failed this test of political legitimacy; like Rousseau, Paine sired a corps of self-seeking radicals who happily abandoned their own families in favour of reckless, ill-founded philosophies. These radicals, with their theory of universal natural rights, might claim to 'stretch their benevolence to the extremities of the globe' and to identify themselves as 'citizens of the world,' Cobbett argued, but they deemed their own family, friends and nation 'unworthy' of their interest.⁵⁴ Paine had lived his principle of cosmopolitan individualism, and it had rendered him a nation-less orphan and France a nation of orphans. His nomadic

⁵¹ Cobbett, *BB*, p. 145.

⁵² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile; or Education* (1762) trans. Barbara Foxley (NY: Everyman, 1966), p.16.; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755) in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress, intro. Peter Gay (Indianapolis 1987) pp. 25-109, pp. 62-3.

⁵³ Cobbett, *Review*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁴ Cobbett, *Review*, p. 4. Cobbett is referring specifically here to Paine's claim to be 'a citizen of the world'.

existence, migrating from one revolutionary nation (America) to another (France), had marked him as an outsider, or as Cheetham put it, 'an alien'.⁵⁵ Cosmopolitanism only created dissidents who, with nothing to lose and no familial concerns to occupy them, felt themselves free to sow the seeds of anarchy wherever they travelled.

Spurred on by ambition and implanted with the anarchistic desires of his fraudulent forefathers, Paine had become pregnant with illusory political theories. Chalmers captures this idea of being impregnated by false philosophy, and the image of the writing process as giving birth, is captured in his description of Paine as a mother figure. After 'a few months labour' and with the assistance of publisher J. S. Jordan and a group of London Democrats (or 'men-midwives'), Paine had delivered a 'mutilated brat ... to the public' on 13 March 1791.⁵⁶ In their rush to deliver the *Rights of Man*, these schemers became 'determined to deprive the child of its virility, rather than so hopeful an infant should be with-held from the world'.⁵⁷ According to Chalmers, the political and grammatical errors the pamphlet contained attested to its lack of 'virility;' moreover, the suggestion is, they demonstrated clearly its author's personal lack of potency.

Chalmers then switches Paine's role, downgrading him to the status of a child. To Paine's child, Chalmers plays the disapproving, hectoring parent. Paine's grammatical errors and puerile writing style indicated a regrettable lack of education, whilst his untenable theories provided evidence of his political immaturity. To emphasize the point, Chalmers devotes the second half of his biography to a linguistic dissection of the *Rights of Man*: both in terms of content and style, he finds that it

⁵⁵ Cheetham, *Life*, p. 121.

⁵⁶ Chalmers, *Life*, p. 67.

⁵⁷ Chalmers, *Life*, p. 67.

largely consisted of a '*gibberish*' that would hardly amuse mere 'school-boys' let alone 'the *grown men* of England'.⁵⁸ He castigates Paine for using the language of a child who lived in an egocentric world of his own design: politically, Paine stood for '*self-legislation*,' '*self actions*' and '*self-redress*,' whilst linguistically, his style could be said to be characterized by '*self-design*' and a stubborn resistance to grammatical convention.⁵⁹ As such, Paine's great political treatise consisted of the outpourings of a spoiled brat who had created his own 'novelties,' used 'barbarisms,' engaged in '*gross improprieties*,' produced 'egotisms,' and spawned '*new-born nonsense*'.⁶⁰

III

The loyalist depictions of Paine we have encountered thus far suggest that his persona was made up of what could only be described as an entire dysfunctional family: he was he a heartless, abusive husband; the father of political discord; a sort of rhetorical rake; the mother of a destructive progeny; a prodigal son; an orphan; and an ignorant, unruly child. Yet, as complex as this picture of Paine is, propagandists complicated it still further, by representing him as a creature that seemed to exist *outside* the realm of the human. Deformed by his beliefs and his wasted life, he was monstrously animal-like; in fact, to follow the chronology of his life was to follow a trajectory of escalating physical deformity. In his earliest days, Chalmers wrote, he had 'always appeared to female eyes a dozen years older than he was, owing to the hardness of his features, or to the scars of disease,' but over the years, these failings had inflated in proportion as his growing dedication to revolutionary politics grew.⁶¹ The 'habitual

⁵⁸ Chalmers, *Life*, pp. 86, 84.

⁵⁹ Chalmers, *Life*, pp. 55, 96.

⁶⁰ Chalmers, *Life*, pp. 96, 96, 99, 113, 101.

⁶¹ Chalmers, *Life*, p. 7.

drunkenness' which had 'commenced with the delirium of the French Revolution,' Cheetham added, had culminated in addiction, loneliness, vagrancy and exile'.⁶² In similar terms, Harford insisted that when Paine was incarcerated in a rotten, damp French gaol cell, the sick, stinking, putrid state of his body owed more to his heavy drinking than to the deplorable conditions.⁶³ Readers were regaled with tales of Paine's final humiliating descent and told how 'in his old age, when the attentions of a wife are inestimable, he had no house, no home; no one to help or to comfort him'.⁶⁴

As the rather loose standards of eighteenth-century personal hygiene gave way to the more fastidious nineteenth century emphasis on cleanliness, biographers made much of Paine's supposed filthiness. He had adopted, to borrow the phraseology of one reactionary novelist, 'the etiquette of a Jacobin toilette' and so did not require basic grooming tools such as soap.⁶⁵ His alleged personal uncleanness, the result of his extended bachelorhood, had turned him into an animal. Marriage, or more accurately, the possession of a wife who would have fulfilled domestic and care-taking duties, would have saved Paine from his descent into brutishness. Instead, the repulsive Paine had been left to live his life 'in holes and corners' like a wild creature, where he took in a filthy diet more fit for swine than humans and a daily amount of brandy which 'would have quickly killed any ordinary man'.⁶⁶

Paine was dehumanized or animalized in Gillray's *New Morality*, a scurrilous portrait of British radicals and Whigs, produced for the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine and Review* of 1798. Whilst William Godwin is a braying ass and John Harford Williams a snake,

⁶² Cheetham, *Life* p. 188.

⁶³ Harford, *Account*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Cheetham, *Life*, p. 219.

⁶⁵ Edward Mangin, *George the Third. A Novel*. (London: James Carpenter, 1807), vol. 2, p. 95-6.

⁶⁶ Harford, *Life*, pp. 4-5.

Paine is a surreptitious and voracious crocodile that crawls on his belly in the mud.

Such animalistic representations, the loyalist Isaac Hunt claimed, might be unpleasant, but it was unquestionably a fair reflection of the character of Tom Paine. Indeed, if an Englishman were to hold a looking glass up to the ugly radical's face, he would

see all the prominent, dismal features, the scowling brow, the hard and brazen front of this dingy, ugly, voracious, boasted monster from America. You will be able to remark the length and strength, the sharpness of his *nails* and *teeth*, and be guarded against his baneful, abominable, infectious, and corrupting breath, enemy to life and matter, and every institution and character, wise, sacred and illustrious.⁶⁷

The intention of this type of biographic discourse was to tangibly demarcate Paine from the human race. He was a physical monstrosity that appeared before readers' eyes. More than simply lacking the cultural refinements of civilized society, he was described as almost sub-human, an animal, a monster—characterizations that would seem to make it difficult for readers to visualize him as one of their own and practically impossible to see him as a political hero.

In his later years, Paine was often ranked among the most notorious of Old Testament villains. He was often compared, for instance, with Cain, the embittered, murderous son of Adam. In Paine's 'bloated' countenance, Grant Thorburn, a Presbyterian who tried to convert him, saw evidence that 'God had stamped his face with the mark of Cain'.⁶⁸ Charles Hamilton Elliot took a more linguistic approach, pointing out the 'strange coincidence in sound and character' between 'Paine' and 'Cain'.⁶⁹ In one of the very few rejoinders to his biographers, Paine appropriated this characterization and adopted the language of his accusers. In the *Citizen* he characterized James Cheetham as an "an ugly tempered man" who bore "the evidence

⁶⁷ Isaac Hunt, *Rights*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Grant Thorburn in Keane p. 519.

⁶⁹ Elliot, in Claeys, vol. 5, p. 330.

of it in the vulgarity and forbiddingness of his countenance”: on Cheetham’s face everyone could see that ““God ha[d] set his mark upon Cain””.⁷⁰

To other biographers, however, Paine resembled Nebuchadnezzar, the exiled Old Testament king whose ‘hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws’.⁷¹ Like the old king, Paine was a broken, unwashed fugitive whose toenails ““exceeded half an inch in length’ and grew, bird-like around his toes ‘nearly as far under as they extended on top.’”⁷² As was the case with the great biblical sinners, Paine’s misdeeds had recorded themselves on his body so that virtuous folk could recognize him for what he was. In such a fashion, propagandists contended that Paine’s body bore the marks of his scandalous personal life and his dangerous politics. His solitariness, his drunkenness, his dirtiness, his animal features and his monstrosity were manifestations of his sins against the family and the nation. He was physically marked, as if by God, as a public reminder that it was

the *duty* of every citizen, who wishes to ... *support* the good order of society, ... to *mark out* this figure of a man to the public eye, to *point out* the rancorous temper of this sovereign-deposing, bishop-kicking, title-levelling, American independent, who has brought over from Pennsylvania his tremendous bloody tomahawk, to scalp the Government, and murder the Constitution of Great Britain.⁷³

Readers are thus invited to channel their scandalous knowledge into community action. If they loved their country, they must ‘mark out’ and ‘point out’ the reformers, who like Paine, threatened everything that king-esteeming, God-fearing, family-loving Britons held dear. The ambitions of this monster and those who resembled him must be checked: political agitators must be ejected from society, if that society was to survive.

⁷⁰ Paine, in David Powell, *Tom Paine: The Greatest Exile* (London 1985), p. 261.

⁷¹ Daniel 4:33 (King James Version).

⁷² Carver in Cheetham, *Life*, p. 30; Carver in Harford, *Account*, p. 52, 50. Both biographers transcribed these personal details from William Carver’s letter to Paine (a letter he apparently never sent).

⁷³ Isaac Hunt, *Rights*, pp. 7-8, italics mine.

Part of the process of checking the ambitions of Painite radicals was to downplay and ridicule Paine's political influence. The biographer 'Adolphus' pointed out that even such sympathizers as the French patriot Madame Roland had misspelled Paine's name as 'Paynes' and that even the monster Robespierre had misspelled it 'Penne'.⁷⁴ He only mentioned 'this slight fact' in his *Biographical Memoirs of the French Revolution*, 'merely to shew how little chance of celebrity remains for English adventurers'—even in places such as republican France.⁷⁵ Those who would follow Paine's example, 'Adolphus' warns, should consider not only 'that at the age of threescore, he has neither wife, child, home, nor country' but also 'that all men have renounced him'.⁷⁶ Paine may have gathered around him a fiendish family of his own making, but even they had abandoned their adopted father.

Paine's name, in all its appellations, became a by-word for a dangerous sexual and political licentiousness, and a term of abuse used to humiliate political enemies, in the street, in the theatre, and of course, in print. The pornographic scandal magazine the *Bon Ton* designated a whole range of lewd and lascivious behaviours as manifestations of Painite equality. As Marilyn Morris has observed, the *Bon Ton* writers often described the worst kinds of moral infractions 'as manifestations of a "Painite tendency in sensuality"'.⁷⁷ The author of the tale of *The Unaccommodated Bridegroom and the Enraged Bride* mockingly linked Paine's call to political activism (and Mary Wollstonecraft's vindication of the rights of women) with the cause of a young wife who found herself rather unsatisfied on her marriage night, due to the diminutive size

⁷⁴ 'Adolphus,' vol. 2, p. 325.

⁷⁵ 'Adolphus,' p. 325.

⁷⁶ 'Adolphus,' p. 327.

⁷⁷ Marilyn Morris, 'Marital Litigation,' p. 38.

of a certain part of her new husband's anatomy. In mock support of the hoodwinked wife, the *Bon Ton* pronounced that

With whatever degree of contempt we reflect upon the wild visions of mad Tom Paine, as set forth in his political rhapsodies, called the Rights of man; we yet hold our selves responsible, not only in a political but a moral and natural point of view, as good and active citizens, to society at large, for those most invaluable and indispensable claims called the RIGHTS OF WOMAN.⁷⁸

The discourse of this article reveals something of the way in which Paine and his doctrines became equated with sexual transgression. His politics need not be addressed; his influence was much more easily and efficiently contained by casting him as 'wild' and 'mad' and harmful in 'a moral and natural point of view'. Good people and dutiful patriots denounced such individuals.

Propagandists informed Britons that they too had a responsibility to stave off Paineite corruption, to renounce Paine's doctrines and to circumscribe his sphere of influence. 'The black cat,' one 1792 Manchester broadside proclaimed, must 'be driven from the family': Tom Paine's 'journeymen' should be identified, exiled, interred and even hurried 'from this stage of life'.⁷⁹ It was not easy to recognize Paine's followers, propagandists warned, for like Paine himself, they could be a surreptitious lot. The public should note, however, that there were certain identifying qualities. 'I would request the reader to look round among his acquaintance,' Cobbett urged, and 'see if there be one among the yelping kennel of modern patriots, who is *not a bad husband, father, brother, or son*'.⁸⁰ Painites were easily recognized, he declared, for 'the same pride and turbulence of spirit' they demonstrate in their political writing 'le[d] them also to

⁷⁸ *Bon Ton*, October 1792, p. 279.

⁷⁹ (n. a.) ([Manchester: n. pub, 1793), *Some Particulars Relating to a New Discovery*, author's own.

⁸⁰ Cobbett, *Review*, p. 9.

tyrannize over those who are so unfortunate as to be subjected to their will'.⁸¹ As this type of discourse demonstrates, how political scandal sought to recruit the public. Scandal promoted the idea that patriotic citizens must make it their business to be wary of the signs not just of political virulence but of domestic turmoil.

Crucially the act of 'naming and shaming' political troublemakers went one step further in the quest to rout out society's disruptive elements. It also operated *self-reflexively*, by prompting readers to examine and to adjust their *own* responses to it. Cobbett makes this point emphatically when he insists that Paine's treatment of his wife should 'excite the indignation and resentment of every virtuous married woman' and rouse 'the detestation of every honourable man'.⁸² If the reader did not feel indignant at Paine's personal life and his politics, then that reader was neither herself virtuous, nor himself honourable. By implication, the reader's own life is brought into question; readers are pressured here to conform themselves to a conservative, and obviously gendered, code of morality. Britons could not remain apathetic about their own lives: only hypocrites would accuse others of moral crimes of which they were themselves guilty.

IV

The political scandalizing of Tom Paine continued in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Loyalist propagandists not only 'tarred' him along with other reformers, but also used him to promote conventional morality and the delights of marriage, family and home. Even after death, Paine's life continued to be used to these ends. Loyalists argued that though he had stopped short of a full deathbed confession,

⁸¹ Cobbett, *Review*, p. 9.

⁸² Cobbett, *Review*, p. 8.

he had made it quite clear that he did not want others to follow his example. The idea was that, as such a vociferous adversary of marriage, morals and religion, he could not face the public humiliation of a *full* recantation, but that 'there were, at certain times, relentings of that hardened impenitence which he strained every nerve to maintain, even to the last'.⁸³ Other pamphlets told of how Paine's followers had forsaken him and expressed regret at ever having read his works. William Wait's best-selling *The Last Days of a Person who had been one of Thomas Paine's Disciples*, for instance, was a best seller that warned readers that they should consider the agony of one young man who realized too late that he had imbibed the "Age of Reason" instead of the "Day of Salvation".⁸⁴ Likewise, the *Philanthropist* reported that Mme Bonneville had been tormented by her decision to reject "family and friends" for someone who had himself come to realize that his principles "will not bear out!"⁸⁵ According to Cheetham and Harford, eyewitnesses had reported that, in the final days of his life, 'no one could recommend matrimony with greater force than Paine'.⁸⁶ He had reportedly declared 'the marriage institution ... an excellent one' and in another instance, had congratulated 'a very respectable householder of New-York' for burning her copy of the *Age of Reason* ('the most dangerous book she had seen').⁸⁷ It was said that he had confided to her that "if ever the Devil had an agent on earth, I have been one."⁸⁸ In the first years of the French Revolution, Paine had been represented by reactionaries as the son of the Devil, the 'Devil's Advocate' and the spiritual father of characters named 'Mac Serpent'; yet, almost thirty years later, he was made to utter counterrevolutionary

⁸³ Cheetham, *Life*, p. 66.

⁸⁴ William Wait's *The Last Days of a Person who had been one of Thomas Paine's Disciples*, 7th ed. (Bristol: n. pub., 1819), p. 2.

⁸⁵ Cheetham, *Life*, p. 66.

⁸⁶ Cheetham, *Life*, p. 279.

⁸⁷ Cheetham, *Life*, p. 278; Harford, *Account*, p. 67.

⁸⁸ Harford, *Account*, p. 67.

warnings against his own writings and to testify against his own dangerous brand of infidelity.⁸⁹

Paine was an incredibly malleable figure, as the plethora of representations we have seen here indicate. Well into the nineteenth century, propagandists of all political persuasions regularly subjected him to ideological appropriation. For all his malleability, however, he continued to be associated with immorality and characterized as a threat to the family. Those who defended him politically and philosophically were themselves dogged by Paine's objectionable persona. When Cobbett defected to the reform cause in the early 1800s, his efforts 'to wrest patriotism away from the Tories and to present Radicalism as the true patriot's position,' continued to be overshadowed by the issue of Paine's debauchery.⁹⁰ In the 1810s, Cobbett made herculean efforts to rehabilitate Paine in hopes of re-igniting a radicalism largely silenced by toryism. In the *Political Register*, he characterized Paine as a "'true Englishman ... [the] son of the 'Lower Orders'" and identified himself publicly as Paine's true political son, as the torchbearer of Paine's 'expiring flambeau'.⁹¹ He planned to write a hagiographic biography of Paine that would counter the scurrilous biographical information he had himself promulgated in the 1790s. Cobbett had gone as far as to exhume Paine's remains from his burial place in New York state and shipped them to England—with the intention of organizing "'bone" rallies' and commemorations—but he soon found out that, as Ian

⁸⁹ Countless examples could be given: Paine is represented, for example, as the Devil's son in a 1792[?] Broadside entitled *True Blue: or, Heart of Oak for Ever*. In the same year he appears as Satan's assistant in *Intercepted Correspondence from Satan to Citizen Paine* (in *Political Writings of the 1790s*, vol. 5, ed. Gregory Claeys (London 1995) pp. 412-13 and as the mentor of the radical 'Mac'Serpent' in *Liberty and Equality; treated of in a Short History Addressed from a Poor Man to his Equals*, 3rd ed. (London 1792). He is often represented in communion with the devil, in for instance, *Mad Tom in a Rage* (1801) (artist unknown) and in *The Friends of the People* (1792) (artist unknown).

⁹⁰ Leonora Natrass, 'Introduction,' *William Cobbett: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p.3. Cobbett's ideological transformation began when he returned to England from America in 1800, and was complete by about 1810.

⁹¹ See *Political Register*, vol. XXXV, p. 24, in William Cobbett, *A Brief History of the Remains of the Late Thomas Paine, from the time of their Disinternment in 1819* (London 1820), p. 4.

Dyck puts it, 'Paine and his legacy were a greater liability than ever'.⁹² Instead Cobbett was caricatured hobbling along under the weight of Paine's bones on his back. A *Bon Ton* writer expressed disgust that Cobbett's return to Britain was 'preceded by the bones of an Atheist, a monster once in human shape and an accredited agent of the Devil' who, at one time, Cobbett had sought 'to damn ... more deeply (if possible) to infamous immortality'.⁹³

Tellingly, in his incarnation as a reformer, Cobbett often employed the same moralizing discourse against Paine's political enemies as he had used, as a conservative, against Paine himself. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, as the radical's new champion, he accused a morally corrupt British establishment of attacking the upright Paine with the 'fangs of bloody monsters': 'Ye pretended moralists,' he declared, 'which of you, to assist his infant merit, would diminish even the surplus of your debaucheries!'⁹⁴ Cobbett set the tone for Paine's succeeding defenders, at least one of whom attempted to re-present his private life as much less immoral than it had been. In his 1819 *Life of Paine*, for instance, Clio Rickman not only insisted that Paine treated his wife generously and had acted honourably in his dealings with the Bonnevilles, but that he had contributed to the domestic happiness of countless others:

While Mr. Paine's enemies have laboured, and are still labouring, to detect vices and errors in his life and manners, shall not his friends dwell on the immense good he has done in public life, on the happiness he has created for myriads, in private? Shall they not point to the abodes of delight and comfort, where live and flourish the blessings of domestic bliss; AFFECTION'S dear intercourses, FRIENDSHIP'S solaces, and LOVE'S sacred enjoyments? And there are millions of such abodes originating in his labours. Why seek occasions, surly critics and detractors! to malteat and misrepresent Mr. Paine? He was mild, unoffending, sincere, gentle, humble, and unassuming; his talents were soaring,

⁹² Ian Dyck, 'Debts and Liabilities: William Cobbett and Thomas Paine,' *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine*, ed. I. Dyck (NY 1988), pp. 97, 91.

⁹³ 'Courtney Melmouth,' *Bon Ton*, 1 Feb. 1820, pp. 209-10.

⁹⁴ William Cobbett, *Brief History*, p. 7.

acute, profound, extensive, and original; and he possessed that charity, which covers a multitude of sins.⁹⁵

In terms of its fulsome language and its profuse style, this elegy on Paine's virtuous character and his life's contribution to the cause of conjugal harmony, recalls Burke's apostrophe to Marie Antoinette. Rickman bestows Paine with all the qualities that make a good husband, a reliable friend and a trustworthy statesman in an attempt to veil what had become known about—or believed about—Paine's life with a patina of private morality.

More often, however, Paine's defenders argued that the radical's life had simply been compatible with the prevailing state of moral decay. In his 1821 *Life of Paine*, the reformer W. T. Sherwin did not deny the claims against Paine, but instead blamed the radical's personal failures on the 'cheerless prospect' of an England that provided 'no hope' for her humble sons.⁹⁶ In his earliest days, the ill-fated Paine had been unhappily 'relieved from every tie which might be supposed to bind him to his country' by a government which, instead of acting 'as an affectionate parent,' proved to be 'an unnatural monster, who had sought to strangle her infant offspring'.⁹⁷ Blame for the loss of Paine's reputation belonged with that same mercenary government, for it had fabricated and circulated the stories of Paine's sexual misadventures, since those stories were 'too improbable and too ridiculous to be believed'.⁹⁸ In such a way, Sherwin carefully avoids any intimation that he either accepted Paine's lifestyle or that he believed it to be without political relevance; instead, he redirects the finger of

⁹⁵ Clio Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (London: n. pub., 1819), pp. 206-7; see also pp. 45, 180.

⁹⁶ W. T. Sherwin, *Life of Paine with Observations on his Writings, Critical and Explanatory* (London: Carlile 1819) p. 19. This version, as well as a *Memoir of the Life of Thomas Paine* were published by radical publisher Richard Carlile, who also produced his own *Life of Thomas Paine* in 1821.

⁹⁷ Sherwin, *Life*, pp. 18, 64.

⁹⁸ Sherwin, *Life*, p. 17.

accusation at the status quo and offers a wider criticism of the moral and political state of the nation.

The radical writer, editor and secularist G. J. Holyoake presented a similar sort of defence, arguing that *all* politicians, regardless of their political persuasion, were a corrupt bunch sorely in need of reform. Paine's private affairs, far from atypical, were consistent with those of other well-known political personalities. 'Is Charles James Fox branded as a drunkard? Is Sheridan?' he asked, 'Do the church-and-state worshippers who would stigmatise Paine, write the name of beast on the front of George the Fourth?'⁹⁹ Not just politicians but the wider public were morally tarnished and so could do with some reform themselves. For 'however clean-handed' members of the public might claim to be, they were 'not pure-hearted enough to throw stones, even at those *taken in adultery*'.¹⁰⁰ Clio Rickman agreed with Sherwin, suggesting that Paine's detractors 'would be much better employed in mending their own lives, and shewing in them an example of good manners and morals, than in calumniating the characters and in detailing silly stories' about the life and death of Paine.¹⁰¹

In their attempts to save Paine's politics from oblivion, Rickman, Sherwin and Holyoake had no choice but to address the issue of his private life. To varying degrees and in different ways, their vindications attempted to reconcile that life to prevalent ideas about personal morality and the vital role of the family. Ultimately, the task of defending Paine was a difficult one, for he was a victim of tightening definitions of respectability. Conservatives had proved particularly dextrous at shaping him—as they would radicals such as Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin—into a public

⁹⁹ G. J. Holyoake, *The Life of Paine by the Editor of 'The National'* (London: n. pub. 1851), p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ Holyoake, *Life*, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Clio Rickman, pp. x-xi.

enemy. He had been used to strengthen public loyalty; to ignite popular hostility against reform (or anything that smelled of it); and to justify the maintenance of the political and social status quo. Destitute and alone, Paine's misfortunes, his loneliness, the deplorable state of his body and the torment of his mind were warnings to would-be radicals and endorsements for quiet, virtuous living. The life of Paine sent a clear message: the nation must get its houses—private and political—in order. Immorality, manifested in either political or private life, would not be tolerated in political leaders, nor political upstarts, nor in the people themselves. It was incumbent upon *all* members of society to contribute to the maintenance of civil order, to live lives of moral uprightness, and to establish domestically harmonious homes.

CHAPTER 3

'A BIOGRAPHICAL ATTEMPT TO CANONIZE PROSTITUTION':
GODWIN'S MEMORIALIZATION OF WOLLSTONECRAFT

In a 1793 *Address to the People of Great Britain*, a Scottish pamphleteer proposed a novel alteration to Britain's electoral rules (and the evidence suggests this was a male author). It would be in the country's best interest, 'A Friend to Liberty, Property and Reform' argued, 'to make a man ... an elector *from the day of his marriage*'.¹ To establish marriage as the criterion of enfranchisement, he explained, 'would both add to the respectability of the electors, and give a greater security for their making a prudent choice, as a married man, all things else equal, is a more respectable member of society, and has a more settled interest in his country, than a batchelor'.² Moreover, he argued, such a reform would have an added benefit, for besides providing 'a means of promoting marriage, which is not only advantageous to the morals and fortunes of individuals,' such a voting requirement would, in turn, improve 'the morals and wealth of the nation' as a whole.³

Such a proposal reveals in very precise terms the degree to which marriage was understood to be the foundation upon which a politically, economically and morally sound nation existed. Marriage, to quote the author of a treatise on *The Deportment of a Married Life*, was perceived to be 'the subject of all others the most important, having for its purpose the Promotion of Universal Happiness in that Moral Union which is the Cement of Society'.⁴

The quality of that cement was a crucial issue: as Donna Andrew observes, 'stable, well-

¹ 'A Friend to Liberty, Property, and Reform,' *An Address to the People of Great Britain; Containing a Comparison between the REPUBLICAN AND Reforming Parties, in their Sentiments and Intentions with Respect to the British Constitution* (1793), In Claeys vol. 7, pp. 300-345 (p. 338).

² 'A Friend to Liberty, Property, and Reform,' vol. 7, p. 338.

³ 'A Friend to Liberty, Property, and Reform,' vol. 7, p. 338.

⁴ 'The Honourable E____ S____,' *The Deportment of a Married Life*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodges, 1798) p. v.

ordered marriage was viewed as central to the existence of a stable, well-ordered society'.⁵ Affectionless, adulterous marriages, formed in anticipation of economic gain or social advancement would not do: 'marriages they are not,' declared one writer in a 1794 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 'they have been properly called *legal prostitutions*'.⁶ Countless observers extolled the social, political and personal benefits of affectionate marriages. In an article 'On Marriage,' a reporter for the periodical *How Do You Do?* celebrated the virtues of homes run like little well-ordered, harmonious and productive nations. 'A man who lives cheerfully in his family,' he wrote, 'who loves and is beloved by his wife, who views his children with the fondness of a parent, and who conducts his domestic affairs with wisdom, beholds a well regulated state in his own house, of which he is himself the head'.⁷

Throughout the 1790s, scores of pamphleteers, biographers, reviewers and novelists consistently reiterated this sentiment, so that by the nineteenth century, it had practically become a mantra. This tremendous faith in marriage—or more specifically, conjugal love and fidelity—and the conception of it as the indisputable foundation of civil society, provides a particularly revealing interpretive context for a study of the reception of William Godwin. In the first chapter, we saw how loyal Britons identified the deterioration of marriage in France as concomitant to that nation's barbarous decline. Against this cultural and historic backdrop, Godwin had contended that 'the institution of marriage is made a system of fraud' and had described marriage as 'the worst of monopolies'.⁸ It was hardly surprising, in the wake of French Jacobinism, the revolutionary wars, the rise of reactionary loyalism, and Pitt's legal campaign against radicalism, that Godwin's views were increasingly

⁵ Donna T. Andrew, 'Adultery à-la-Mode': Privilege, the Law and Attitudes to Adultery, 1770-1809,' *History* 82: 265 (January 1997), pp. 5-23 (p. 7).

⁶ *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1794), 272, in Andrew, p. 15.

⁷ *How Do You Do?* No. 2, 6 August 1796.

⁸ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 3rd ed. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798) ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 762.

viewed as threatening to social stability. He, like Paine, was fashioned into an anti-familial figure who felt nothing for the affectionate ties of marriage, family, community or nation. But there were also differences in the way the two men were portrayed. Godwin became a specific kind of a threatening figure: he was a 'new' or 'modern' philosopher, a cold-hearted, detached, almost scientific figure who was more concerned with his social experiments than with human needs and emotions.

The term 'new philosophy,' like 'Jacobinism,' was largely undefined and indefinable, a nebulous label that roughly denoted any body of ideas that had a whiff of Rousseauian or Voltairian immorality, but with such an expansive definition 'it could encompass any transgression against the institutions or manners of the *status quo*'.⁹ As Matthew Grenby points out in his study of 1790s anti-Jacobin novels, the reactionaries' campaign was not 'designed to counter some specific protagonists and tenets of new philosophy'; rather they targeted what they perceived to be the essence of new philosophy: an 'ultimate nihilism, expressing itself simply as the absence of all constraint'.¹⁰ The lives and writings of Godwin and female new philosophers Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft seemed to display, to alarmed Britons, the most frightening aspect of nihilism; that is, an alleged desire to abolish marriage, that sacred moral union which formed the cement of society. For loyalists, it was not a great leap from Godwin's disavowal of marriage to the bloody 'Jacobin marriages' of France and the monstrous acts of patricide performed there. Godwin's philosophy led directly to the types of terrifying scenes of familial breakdown that, as we saw in the first chapter, had transformed France from a civilized to a barbarous nation.

⁹ Matthew Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) p. 66.

¹⁰ Grenby, p. 75.

A common perception was that of the new philosophers, Wollstonecraft and Godwin seemed particularly to disavow what Lisa Vargo has designated 'the claims of the familiar and the familial'.¹¹ This was due in large part because the couple's private lives overwrote their political arguments; at the same time, loyalist animosity tended to be directed at their personal characters, or more accurately their personas, rather than at new philosophy itself. Very few anti-Jacobin novels and pamphlets, or even reviews, engaged with Godwin's *arguments* about marriage. They largely ignored his contention that it was an institution that often subjugated individuals, that it encouraged falsity, self-delusion, hypocrisy, possessiveness, ruthlessness and competitiveness; moreover, loyalists tended to disregard his argument that marriage treated women as commodities. Instead, Godwin's zealotry for new philosophy, his allegedly cold and unfeeling character, and Wollstonecraft's tangled and ruinous personal life increasingly subsumed the philosophical arguments of his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* and her *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*.¹²

In many ways, it is not so significant that the attacks on Godwin and Wollstonecraft betray a lack of familiarity with their arguments, nor is it particularly important that loyalists peddled image rather than biographical reality. The real story lies in the emerging public perception that the types of personal lives that Godwin and Wollstonecraft were thought to have lived were deeply threatening to the social order. The previous chapter showed how in the first half of the 1790s, propagandists enforced the notion that private and public virtue were linked directly; this chapter will show that by 1797, public debate on reform issues per

¹¹ Lisa Vargo, 'The Aikens and the Godwins: Notions of Conflict and Stoicism in Anna Barbauld and Mary Shelley,' *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism*, 11:1 (2005), pp. 84-98. Vargo paraphrases Anne Janowitz's claim in 'Amiable and radical sociability: Anna Barbauld's "free familiar conversation,"' in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 62-81.

¹² Grenby, p. 77. Grenby points out that often novelists quoted long passages from *Political Justice*, but that they were obviously quoted from other novelists, as the same misquotes were repeated; the most-quoted passages were, almost without exception, those that focussed on friendship, marriage and sexual relations.

se had declined in the face of a widespread and very vocal campaign against the sexual immorality of the new philosophers. In this chapter, we will see how Godwin and Wollstonecraft were used to drum up support for a moral reform campaign that applied greater pressure on the public to abide by a stringent code of behaviour—a code that emphasized sexual purity and marital fidelity above all else.

II.

In the 1790s, public reception of Godwin's private life and his politics went through three distinct phases that concern us here. In the first stage, the publication of *Political Justice* in 1793 and *Caleb Williams* in 1794 garnered Godwin much acclaim. Whilst the negligible amount of negative criticism he did receive focused on issues of family and morality, these issues were discussed in relation to the *content* of the work in question. Thus, for instance, in its positive review of *Caleb Williams*, the reform-minded *Analytical Review* criticized the lack of affectionate relationships in the narrative: there was 'no fondly anxious parent, or child devoted to filial duty'.¹³ The reviewer struggled with Godwin's suggestion that a society could exist without 'duties of friendship, sexual attachment, parental love, [or] filial affection, protection, gratitude, and every other object of amiable emotion'.¹⁴ The *English Review* expressed similar reservations about *Political Justice* and its disregard of the process whereby the 'ardent and generous passion' of parental love was converted into conjugal love, communal love and finally, love of country.¹⁵ In one of the few overtly personal remarks, the *English Review* writer went on to suggest that Godwin had arranged 'all ideas of attachment and duty around the centre of a most complicated chaos of crude and cold abstractions' because he was 'very imperfectly acquainted' with human passions and

¹³ *AR* 21 (1795), pp. 166-75, in *GR* p. 84.

¹⁴ *AR* 21 (1795) pp. 166-75, in *GR*, p. 83.

¹⁵ *English Review* 28 (October 1796), pp. 437-43, in *GR* p. 82.

feelings.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the personal nature of this stab at Godwin's unmarried status, it is a brief and gentle gibe, and one of the few personal remarks on Godwin's writings in these early years.

After mid-decade, however, things changed. From about 1795 until 1798, Godwin's perceived philosophical flaws were increasingly represented in personal terms. Critics conceptualized his alleged anti-familial and anti-marriage stance as the philosophical by-product of a character that lacked the finer emotions of love, affection and loyalty. He was most often depicted as a coldly detached individual, a philosophical zealot whose passion for ideas precluded any love for family, friends and nation. In 1796, he was the likely subject of an anonymous caricature depicting 'A Philosopher' (Pl. 5). Hunched over his table with his squinty eyes fixed on his shadowy experiments, the philosopher-Godwin appears as a conjurer or alchemist. His remoteness and blind single-mindedness was also lampooned in the 21 April 1795 issue of the *Courier* which announced that 'on Saturday afternoon, Mr. Godwin, the Author of "Political Justice," was rode over by a man on horseback in Oxford-street, and received a violent contusion in his face, which was also much cut'.¹⁷ The paper was 'happy' to report, however, that there seemed to be 'no dangerous consequences'.¹⁸ This newspaper anecdote implies that Godwin, who was widely known to have taken long daily walks through London, was so completely consumed by his abstract thoughts that he was oblivious to the real world that rushed past him. Godwin was 'the walking philosopher,' a nickname that would be parodied mercilessly by anti-Jacobin novelists in the late 1790s and which stuck with him long after. In 1834, for instance, *Fraser's Magazine* depicted him strolling the streets of London, his eyes unseen and unseeing, hidden behind spectacles and a

¹⁶ *English Review* 28 (October 1796), pp. 437-43, in GR p. 82.

¹⁷ MC 21 April 1795.

¹⁸ MC 21 April 1795.



Pl. 5. Artist Unknown, *A Philosopher, — Conduit Street* (London: H. Humphrey, 1796).
 Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

low brimmed hat. His hunched pose and his arms enfolded behind his back gesture at his disconnection from reality, signifying that he is a man of books, not of life or action.

Although this commentary mocks Godwin personally, it must be emphasized again that it does so rather playfully, for he is not yet perceived to be the dangerous or threatening figure that he would become later in the decade. Crucially, in 1795-6, however, reformers and previous supporters began to attack him, and these attacks were much more personal—a fact which, at least to anti-revolutionaries, seemed to demonstrate the type of disloyalty Godwin promulgated in his writing.¹⁹ The first great blow to his public reputation came January 1796 when Godwin and one of his foremost admirers, the political lecturer and writer John Thelwall, engaged in a public and distinctly personal quarrel. The two friends had shared many of the same political views, and although their exact intellectual relationship remains rather opaque, Thelwall had referred to Godwin as his ‘philosophical father’.²⁰ Thelwall was incensed to find that, in a pamphlet written in response to the notorious two acts against sedition, Godwin had condemned what he saw as the political immoderation of the popular radical movement. In his *Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr. Pitt’s Bills*, Godwin had characterized the London Corresponding Society meetings and Thelwall’s own ‘system of political lecturing’ (referring to his Beaufort Buildings meetings) as ‘well adapted to ripen men for purposes, more or less similar to those of the Jacobin Society of Paris’.²¹ Godwin had concealed his identity behind the nom de plume ‘A Lover of Order,’ but his style was recognizable and he very quickly confessed authorship.

¹⁹ Coleridge attacked Godwin and the principles of *Political Justice* in his 1795 Bristol lectures and in *The Watchman* of 1796.

²⁰ Peter Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1984), p. 140; This discussion owes much to Robert Lamb, *Constructing the Philosopher: William Godwin and Loyalist Propaganda* (unpublished paper presented at the British Society for Eighteenth Century Studies Conference, January 2004).

²¹ William Godwin, *Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr. Pitt’s Bills* (London: J. Johnson, 1795) p. 2.

Although Godwin's precise motives for such an attack are open to debate, it seems certain, as John Barrell points out, that Thelwall must have felt betrayed by what seemed to be an attempt to define his "philosophical disquisitions" as somehow 'beyond the reach of law'.²² Thelwall interpreted Godwin's characterization of his politics as an intrinsically personal public attack—a 'slandorous misrepresentation'—and so felt justified in attacking him on equally personal grounds, in an equally public medium. Thelwall's retaliation against his philosophical father came in the preface to the second collected volume of *The Tribune*, in which he contended that Godwin's alleged personal coldness was generative of a concomitant political remoteness, a remoteness that manifested itself in the type of irresponsible, unfeeling views expressed in his attack on Thelwall and the London Corresponding Society. He specifically targeted Godwin's bachelor status (despite a full social calendar and a renowned love of company and conversation, as an unmarried forty-year old Godwin was often represented as a loner). Godwin's pamphlet was 'proof,' Thelwall argued, of 'how great and how dangerous ... the life of domestic solitude' could be. Godwin was a 'singular man,' whose 'scrupulous avoidance of all popular intercourse' had shown how prolonged solitude

deaden[ed] the best sympathies of nature, and encourage a selfish and personal vanity, which the recluse philosopher first mistakes for principle, and then sacrifices it to every feeling of private, and sometimes public justice.²³

Thelwall contends here that Godwin's 'single' status rendered him 'singular' in more ways than one: the lack of personal intimacy in his life gave rise to a philosophic insularity and a disengagement from the real struggle for reform. Godwin avoided debate and the "mixed and crowded audiences" that had gathered "in theatres and halls of assembly" to agitate for

²² Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 587.

²³ Thelwall, *The Tribune, a Periodical Publication, consisting chiefly of the Political Lectures of J. Thelwall*, no. II (London: Symonds et al., 1796), p. xv.

reform.²⁴ He was a '*philosopher*' whose remoteness had rendered him—and here Thelwall invokes the image of Godwin as a sightless perambulator—'only a *walking* index of obsolete laws and dead-lettered institutes'.²⁵

Thelwall explicitly links bachelorhood with political detachment. One could only identify political injustice and instigate reform, *if* one had experienced fraternity, solidarity, friendship and kinship; in turn, he suggests that these values could only be nurtured within married life. Conjugal affection allowed an individual to recognize, to appreciate, and to 'inspire that generous sympathy—that *social ardor*, without which a nation is but a populous wilderness'.²⁶ Godwin's cold Enlightenment rationality and his lofty philosophizing were, according to such an argument, products of his discreditable marital status. The wifeless and childless Godwin was marked as both politically ineffective and personally untrustworthy. The implication is that should Godwin have taken a wife—something that looked rather unlikely in 1796—then he would have formulated more judicious political views.

In such a fashion, Godwin's private life had been introduced officially into public debate; from this point on, it would beleaguer his philosophic and literary endeavours. Crucially, Godwin's private life would be used, too, for a wider purpose: to define the features of an acceptable and an unacceptable private life. In fact, there are moments in Thelwall's article where he uses remarkably general terms that go far beyond specific criticism of Godwin. It was 'the life of domestic solitude' in general that was 'dangerous' to society: bachelorhood gave rise to 'a selfish and personal vanity'.²⁷ Thelwall taps into an existing cultural suspicion of vanity, which was defined in this era as an individualism that

²⁴ E.P. Thompson also conceived of Godwin as an "intellectual extremist" who was divorced from the activities of the emerging working-class. See *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 244.

²⁵ Thelwall, *The Tribune*, no. 2, p. xv., second italics mine.

²⁶ Thelwall, *The Tribune*, no. 2, pp. xiv-xv.

²⁷ Thelwall, *The Tribune*, no. 2, p. xv.

rejected familial and familiar ties. Bachelorhood was a manifestation of such an individualism, a product of those narcissistic tendencies that undermined social harmony and national cohesiveness—crucial elements for the nation’s survival at all times, but particularly so in the 1790s.

In this respect, Thelwall joined with a contingent of reformist and conservative pamphleteers who railed against both the ‘vanity of aspirers to profligate distinction’ and the selfishness of unfeeling bachelors.²⁸ Although not necessarily mutually exclusive, these two manifestations of personal vanity—the hedonist and the bachelor—fell roughly along political party lines: Whigs were accused of an unrestrained licentiousness that reflected their political irresponsibility, whilst Pitt and his Tories were charged with a personal frigidity, a sign of their calculating, cold-hearted politics. Pitt’s political allies (or according to the opposition press, his paid ‘deputies’) often received similar treatment, particularly the government spy and propagandist John Reeves. In one squib, *The Morning Post* printed an address to Reeves from ‘the Old Maids of Westminster’. The Westminster Tories thank Reeves for protecting their virtue and chastity from sans-culottes or the ‘breechless rogues’ who would defile their ‘spotless virtue’.²⁹ Like Reeves, the ministry is proud to be as ‘chaste and good’ and ‘as frigid’ as he.³⁰ They are self-described ‘virgin country-women’ who on the one hand, express relief to have avoided their debauching at the hands of Whigs and members of the Friends of the People, and on the other, express with some poignancy, their lingering disappointment that they ‘can never now expect, a repetition of, the RAPE OF

²⁸ ‘A Friend to Social Order,’ *Thoughts on Marriage and Criminal Conversation, with some hints of appropriate means to check the progress of the latter; comprising remarks on the life, opinions, and example of the late Mrs. Wollstonecraft Godwin: respectfully addressed and inscribed to the Right Honorable Lord Kenyon, Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King’s Bench* (London: F. C. Rivington, et al., 1799) p. 54.

²⁹ MP, 8 February 1793.

³⁰ MP, 8 February 1793.

THE SABINES'.³¹ The implication here and in much of the scandal directed at the Tories is that the supposedly spotless virtue of Pitt and his deputies masked rather less wholesome desires. Their political ambitions were much stronger than any other of their desires.

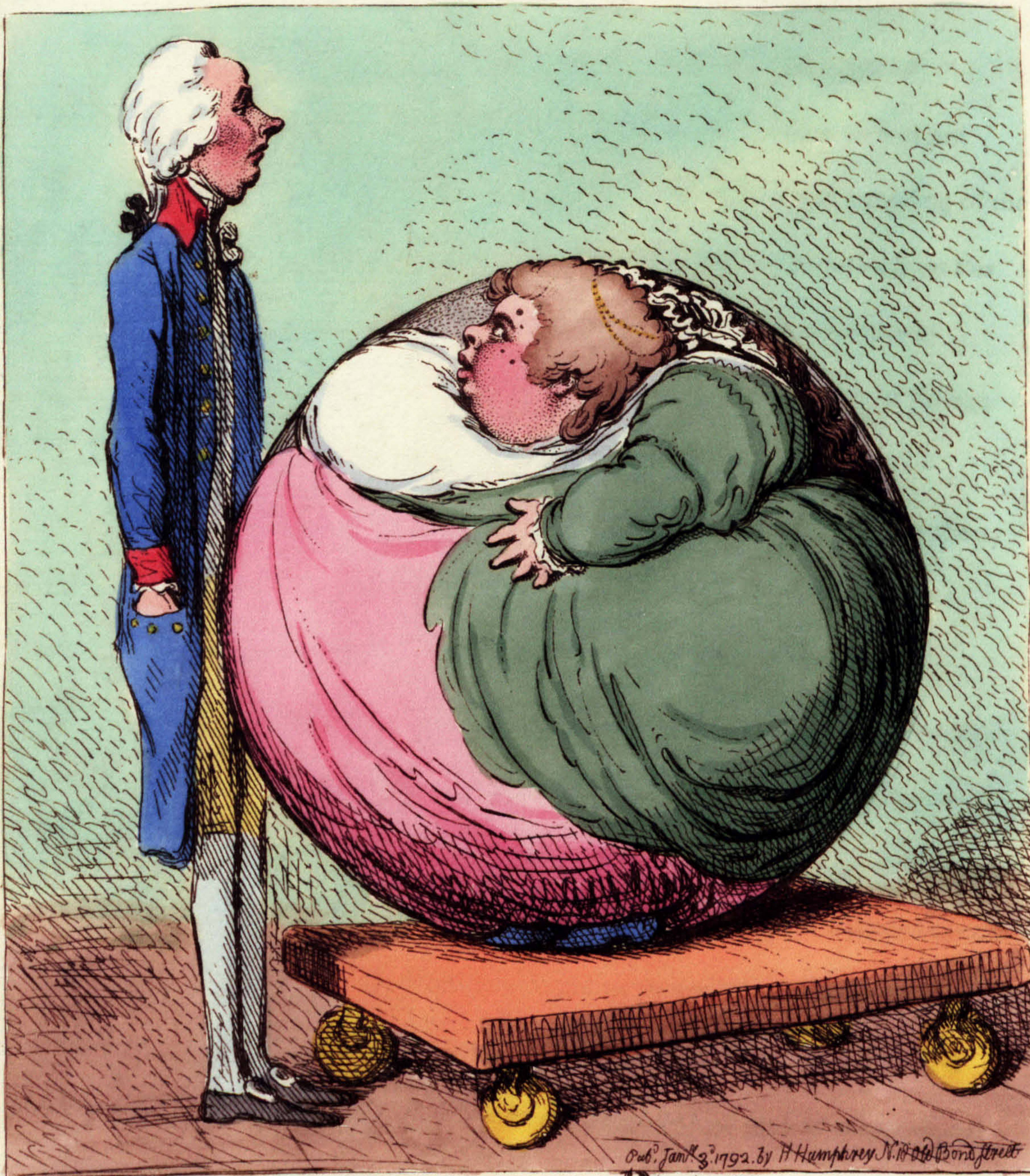
Revealingly, the discourse of anti-Pittite propaganda is similar to that used in condemnations of Godwin in these years. Pitt's emotional detachment was a constant reference point in the press; for instance, one *Morning Post* writer figured that the best way to encapsulate a particularly nasty drop in London's temperature was to write that 'there never was more extraordinary weather than the present. It is as *cold* as Mr. Pitt'.³² Pitt was also commonly referred to in newspapers as 'Immaculate Boy', a socially immature, inexperienced youth whose spotless private life was a void. In Gillray's *A Sphere, projecting against a Plane* (1792) (Pl. 6), Pitt was the eponymous 'Plane,' an extremely thin, straight, fixed, almost lifeless character—'a perfectly even & regular Surface'—who never expressed nor consummated a sexual desire. Thus, 'when applied ever so closely to a SPHERE,' the text reads, he 'can only touch its Superfices, without being able to enter it'.

This representation of the supposedly virginal Pitt was carried to a greater extreme in a particularly scurrilous piece of personal and political satirizing in *The Courier*. Why, the paper asked the thirty-six year old Pitt, did he continue to be 'an enemy to the delights of Love?' when the possession of a woman's 'charms shall give a tenderness to thy nature and humanize thy soul'.³³ In similar fashion, a mock theatre advertisement of late 1794, also in *The Courier*, announced that the government leader, in the character of Signor Pittachio would make 'JOHN BULL A JACK ASS,' by performing 'A SOLO ON THE VIOL

³¹ MP, 8 February 1793.

³² MP 7 July 1791.

³³ C, 22 January 1795.



Pub^d Jan^y 3^d 1792. by H Humphrey N^o 10 Old Bond Street

A SPHERE, projecting against a PLANE.

Definitions from
Euclid.

Def: 1st. B: 4th A **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. — Def: 2^d. B: 7th 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 Superfices, without being able to enter it — Vide. Euclid. illustrated; by the Hon^{ble} M^{rs} Circumference.

Pl. 6. James Gillray, *A Sphere, projecting against a Plane* (London: H. Humphrey, 1792). By permission of the British Museum.

D'AMOUR'.³⁴ In other words, Pitt would play with himself for the amusement of the public in a one-man show. According to these mock playbills, Pitt's 'Prettygirlibus indifferentissimus' (or, simply, his indifference to women), and the fact that he had not 'engaged any female performers,' was incontrovertibly linked to his political cudgeling of the British public.³⁵ Pitt was only capable, *The Courier* suggested, of feeling for himself (in this case quite literally). His lack of passion, affection and attachments to others was why, according to the opposition press, he was so willing to sacrifice British citizens on foreign battlefields and, as the Two Acts had shown, to the long arm of the law.

In response to such opposition propaganda, the conservative press tried to soften Pitt's image by consistently announcing his impending marriage (and at the same time, urging its realization). *The True Briton*, for instance, unflaggingly assured readers 'of the approaching nuptials' of Pitt and the daughter of Lord Auckland, Eleanor Eden. The paper confidently assured him 'that he cannot lead to the Altar a *fairer Bride*'.³⁶ And on another occasion the paper stated compellingly that 'Mr. PITT should unite with EDEN,' as he would then 'not be far from Paradise'.³⁷ The loyalist defence of Pitt and the whiggish attacks on his marital status had much in common with the critical treatment and public reception of Godwin. The attacks on the two men were underwritten by similar cultural attitudes. There existed a deep distrust of bachelorhood and an equally abiding faith in conventional domestic arrangements.

³⁴ C, 28 November 1794; 29 December 1794.

³⁵ C, 15 December 1794.

³⁶ TB, 5 January 1797.

³⁷ MP, 11 January 1791.

III

In the two years after Thelwall's attack, Godwin was perceived as a philosophical zealot, but after his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft in 1797, he became a *married* philosophical zealot. Then, in 1798, his public persona transmogrified into a much more threatening figure; critics were vitriolic and much more personal in their attacks. This alteration came about as a result of the publication of his *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft in January 1798—a mere four months after her death from complications in childbirth. In the *Memoirs*, Godwin had narrated details of Wollstonecraft's pursuit of the married artist Henry Fuseli, her affair with the American adventurer Gilbert Imlay, her subsequent pregnancy and Imlay's desertion of her, her consequent attempted suicides, and finally, her affair with Godwin and the resulting pregnancy. Scores of writers, of all political persuasions, charged Godwin with authoring Wollstonecraft's disgrace, both in life and in print. 'Her husband,' the author of a defence of Wollstonecraft contended, had 'undermine[d] the influence which she had been labouring to acquire' as an author.³⁸ Either he had not known his wife's heart and mind or he had purposely suppressed her true opinions; either way, he had irreparably harmed her both personally and politically. The prevailing perception was that marriage had not softened or humanized him; instead, he had become so devoted to his philosophical cause, that he would willingly forfeit his wife for it.

Godwin's willingness to use his wife's private life to promote his philosophical cause was seen as an unmanly, unchivalrous, and distinctly un-English act. The cold-hearted philosopher had most indecently served his wife up on a plate to her political enemies. The *Memoirs* demonstrated that Godwin lacked the requisite manly emotions of a husband, that

³⁸ (n. a.), *A Defence of the Character and Conduct of the late Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Founded on Principles of Nature and Reason, as Applied to the Peculiar Circumstances of her Case, in a Series of Letters to a Lady*. London: James Wallis, 1803. pp. 52-3.

he had felt neither a masculine protectiveness toward his wife, a jealousy for her reputation, nor a sense of pride in her accomplishments. There was something very wrong, reviewers contended, with the fact that a sense of civility had prevented strangers—even politically and morally hostile strangers—from publicizing the most private details of her life, but had not prevented her own husband from doing so. With a distinct lack of the ‘glowing ardour’ that a husband ‘ought to feel’ toward his wife’s reputation, Godwin had confirmed stories that may have been ‘whispered concerning her while living,’ but which ‘the good natured part of mankind’ had politely excused as mean-spirited ‘scandal and calumny.’³⁹ Since he had described the *Memoirs* as a *vindication* of his beloved wife’s character, he could not have been ‘ignorant that the shafts of calumny had already been launched against her’ yet he had publicized intimate secrets over which any husband ‘would have endeavoured to draw an eternal veil’.⁴⁰ Indeed, ‘blushes would suffuse the cheeks of most husbands,’ the *Monthly Review* declared, ‘if they were *forced* to relate those anecdotes of their wives which Mr. Godwin voluntarily proclaims to the world’.⁴¹

Although Godwin displayed a distinct lack of husbandly protectiveness toward his wife’s reputation, he had not been afraid to demonstrate his tremendous passion for new philosophy. He was accused of sacrificing his wife at the altar of new philosophy, using her to promote a utilitarian vision of society that rejected marriage and family in favour of the pursuit of individual pleasure. He appeared as a whole range of zealots in the considerable number of anti-Jacobin novels published between 1798 and 1805, in the wake of Godwin’s *Memoirs*. He was, for instance, ‘Myope’ in Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), a character whose ‘enthusiasm’ was ‘the produce of an inflammable

³⁹ *Defence of Wollstonecraft*, pp. 53-54; *New Annual Register for 1798* (1799), p. 271, in GR, p. 155.

⁴⁰ *Defence of Wollstonecraft*, p. 53.

⁴¹ MR, NS 27 (1798), GR p. 150.

imagination...blinded by the glare of its own bewildering light'.⁴² In Isaac D'Israeli's *Flim Flams! Or the Life and Errors of my Uncle and the Amours of my Aunt*, Godwin is happy to retreat obsessively into 'philosophical solitude' whilst Wollstonecraft excludes all 'sympathy and daylight, in the dark room of the Amazon!'⁴³ Yet, D'Israeli emphasizes that for all of Godwin's philosophic coldness, he is very jealous about his pursuits, so that although his 'violent passions' were 'expressed by angular positions,' they were violent passions nonetheless.⁴⁴ Godwin's enthusiasm was paradoxical; it was both passionately zealous and coldly selfish. He promoted cold rationalism and utility, but he did so with a fervent single-mindedness. A shocking example of enthusiasm put into practice, the *Memoirs* was a manifestation of Godwin's uncompromising insistence on absolute frankness. Perhaps this point was made best by the pamphleteer Thomas Green who argued that Godwin was the leader of a new breed of 'heated' philosophers who felt such 'unbroken constancy,' such 'infuriate ardour' for their projects, but harboured an equally passionate 'hatred ... intensely inflamed by the blast of zeal' for such things as 'friendship, patriotism, parental affection, filial piety, confidence, fidelity' and 'conjugal union'.⁴⁵

These descriptions of Godwin's philosophical zeal use a language typically reserved for the expression of desire between two lovers. Yet propagandists continued to emphasize the unnaturalness of Godwin's alleged previous disinterest in the female sex. His 'enthusiasm,' Charles Lucas declared in his 1801 anti-Jacobin novel *The Infernal Quixote*, was

⁴² Hamilton, Elizabeth. *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 3 vols. (Bath: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1800), ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000), p. 145.

⁴³ Isaac D'Israeli, *Flim Flams! Or the Life and Errors of my Uncle and the Amours of my Aunt*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1805), vol. 1, pp. b1, b5.

⁴⁴ D'Israeli, *Flim Flams!*, vol. 1, p. b6.

⁴⁵ Thomas Green, *An Examination of the Leading Principle of the New System of Morals, as that Principle is stated and applied in Mr. Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, second ed. (London: T. N. Longman, 1799), in Claeys, vol. 8, pp. 343-368 (p. 360).

'deaf to the calls of nature'.⁴⁶ In fact, nothing brought that point home more than the philosopher's systematic and public dissection of the medical circumstances surrounding Wollstonecraft's complications in childbirth. The *European Magazine* expressed its horror that Godwin had given the public 'a very minute ... a disgusting, narrative ... of her illness'.⁴⁷ For this reason, Lucas classified the *Memoirs* as a 'scientific work,' the *British Critic* labelled it 'a medical statement' and the *Monthly Review* termed it a 'case for memorandums' for 'medical men.'⁴⁸ Rather than predispose an audience to feel sympathetically toward Wollstonecraft, the reviewer for the *Monthly Mirror* contended that such personal details gave rise instead to emotional indifference: 'her labour, and the circumstances attending her death' were, he or she wrote, 'too minutely described to interest the feelings' of readers.⁴⁹ Reviewers wondered at the inhumanity of the narrator, at the cold precision with which Godwin, like a man of science, had recounted such graphic biological detail.

The *Memoirs*, interpreted as a husband's greatest betrayal, was read against Godwin's relatively brief speculations about marriage in *Political Justice*. As Matthew Grenby has observed, anti-Jacobin novelists used Godwin's alleged rejection of marriage as 'the peg on which all their attacks on Jacobinism and new philosophy could hang' and as evidence that Godwin was 'the murderer of any and all familial attachments'.⁵⁰ The pamphleteer and novelist W. C. Proby declared that 'the spirit of what is called the modern philosophy' was most manifest in Godwin's argument 'that marriage is founded in error, and productive of

⁴⁶ Charles Lucas, *The Infernal Quixote. A Tale of the Day*, 4 vols. (London: Minerva, 1801), ed. M. O. Grenby (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004) vol. 2, pp. 178-81.

⁴⁷ *European Magazine* (also known as *The London Review and Literary Journal for April 1798*) 33 (1798), pp. 246-5, in GR, p. 147.

⁴⁸ Lucas, p. 84; BC 12 (1798), pp. 228-33, in GR p. 144; *Monthly Mirror* 5 (1798), pp. 153-57, in GR p. 149.

⁴⁹ *Monthly Mirror* 5 (1798), pp. 153-57, in GR p. 148.

⁵⁰ Grenby, pp. 68-9.

injurious consequences'.⁵¹ Godwin espoused 'the new philosophy of matrimony,' the novelist Althea Lewis declared, which destroyed, amongst other things, 'conjugal peace' and 'filial affection'.⁵² In the vast majority of cases, the strategy employed against the new philosophy of matrimony was not to argue against it so much as to paint an imaginative and very often grossly overstated picture of how it would manifest itself in the daily lives of Britons.

Anti-Jacobin novelists argued that, without marital boundaries, men would be free to express their most primal sexual urges, to become scheming, manipulative seducers (like Gilbert Imlay) and/or sexual deviants (like Tom Paine). Under the influence of Jacobin ideology, men would become like the title character of D'Israeli's novel *Vaurien*, a scheming French character who simultaneously seduces a young woman for his personal pleasure and groups of Britons for his dastardly revolutionary mission. Vaurien might declare that 'domestic treasons are beneath me,' but his revolutionary aims occupy much less of the novel's focus. D'Israeli emphasizes that Vaurien's vile sexual conquest is very much an integral part—and the most dangerous part—of Jacobin philosophy.⁵³ In *The Vagabond*, published the year after the *Memoirs*, novelist George Walker took great pains to connect sexual immorality with Godwin's philosophical project. Walker's Godwinian hero sets his sight on a virtuous woman who believes that unscrupulous men only philosophically advocated 'promiscuous intercourse of sex ... merely to cover their own depraved desires, and avoid the stigma of the world by rendering it common'.⁵⁴ With the *Memoirs* as his

⁵¹ W. C. Proby, *Modern Philosophy and Barbarism: Or, a Comparison between the Theory of Godwin and the Practice of Lycurgus* (London: R. H. Westley, [1798]), in Claeys, ed., vol. 8, pp. 291-322 (p. 306).

⁵² Grenby, p. 89.

⁵³ Isaac D'Israeli, *Vaurien: or, Sketches of the Times* (1797), vol. 8, ed. Nicola Trott, in *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, gen. ed. W. M. Verhoeven, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005).

⁵⁴ George Walker, *The Vagabond*, 3rd ed. (London: G. Walker, 1799), ed. W. M. Verhoeven (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004), p. 155

inducement, however, the Godwinian character convinces her to live with him outside of marriage.

Anti-Jacobin novels, as these passages suggest, weave together narrative, personal innuendo, malicious gossip and historical and political events. Walker's *The Vagabond*, Edward Du Bois' *St Godwin*, Isaac D'Israeli's *Vaurien*, and Charles Lucas' *The Infernal Quixote* are filled with footnotes and other intertextual insertions that give readers biographical information about new philosophers, make bibliographic references to their works and engage in polemical tangents about both. Direct references to *Political Justice* and the *Rights of Woman*, whether articulated by unscrupulous characters or quoted in authorial footnotes, creates an 'interpretive regime' in the novels, which strips new philosophy texts 'of any meaning save that which is imposed on them by the host text'.⁵⁵ Not only is the novel's narrative superceded by the imposition of a conservative message, but the philosophical meanings themselves become overshadowed by personal scandal. Henry James Pye's novel *The Democrat*, a tale of the adventurous journey of a French Jacobin who attempts to bring equality to Britain, is a defence of the social and political status quo and a tribute to Pitt. Yet, a key focus of the novel, as he states unashamedly in his subtitle, is the interspersed 'Anecdotes of Well Known Characters.'⁵⁶

After the publication of the *Memoirs*, anti-Jacobin novelists, pamphleteers and reviewers offered particularly scathing *re*-views of Godwin's clarion call to 'general utility,' made in *Political Justice* five years earlier. After its publication in 1793, *Political Justice* had been relatively well-received, but after 1798, the principle of utility seemed to be antithetical not only to established norms, but also to the very existence of human civilization. The 'famous

⁵⁵ Nicola Trott, 'Introduction,' to D'Israeli, *Vaurien*, p. xi.

⁵⁶ Henry James Pye, *The Democrat: Interspersed with Anecdotes of Well Known Characters* (London: William Lane, 1795), ed. W. M. Verhoeven, vol. 1, in *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, 8 vols., gen. ed. W. M. Verhoeven (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005).

fire cause' (as it was designated by Charles Lamb), contained in the chapter 'Of Justice' seemed particularly disturbing in light of the revelations of the *Memoirs*. In this ethical dilemma, Godwin proposed that if an individual had the choice to save either the philosopher Fenelon or his or her own mother from a burning building, Fenelon must be saved.⁵⁷ Godwin argued that the morally correct action would be to sacrifice a loved one as the philosopher would contribute more to the general good of society. After 1798, this dilemma, intended to illustrate the basis and extent of utilitarian justice, was re-interpreted as an attack on marriage. In his 1798 pamphlet *Modern Philosophy and Barbarism*, Proby re-presents Godwin's burning building scenario, but the endangered loved one is 'a beloved wife' and it is a husband who must choose between 'the life of the dear object of his heart' and 'a citizen of splendid talents and exquisite mental attainments, whose exertions are of infinite service to the state'.⁵⁸ Godwin's insistence that the wife must perish whilst the stranger (perhaps even someone who was a personal enemy) is saved demonstrates Godwin's wish to abolish 'love, affection and sensibility'.⁵⁹

To Proby, the author of such novels of heroic chivalry as *The Spirit of the Castle: A Romance*, Godwin seemed to have much more in common with the cold, unfeeling ancient classical world than with his own familial, loyal and proud English heritage. Godwin's views on marriage, women and kinship were as repellent as those held by the semi-mythical figure, Lycurgus, the legislator who had transformed ancient Sparta into a militaristic machine. Proby argued that both the Lycurgan and the Godwinian systems sought to 'destroy[] the ties of private affection, for the purpose of substituting in their stead the chains of public

⁵⁷ In later versions, Godwin substituted the mother with other family members; See Robert Lamb's *Constructing the Philosopher: William Godwin and Loyalist Propaganda*.

⁵⁸ Proby, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 306.

⁵⁹ Proby, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 306.

good.⁶⁰ To this end, Spartan wives were housed in separate living quarters from their husbands, where they were free to take many lovers, so that they could produce children for the state. Proby contended that when, in *Political Justice*, Godwin had argued against the monopolization of women, he had effectively promoted an equally barbarous system which, if it was ever implemented, would bring about the end of civilization.

IV

Proby expressed particular fears about the type of woman Godwin's barbarous system produced. Released from the constraints of monogamous marriage, women would be free he suggests, as they had in Sparta, to display a revolting 'manly boldness,' to express the most 'lawless desires' and to make 'invidious comparisons' between their many lovers.⁶¹ Under Godwin's system, British women would become as masculine and as lacking in feminine charms as their Spartan forerunners. For Henry James Pye, Jacobinical women were savage, physically hideous beings who had no interest in men as husbands, fathers and brothers, but rather as victims for their savagery.⁶² One of Pye's characters, a 'classic amazon,' followed in the footsteps of the mythical Artemis, who joined men in battle and 'behaved with proper spirit' when she sunk the ships of her enemies.⁶³ According to anti-Jacobins, feminine softness was a vital ingredient in the building of families and the cementing of the nation, for it was the ingredient that attracted and attached men. However much the 'enlightened reason' of modern philosophers made claims for 'the mental equality

⁶⁰ Proby, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 296.

⁶¹ Proby, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 295.

⁶² Pye, p. 41.

⁶³ Pye, p. 65.

of women,' Proby contended, man's affections could not be fixed by aptitude and accomplishments, but only 'by a winning softness and peculiar grace'.⁶⁴

Critics of the *Memoirs* used the very terms Proby used in his descriptions of Spartan women in their characterizations of Wollstonecraft. There had been, they insisted, very little modesty in her relations with men and as Godwin's account of her suicide attempt revealed, she displayed as little maternal feeling as the Spartans who relinquished their newborns to the state. Only a heartless, inordinately selfish woman, the reviewer for the *European Magazine* declared, would desert 'a helpless offspring, disgracefully brought into the world by herself, by an intended act of suicide'.⁶⁵ Whereas Godwin was ruled by philosophical enthusiasm, Wollstonecraft was ruled by sexual desire. The *British Critic* represented her as a sexually predatory woman who had aggressively pursued Godwin because she found in him 'a man able and willing to satisfy her desires'.⁶⁶ She had used sex to sway Godwin from his declared principles. Although he had openly acknowledged his aversion to marriage, 'after several months of sexual intercourse, she had acquired such an ascendancy over her lover, that she prevailed with him to marry her'.⁶⁷

Such startling commentary reveals how propagandists commandeered Wollstonecraft's private life and used it to savage the couple's characters and their politics. Wollstonecraft the seductress had superseded Wollstonecraft the thinker and writer. By providing such extraordinary access to the most private, and according to prevailing moral standards the most shameful, particulars of his wife's private life, Godwin had provided propagandists with powerful ammunition. When Wollstonecraft's writings *were* mentioned, they were re-read through the lens of her life. The American writer Benjamin Silliman, for

⁶⁴ Proby, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 295.

⁶⁵ *European Magazine* 33 (1798), in GR, p. 147.

⁶⁶ *British Critic* 12 (1798), pp. 228-33, in GR, p. 143.

⁶⁷ *British Critic* 12 (1798), pp. 228-33, in GR, p. 143.

example, wrote that she had professed 'a high regard for chastity; but unfortunately the practice of her life was at war with her precepts. She had been 'polluted by the *last crime of woman*': she had admitted one *sentimental lover* after another ... and proved the *attainments of reason*, to be ... sources of pleasure, far inferior, in value, to the pleasures of sense'.⁶⁸ Silliman equated Wollstonecraft's advocacy of reason in the *Rights of Woman* with Rousseauian immorality (disguised as sentimentality) and with her own personal infamy. The use of such incredibly derogatory terms to characterize her life and opinions practically became routine. In its 1799 index, for instance, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* listed 'Wollstonecraft' under the heading 'Prostitution,' and more than one periodical chose the word 'concubinage' to characterize her personal relations.⁶⁹ These labels made it tremendously difficult for readers to be seen with her books, let alone subscribe to her views. For certainly any woman with 'any pretensions to delicacy' and to 'moral taste' could only view her life and her ideas with the most 'lively emotions of disgust'.⁷⁰ As 'A LIBERTINE SYSTEMATICALLY AND ON PRINCIPLE,' the *Anti-Jacobin* proclaimed, no modest woman could reputably associate' with her.⁷¹

The *British Critic*, referred to her arguments for social reform in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as 'Mary's theory' or 'the right of women to indulge their inclinations with every man they like'.⁷² The reviewer argued that her's was not a *new* philosophy but that it was 'as old as prostitution'.⁷³ Indeed, she had become only 'Mary,' and that name, by 1799, had itself become a curse as bad as 'prostitute' or 'concubine'. In reference to

⁶⁸ Benjamin Silliman, *The Letters of Shahcoolen, a Hindu Philosopher*, Letter 2 (Boston: n. pub., 1802) in Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, second ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1792), ed. Carol H. Poston, second ed. (NY, NY: Norton, 1988), pp. 237-240 (p. 238).

⁶⁹ *AJ* 1 (1798), pp. 94-102, in GR, p. 141; *The Scientific Magazine and Free-Mason's Repository* 10 (1798), pp. 403-04, in GR p. 154.

⁷⁰ *European Magazine* 33 (1798), pp. 246-51, in GR p. 147; *MR NS* 27 (1798), pp. 321-25, in GR, p. 155.

⁷¹ *AJ* (August 1805) in *Fleetwood* p. 530.

⁷² *AJ* 1 (1798), pp. 94-102, in GR p. 141.

⁷³ *AJ* 1 (1798), pp. 94-102, in GR p. 141.

Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays personally and to the characters of their novels with the names 'Mary' and 'Maria, the *Anti-Jacobin* declared itself entirely 'sick of Mary'.⁷⁴ Pertinently, Chantal Thomas has observed how, in pre-revolutionary Catholic France, the enemies of Marie-Antoinette consistently dropped 'Marie' from her name in order to assert 'that the queen was unworthy of bearing the Virgin's name'.⁷⁵ This act of contemptuous abbreviation worked in different ways, but to a similar effect in Britain. Speaking of the two women philosophers by their first name 'Mary' diminished their status as political thinkers, as talented writers, as public women; instead, they were simply prostitute scribblers, more reminiscent of Mary Magdalene than the Virgin Mary. Indeed, Godwin's most hated principles even became identified mistakenly as the immoral rantings of 'Mary.' In George Walker's *The Vagabond*, the Godwinian seducer insists that the female object of his schemes must hear 'my Mary' on the subject of sex without marriage. Yet the passage he quotes—that a marriage ceremony is 'contrary to the *genuine march* of sentiment'—is Godwin's line from the *Memoirs*. In the novel's third edition, Walker not only still refers to the passage as Wollstonecraft's but insists in a footnote that these are her words 'verbatim'.⁷⁶

Those who had admired Wollstonecraft's political writing could only express their deep disappointment that Godwin's biographical treatment had so detrimentally, and seemingly irretrievably, darkened public reception of her work. Wollstonecraft's name might be celebrated in the future, a sympathetic reviewer for *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* observed, but in the current reactionary climate, she must 'suffer the reproach of married and unmarried prostitutes'.⁷⁷ In order for her philosophies to receive even a cursory glance, her life would have to at least appear more conventional. The *Memoirs*, which received much

⁷⁴ *AJ* vol. 3, May 1799, pp. 54-8.

⁷⁵ Thomas, p. 142.

⁷⁶ Walker, p. 155.

⁷⁷ *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* (1798), pp. 289-96, in *GR*, p. 156.

greater critical attention than the *Rights of Woman* had, also had much greater impact in the fashioning of Wollstonecraft's posthumous reputation in the years following her death. Because of this, 'the charge of multiplied immorality' was levelled 'by the candid as well as the censorious; by the sagacious as well as the superficial observer'.⁷⁸ The issue of women's rights was, by association, an almost untouchable subject at the turn of the century (a rare exception was Mary Robinson's 1799 *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*). The cause of political reform was also severely damaged: her lack of private fidelity was widely interpreted as a reflection of her lack of public faith. 'Mrs. W's zeal to subvert the laws of marriage,' one anonymous pamphleteer remarked, 'reminds us of those hot-headed and dangerous politicians, who are for overthrowing Governments'.⁷⁹ The *Memoirs* had effectively transformed her into a political scapegoat. She was being punished for the moral crimes of both French Jacobins and British aristocrats—and former acquaintances did not want to be on the receiving end of any associated bad publicity. She lost previous support from dissenters who, interested in both political and moral reform, saw marriage as the cornerstone of an honourable, principled life.⁸⁰ She had become, after death, an icon of shameless, abandoned womanhood, a manifestation of the dangerous innovations of new philosophy.

V

Wollstonecraft might have been deserted by friends and supporters; she was not deserted, however, by moralists, for they found her life very 'useful' indeed. Propagandists who ridiculed Godwin's insistence on 'utility' as the basis of human action found great utility

⁷⁸ *Monthly Magazine* 5 (1798), p. 493, in GR, p. 148.

⁷⁹ 'A Friend to Social Order,' p. 34.

⁸⁰ See William Stafford, *English Feminists and their Opponents in the 1790s: Unsex'd and Proper Females* (Manchester and New York: MUP, 2002. p. 16.

in the *Memoirs*. They scoffed at his incredibly miscalculated statement that he believed the *Memoirs* could usefully improve society. The biography was only 'useful,' the reviewer of the *Scientific Magazine* contended, because in 'the *moral sentiments* of Godwin, and in the *moral conduct* of Wollstonecraft,' it clearly illustrated the effects of 'their principles and theories'.⁸¹ 'The conduct and principles of Mrs. Godwin, as far as the sexual intercourse is concerned,' echoed the *Critical Review*, provided society not with the 'pattern' Godwin intended, but with a public 'warning'.⁸² 'The *utility*' of Wollstonecraft's life, the *Anti-Jacobin* declared, was that it showed the public what it was 'wise to avoid.'⁸³

One of the lessons gleaned from Wollstonecraft's miserable life, the satirist Richard Polwhele argued, was that the biological differences between men and women could not be denied or overturned. Women's bodies, he insisted, provided clear evidence that nature had intended women to be confined to the home. In support of his case, Polwhele turned to Godwin's description of Wollstonecraft's final illness (a section of the *Memoirs* which, as we have seen, deeply mortified several reviewers). Her complications in delivery reminded readers that she had 'died a death that strongly marked the distinction of the sexes, by pointing out the destiny of women, and the diseases to which they are liable'.⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft's death in childbirth reminded the world that women were prey to a completely different set of afflictions than men, and that their bodies were naturally intended for domestic roles. Wollstonecraft's death was a veritable god-send for conservatives. It was, E. P. Thompson has wryly observed, rather 'convenient that this most rational of women, who proclaimed the equality of sexes and who attempted to live her principles in

⁸¹ *The Scientific Magazine and Free-Mason's Repository* 10 (1798), pp. 403-04, in GR, p. 155, italics mine.

⁸² CR S2 22 (1798), pp. 414-17, in GR, p. 145.

⁸³ AJ 1 (1798), pp. 94-102, in GR p. 139.

⁸⁴ Richard Polewhele, *The Unsex'd Females; a Poem, Addressed to the Author of The Pursuits of Literature* (New York: William Cobbett, 1800), p. 39.

free marriage ... should have died in childbirth'.⁸⁵ Indeed, to conservatives like Polwhele, her death appeared as writing on the wall, and the message was clear: philosopher-women could no longer play the part of men.

Numerous arguments had been made for the division of the sexes, but there was a noticeable shift in the way this issue was argued after 1798. This shift is apparent, for example, in the critical reception of Wollstonecraft's translation of the *Elements of Morality for Children* in 1792 and in 1798. In his 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, the Platonist Thomas Taylor equated moral depravity with the female claim for equality, but his satirizing tended to focus on Wollstonecraft's writing and not on her alleged personal licentiousness. He criticizes her for using a bold tone to disguise unsophisticated and outlandish arguments and mocks her for wanting to remove the social, political and even the biological boundaries that separated male and female, adult and child. In a rather bizarre and meandering text (perhaps reflective of his fear of corroding class and gender boundaries), Taylor proposes that this levelling craze would extend to the animal kingdom, so that humans would eventually converse with elephants and dogs. To make his case that such a proposition was as ridiculous as the idea that women were intellectually equal to men, he points to Wollstonecraft's suggestion, in the 'Introduction' to the *Elements of Morality for Children*, that masturbation or 'the practice of self-pollution,' could be prevented by freely explaining to children what "the organs of generation ... were designed for, and how they may be injured."⁸⁶ This was an obvious solution to a simple problem disguised with bold, inflated rhetoric. A simpleton could have figured out that children needed to be informed as to 'how

⁸⁵ E. P. Thompson, *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Merlin, 1997), p. 72. This 'moral,' Thompson notes, 'has been repeated ever since'.

⁸⁶ Thomas Taylor, *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (n. pub. details, 1792), ed. R. Urban St. Cir (Sequim, WA: Holmes Publishing Group, 2005), pp. 22-23. *Elements of Morality, for the Use of Children; with an Introductory Address to Parents* is a translation (or adaption) of the German writer Christian Salzmann's *Moralisches Elementarbuch*, but critics in these years referred to it as 'her' work, and tended to focus on her 'Introduction' to the work.

the genital parts ... are to be employed in a natural way'; yet the woman-philosopher had presented this solution as an 'original' new idea. This was, Taylor mocked, 'a most striking proof of ... the truth of her grand theory, *the equality of the female nature with the male*'.⁸⁷

In 1798, the same contentious passage about child masturbation was viewed in a much different light. The reviewer for the *British Critic* argued that Godwin's notorious description of Wollstonecraft's complications in childbirth was 'exactly conformable to the *Elements of Morality* written by Mrs. G herself; in the introduction to which she urges the propriety of making young persons, particularly girls, intimately acquainted with certain parts of anatomy, generally thought to be unfit for their contemplation'.⁸⁸ The reviewer interpreted Wollstonecraft's severe candour, embodied in her philosophical rhetoric, as demonstrative of a certain dangerous willingness amongst female new philosophers to share themselves inappropriately not just with their lovers but also with the public at large. Propagandists might be perfectly willing to publicize the private lives of new philosophers in their performance of public duty, but they were much less comfortable with the willingness of female new philosophers to discuss private matters in a public forum.

Propagandists contended that the greatest lesson to be gleaned from Wollstonecraft's life was that both men and women—although for different reasons—needed the security and regulation that marriage provided. Crucially, this was the point upon which both anti-Jacobin and reformist, or at least sympathetic, critics met. They agreed that marriage was 'one of the first institutions ... essential to social order' for whilst 'no evil may result from recording the vow of love ... *many evils must result from a contempt of marriage*'.⁸⁹

Wollstonecraft had assumed mistakenly that Imlay would be bound to her and their child by

⁸⁷ Taylor, p. 23.

⁸⁸ *British Critic* 12 (1798), pp. 228-33, in GR p. 144; again, this critic mistakenly attributes the authorship of the work to Wollstonecraft.

⁸⁹ MR NS 27 (1798), pp. 321-25, in GR p. 151.

a sense of respectful obligation, but men were not naturally inclined to stay attached to one woman. Her private letters to Imlay (which Godwin had published along with the *Memoirs*) illustrated vividly how vulnerable unmarried women were. Wollstonecraft's tragic relationship with Imlay, wrote a reviewer for the *Analytical*, demonstrated that such an arrangement might have been 'well adapted for the conscientious Moralist,' but it was 'inapplicable to persons of gross appetites and vulgar apprehensions; that is, to the great mass of mankind'.⁹⁰ The author of the *Defence of Wollstonecraft* proposed that Mary Robinson had got it right when, in her *Letter to the Women of England*, she surmised that "the passions of men originate in sensuality, those of Women in sentiment; that *man* loves corporeally, *woman* mentally".⁹¹ Robinson's statement seems founded on the idea of the natural, biological division of the sexes, but it is also a critique of a world that not only excuses but encourages the full expression of men's 'sensuality'. Until men acted with firm moral sentiment on their own accord, they needed the stability and controls that marriage laws provided.

Marriage allowed men to trust themselves and each other, for it rendered a man 'consistent with himself, to make him, in his dealings, the same to-morrow as today, and such as one that his fellows in society may be able to reason on his probable actions'.⁹² Such consistency spoke to men's fears: marriage laws made the anti-Godwinian Thomas Green feel secure that a stranger could not simply enter his home and freely 'violate, according to his taste, my partner or my child'.⁹³ In his *Thoughts on Marriage and Criminal Conversation, with some hints of appropriate means to check the progress of the latter; comprising remarks on the life, opinions, and example of the late Mrs. Wollstonecraft Godwin*, 'A Friend to the Social Order' shared similar anxieties about the predatory nature of men who found amusement in the seduction of other

⁹⁰ AR 27 (1798), pp. 481-90, in GR, p. 110.

⁹¹ *Defence of Wollstonecraft*, p. 109.

⁹² 'Friend to Social Order,' p. 32.

⁹³ Green, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 358.

men's wives. Both debauched aristocrats and free-thinking philosophers had failed to consider how changeable, erratic and brutish could be the male of the species in particular. 'Man, his uncounted varieties of opinion and caprice, must be bound' by law and custom, for 'society can not be carried on, unless we can ascertain some grounds for calculation on another's conduct'.⁹⁴ Even if, Green argued, the existing 'principles, maxims, and institutions, moral, civil, or social' which regulated human relations were 'defective' or 'redundant' and even in some cases 'absurd,' at least those laws offered protection to otherwise vulnerable individuals.⁹⁵ Legal sanctions and familial obligations provided individuals with direction and forced them to be vigilant in their interactions. The author of the *Defence of Wollstonecraft* provided an extensive, cogently argued explanation of the physical, political and moral functions of marriage: first, it settled issues of paternity, inheritance and habitation; second, it allowed individuals to unite in a community; finally, it ensured 'the harmony of affections' and the performance of conjugal duties.⁹⁶

For all that law could do to regulate behaviour it was not enough on its own. 'A Friend to the Social Order' layered his critique of Wollstonecraft's life with a tribute to the Attorney General Lord Kenyon for his efforts at eradicating adultery. 'No praise can be too great for the real patriotism, which has thus put the rod into the hand of justice, and raised it against the deformers of society'; yet Kenyon's legal war on criminal conversation was insufficient to bring about moral reform.⁹⁷ Rather the people must sit as the judge and the punisher of moral deviance. The nation was regulated by 'positive laws, custom, education, and refined manners' and there were still 'too many aberrations still made from the line of conjugal fidelity, too many inroads on domestic felicity, too many breaches in the peace and

⁹⁴ 'A Friend to Social Order,' pp. 32-33.

⁹⁵ Green, in Claeys, vol. 8, p. 358.

⁹⁶ *Defence of Wollstonecraft*, p. 94.

⁹⁷ 'A Friend to Social Order,' p. 46.

good order of society'.⁹⁸ Political, religious or legal institutions could not fully ensure that familial and moral obligations would be met; the real weapon in the ongoing 'civil war of lust' was 'SOCIAL SHAME'.⁹⁹ The searing gaze of social censure could discipline the perpetrators of illicit acts as well as punish those who, in advocating marriage without mutual affection, were engaged in what amounted to prostitution. Privilege and secrecy could no longer protect 'the perjured adulterer' and the 'splendid prostitute': those who 'dared to condemn the principles and unfortunate conduct of Mrs. Wollstonecraft, while they are themselves guilty of this heinous breach of social duty' might find their lives the object of a similar examination.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, a number of commentators were pleased to acknowledge that certain well-known members of society had been exemplary in refusing to tolerate the perpetrators of sexual vice in their circle of acquaintance. In the *Memoirs*, Godwin had written of his shock to find that when he married Wollstonecraft, the actress Sarah Siddons and the actress and novelist Elizabeth Inchbald refused to receive his new wife. Godwin had thought that 'marriage would place her upon a sure footing *in the calendar of polished society*'; instead their union had publicized the fact that she had never been Imlay's wife, or that she had become a polygamist.¹⁰¹ The two women had demonstrated, wrote the *European Magazine* reviewer, 'to the honour of the sex,' that new philosophy could not 'obliterate all sense of decorum'.¹⁰² Though 'the morals of the great' were not as 'correct as they ought to be,' an *Anti-Jacobin* writer stated rather pointedly, the 'treatment which Mrs. Godwin received' proved that polite

⁹⁸ *Defence of Wollstonecraft*, pp. 96-7.

⁹⁹ 'A Friend to Social Order,' p. vi.

¹⁰⁰ 'A Friend to Social Order,' pp. 35, 38, 35.

¹⁰¹ *British Critic* 12 (1798), pp. 228-33, in GR, p. 143.

¹⁰² *European Magazine* 33 (1798), pp. 246-51, in GR, p. 147.

society was 'not yet totally corrupt'.¹⁰³ Wollstonecraft's philosophical 'importance' had not been enough to excuse her private sins or to 'wash her clean' in the public eye.¹⁰⁴

The moralizing forcefulness of the reviewers' language fashions Siddons and Inchbald into moral exemplars and banishes Wollstonecraft from society, but more than that, it urges Britons to similarly ostracize all other libertines. *The Scientific Magazine* urged 'parents, anxious for the welfare of their children' as well as 'statesmen of the community' to likewise participate in expelling immoral influence from their midst.¹⁰⁵ Such a directive is underwritten by a profound suspicion of unconventional relationships and an acute intolerance of social nonconformity. There is, in almost all of the pamphlets, reviews and novels a powerful condemnation of what is identified as 'a disposition to run counter to established practices and opinions'.¹⁰⁶ Moral 'independence'—a deeply suspect phrase at this time—undermined marriage, led to familial breakdown, and gave rise to social unrest and political disorder.¹⁰⁷ Britons had a responsibility, the *Critical Review* urged, to take action against views that were 'too much at variance with those which have been generally adopted'.¹⁰⁸

VIII

The degree to which Wollstonecraft and Godwin became appropriated by pamphleteers, reviewers and novelists after the publication of the *Memoirs* is nothing short of remarkable. That their lives were literally colonized by propagandists is evidenced by the tendency, particularly in the first decade of the nineteenth century, to announce that one or

¹⁰³ *AJ* 21 (August 1805), pp. 337-58, in William Godwin, *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling*, 3 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1805), ed. Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2001), pp. 523-31 (p. 530).

¹⁰⁴ *AJ* (August 1805) in *Fleetwood*, p. 530.

¹⁰⁵ *The Scientific Magazine and Free-Mason's Repostory* in *GR*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁶ *European Magazine* 33 (1798), pp. 246-51, in *GR*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁷ *Critical Review*, in *GR*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁸ *Critical Review* in *GR*, p. 144.

both of them had at some point repented their immoral lives and rescinded their views on marriage. Contrition was the greatest coup of anti-Jacobins, and for the couple's very few apologists, it was the only way to exoneration. The anonymous author of the 1803 *Defence of Wollstonecraft* claimed that more than likely her 'sentiments concerning marriage were formed upon partial considerations' and that, if given a chance, she would have made 'a full acknowledgement of having altered her opinion'.¹⁰⁹

As might be expected, many observers interpreted the couple's marriage as evidence of Godwin's philosophical inconsistency. When such perceived personal inconsistency was followed by what seemed to be a public recantation of his views on marriage in his 1799 novel *St. Leon*, the reviewers were ecstatic. In the 'Preface' to the novel, Godwin wrote that 'some readers ... will perhaps ... accuse me of inconsistency; the affections and charities of private life being every where in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium'.¹¹⁰ He then described how he had sought to modify *Political Justice* in later editions to account for his change in opinion concerning 'the domestic and private affections' as it had occurred to him that

since the man who lives in the midst of domestic relations will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, ... without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence, ... [he might be] more prompt in the service of strangers and the public.¹¹¹

This preface inspired loyalists to claim victory. They announced that marriage had changed Godwin. In the *Monthly Review*, Christopher Lake Moody congratulated Godwin on an 'inconsistency' that signalled a newfound admiration for the pleasures of domestic bliss and

¹⁰⁹ *Defence of Wollstonecraft*, p. 95.

¹¹⁰ William Godwin, *St. Leon: a Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831) in William Godwin, *Collected Works*, 8 vols., ed. Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), vol. 4. pp. 10-11.

¹¹¹ Godwin, *St. Leon*, p. 11.

credited 'the late Miss Wollstonecraft' for inspiring 'a complete revolution in his opinion respecting the affections and charities of private life'.¹¹²

An even greater conservative triumph came when Godwin produced his 1803 *Life of Chaucer*. It appeared that a very different Godwin had produced a *very* different biography—a biography as dissimilar to his *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft* as was possible. It seemed as if Godwin had undergone a revolution in opinion, for he praised the close-knit familial structure of feudal Britain and the old chivalric code that celebrated female virtue and chastity. In fact, Godwin criticized the great Chaucer for his occasional failure to promote chivalric conduct toward females. Although Chaucer's male characters most often demonstrated 'a virtuous and honourable passion' for their mistresses, Godwin wrote, they also made 'indecorous suggestions, which the notions of a more polished age would not have failed to proscribe'.¹¹³ In a comparison that must have thrilled anti-Jacobins, Godwin explained why he preferred Chaucer's much more 'respectable' Troilus to Shakespeare's version of the same character.¹¹⁴ Chaucer's Troilus had been 'an honourable lover' who would rather have sacrificed his own life than 'divulge, whether in a direct or an indirect manner, any thing which might compromise the reputation of his mistress, or lay open her name as a topic for the comments of the vulgar'.¹¹⁵ In stark contrast however, Shakespeare's Troilus had shown 'no reluctance to render his amour a subject of notoriety to the whole city'.¹¹⁶ By publicizing the intimate details of his beloved's private life, Shakespeare's Troilus had ensured that even 'to all of whom she [was] a total stranger,' she had 'assume[d] the manners of the most abandoned prostitute'.¹¹⁷

¹¹² [Christopher Lake Moody], MR NS 33 (1800), pp. 23-29, in GR, p. 167.

¹¹³ William Godwin, *Life of Chaucer*, 4 vols., second ed. (London: T. Davison, 1804), vol. 1, p. 385.

¹¹⁴ Godwin, *Life of Chaucer*, vol. 1, p. 513.

¹¹⁵ Godwin, *Life of Chaucer*, vol. 1, p. 314.

¹¹⁶ Godwin, *Life of Chaucer*, vol. 1, p. 314.

¹¹⁷ Godwin, *Life of Chaucer*, vol. 1, p. 314.

These types of opinions garnered a series of glowing reviews in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Godwin's style in the *Life of Chaucer* was 'manly,' one reviewer proclaimed, and his altered principles worthy of congratulation.¹¹⁸ The periodical even became Godwin's advocate, defending him against the unfavourable reviews of Robert Southey and Walter Scott, who had remarked in the *Edinburgh Review* 'that the principles of a modern philosopher continue[d] to alarm the public, after the good man himself has abandoned them'.¹¹⁹ The *Monthly Mirror* thought the biography was Godwin's 'chef d'oeuvre,' for it demonstrated that the philosopher possessed the same 'penetration of mind' that had produced treatises such as *Political Justice* and novels like *Caleb Williams*, but that he was now 'wholly free' from the 'peculiar opinions' he had expressed in those works.¹²⁰ An author, the *Monthly Review* declared, could not 'more studiously humour the bias of the times, or seem more complaisant to prevailing prejudices' than Godwin had done in his biography of Chaucer.¹²¹ Godwin could be ranked among those who had awakened 'from those delirious dreams of innovation'—dreams that had betrayed a sense of 'moral derangement' in their willingness to use 'slanders' to obtain their realization.¹²²

This willingness to forgive Godwin, to embrace him for his alleged philosophical, political and moral apostasy, tells us much about the cultural attitudes of turn of the century Britain. The positive critical reception of Godwin's biography of Chaucer demonstrates the strong compulsion to cling to what was perceived as a distinctly English code of morality, a gendered code of behaviour, that may have emerged prior to the 1790s, but which really took hold in that decade. Moreover, the language of these reviews demonstrates how, as

¹¹⁸ *AJ* 18 (1804), pp. 221-41, in *GR*, pp. 215-16.

¹¹⁹ *Edinburgh Review* 3 (1804), pp. 437-52, in *GR*, p. 225.

¹²⁰ *Monthly Mirror* 17 (1804), pp. 253-58; 18 (1804), pp. 173-76, in *GR*, p. 242.

¹²¹ *Monthly Review* 46 (1805), pp. 113-30, 287-302, in *GR*, p. 244.

¹²² *AR* 18 (1804), pp. 221-41, in *GR*, p. 216.

Michèle Cohen has noted, chivalry 'provided a vocabulary' for emerging definitions of masculinity that integrated 'national identity' with ideas about 'progress and civilization'.¹²³ Civilized behaviour and beliefs about the maintenance of social order were tied closely to an increasingly entrenched moral and political conservatism that sought to regulate public and private life. Indeed, it was only because Godwin had demonstrated a manly rectitude and had given public evidence of his 'altered' principles, that the *Anti-Jacobin* was willing to overlook the fact that his *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft* had gravely insulted the established morals and 'sentiments of every civilized state'.¹²⁴

The love affair between Godwin and the reviewers came to an abrupt end. If the *Anti-Jacobin* had been willing, in 1803, to forget the *Memoirs*, or as they put it, willing to refrain from their 'war of aggression, with the memory of the dead,' their position changed drastically when Godwin's *Fleetwood* appeared in 1805.¹²⁵ In the preface to the novel, Godwin had specifically rebutted those reviewers who had previously been so exulted by the 'supposed inconsistencies' in his political thought. He contended that since the publication of *Political Justice* he had continued to question 'whether marriage, as it stands described and supported in the laws of England, might not with advantage admit of certain modifications'.¹²⁶ The response of the loyalist press is more than revealing. The *Anti-Jacobin*, obviously cognisant that Godwin's comments were largely directed at itself stated:

we certainly thought that we perceived good symptoms of amendment in Mr. Godwin's sentiments with regard to marriage, and we took the liberty to congratulate him on the change It seems, indeed, that we were greatly deceived, and that Mr. Godwin does not thank him for our praise. The obvious intention of [the preface to *Fleetwood*] is, to inform his friends, that he has, in no respect, abjured his original principles.¹²⁷

¹²³ Michèle Cohen, "Manners Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Constructions of Masculinity, 1750-1830, *Journal of British Studies* 44: 2 (April 2005), pp. 312-329 (p. 315).

¹²⁴ *AJ* 18 (1804), pp. 221-41, in *GR*, pp. 216, 215.

¹²⁵ *AJ*, 18 (1804), pp. 221-41, in *GR*, p. 216.

¹²⁶ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 49.

¹²⁷ *AJ*, in Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 526

Then in a strategically brilliant move, the *Anti-Jacobin* turned its ostensible defeat to triumph. In the long-term struggle against immorality and Godwinian new philosophy, the reviewer claimed that what was truly important in the whole debacle was that public pressure had forced Godwin to *seem* to alter his opinions. The fact that readers had been so completely fooled into believing he had recanted demonstrated that, though he might not have been sincere in his concessions, the moral climate in the first years of the new century had happily made it necessary for Godwin to at least pay lip-service to traditional morality and the 'grave good sense of Britons'.¹²⁸ In fact, the *Anti-Jacobin* reviewer positively crowed, Godwin's 'expressions of respect for that sacred institution we shall consider as so many involuntary sacrifices, on his part, to the prejudices of his country'.¹²⁹ Using the discourse of reform not only to mock Godwin but to praise the nation for 'tyrannically' fastening 'vile fetters' on his 'enlightened and ingenuous mind,' the reviewer expressed his delight that Godwin had been compelled 'to speak, with reverence' of the very virtues and customs he detested.¹³⁰

There was a lesson here for Britons: this unfortunate incident clearly demonstrated that though the public had been duped by Godwin's act of deceit, it had learned to be on guard against those, like him, who would trick them with such 'jesuitical evasion'.¹³¹ With regard to new philosophers, they could only avoid their 'former egregious want of penetration' by looking back to the *Memoirs* of Mary Wollstonecraft, for that work was a statement of Godwin's real purpose—which was 'to inculcate' the principle 'that marriage is necessarily destructive of happiness'.¹³² Undoubtedly, this return, to the scene of the crime, a full seven years after her death, illustrates how deeply the *Memoirs* would continue to

¹²⁸ *AJ*, in Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 526.

¹²⁹ *AJ*, in Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 530.

¹³⁰ *AJ*, in Godwin, *Fleetwood* p. 530.

¹³¹ *AJ*, in Godwin, *Fleetwood* p. 528-9.

¹³² *AJ*, in Godwin, *Fleetwood* p. 530.

tarnish the couple—personally, politically, professionally and publicly. That ill-judged, ill-timed biography had undoubtedly provided the moralizing movement with great impetus: as one reviewer so aptly put it, the *Memoirs* acted ‘as a warning to those who fanc[ied] themselves at liberty to dispense with the laws of propriety and decency’.¹³³ The reviewers’ apparent readiness to forgive Godwin’s crime indicates something about the ability of propagandists to adapt public figures to suit the growing emphasis on moral recruitment. As these reviews indicate, by the first decade of the nineteenth century, a conservative politics had become intimately entwined with a conservative moral ethos.

¹³³ *European Magazine* 33 (1798), pp. 246-51, in GR, p. 148.

PART THREE:
EMINENT LIVES

CHAPTER 4

THE KING, THE PRINCE, THE WIFE, THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC

An anonymous 1795 pamphlet, *The Rights of the Devil*, published by Richard ‘Citizen Lee,’ redefined ‘hell’ as ‘the fountain, the grand centre where all the lines of monarchy meet’.¹ The princely occupants of this hell were easily distinguished by their love of such things as ‘luxury, lust, debauchery, incest and adultery’ and by their ‘thirst for filthy lucre, ribbons, garters, and other play-things; titles, dignities and honours’.² Notably, this pamphlet was dedicated to a list of political figures beginning with King George III and ending with his eldest son, George, the Prince of Wales. Yet the king—‘the people’s king,’ or ‘Farmer George’ as he was popularly known—could scarcely be considered to display, as other royal hellions did, a fondness for other men’s wives or a predilection for high living. It was, however, more than apropos that the Prince of Wales brought up the rear of the pamphlet’s list of dedications, for his dissipated life—a life which seemed to have much more in common with the decadence of the French Bourbons than the model of restraint and domestic harmony established by George III—fitted this devilish model of monarchical licentiousness perfectly.

The notorious Prince of Wales was wildly unpopular for most of his life. Citizen Lee’s pamphlet indicates not only the breadth and depth of such public animosity, and crucially, but gives pinpoints the source of it. The prince’s indulgences, his scandalous affairs and his ‘love of dissipation,’ George III complained to his son, had been constantly

¹ *The Rights of the Devil; or, Consolation for the Democrats; Dedicated to the King, Lords and Commons, Likewise Humbly Submitted to the Devout Consideration of the Bench of Bishops and The Prince of Wales*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Citizen Lee, 1795?) p. 15.

² Lee, *Rights of the Devil*, p. 15.

‘trumpeted in the public papers’ so that they had become popular topics of conversation.³ Since his youth, newspaper writers, political pamphleteers and graphic artists had conflated the prince’s political ineffectiveness and his disordered finances with his unrestrained sexual appetites and disastrous family life. By the mid-1790s, the contention, from one end of the political spectrum to the other, was that his was a life deeply incompatible with the social and political climate of the times. The Tories argued that he had wholeheartedly adopted the licentious, and hence, unprincipled habits of his associates, the Foxite Whigs. For the Whigs, he proved an unreliable ally whose ‘principles’ were shaped much more by whomever was his current mistress rather than by any apparent political convictions. For reformers, he embodied all that was corrupt about princely privilege and the monarchical institution in general. To loyalists, the prince jeopardized Britain’s most venerable institutions and influenced other members of his dissipated circle to likewise abandon the nation to the pernicious influence of republicans and revolutionaries.

Despite these differences of political opinion, loyalists, reformers, Tories and Whigs were, on the whole, remarkably unanimous in their opinion that the prince’s *private* life deeply endangered *public* security. With this diagnosis, the wider British public inclined to agree: as the Pittite (at the time) William Augustus Miles declared, ‘the people were as little satisfied with the part’ the prince ‘had taken in politics,’ as they were with his ‘transactions in private life’.⁴ The prince had ‘ruined his constitution,’ the author of the appositely titled *John Bull Starving to Pay the Debts of the Royal Prodigal* argued, just as he would ‘ruin the constitution

³ George III, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770-1812*, 8 vols., ed. A. Aspinall (London: Cassell, 1963-71) vol. 1, in Christopher Hibbert, *George IV* (Penguin: London, 1988) p. 29.

⁴ William Augustus Miles, *A Letter to the Prince of Wales, on a Second Application to Parliament, to Discharge Debts Wantonly Contracted since May 1787*, 10th edition (London: J. Owen, [1795]) p. 7. Until about 1794, Miles, a talented reporter, was a Pitt supporter and in the pay of the Treasury (earning, according to Arthur Aspinall, more than £500 a year). After 1794, Miles became critical of Pitt’s war policies and apparently determined on becoming an independent writer, unsupported by either government or opposition. On Miles, see Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, 1780-1850* (London: Home & Van Thal, 1949) pp. 163-4.

of his country'.⁵ Public dissatisfaction with the eldest son of George III stemmed less from his whiggish political opinions and much more from his whiggish love of carousing. These few comments, like countless others, suggest that the Prince of Wales' private character could not be extricated from his public persona: the belief was that his personal conduct greatly affected the nation's political and moral climate. As a prince who was governed by unruly private passions, he could not feel himself inhibited by the laws of the nation, nor by the morals and manners of his virtuous and patriotic subjects.

The King

Throughout the 1790s and the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Prince of Wales' popularity declined almost in direct proportion as his father's grew in public estimation. George III had not always enjoyed public affection; indeed, in the first twenty years of his reign, he had been anything but a political success. In the 1760s and 70s, he was widely thought of as poorly educated, dim-witted, stubborn, dictatorial—qualities he had imbibed from his domineering and over-protective mother, the Dowager Princess of Wales.⁶ These qualities, his critics argued, had manifested themselves in a ramshackle imperial policy, in schemes to stage-manage ministers and attempts to dominate Parliament. The war with America heralded the nadir of his reputation; in fact, the American Declaration of Independence forever enshrined public sentiment—in Britain and in the colonies—when it defined him as 'a Tyrant' who was 'unfit to be the ruler of a free People'.⁷ Britons blamed George III for losing America in its war for independence and accused him of acting the tyrant father to his colonial children, driving them away and forcing them to break with 'the

⁵'A Hanoverian,' *John Bull Starving to Pay the Debts of the Royal Prodigal* (London: Richard 'Citizen' Lee, 1795), p. 17.

⁶ See Simon Ditchfield, *George III: An Essay in Monarchy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

⁷ Ditchfield, p. 109.

imperial *parens patriae*'.⁸ Both American and British *anti-monarchical* war propaganda was infused with such *anti-patriarchal* rhetoric: he was, in Tom Paine's words, a 'wretch' who called himself '*Father Of His People*' whilst 'unfeelingly hear[ing] of their slaughter'; he had, William Cobbett argued, cold-bloodedly sent his own troops 'to cut the throats of a people, our friends and *relations*'.⁹

Yet, a rival discourse developed steadily alongside this rather hapless political reputation throughout the 1770s and 80s. As historians have shown, George III's father, Frederick Prince of Wales had tutored his son in the principle that his private life and personal character would be crucial to his public role, urging him to 'convince the nation' that he was 'not only an Englishman born and bred,' but that he was 'also this by *inclination*'.¹⁰ Political observers hoped that by separating himself from bickering political factions and by adopting the persona of "Patriot King" (as described by Bolingbroke in his 1749 treatise, *Idea of a Patriot King*), he would restore the "royal dignity" that had been tarnished under the previous two Georges.¹¹ The unpopularity and the tenuousness of the reigns of the two previous Georges stemmed from their political factionalism, but perhaps more crucially, from their inability to reflect the traits and qualities of the British public. George III had learned this lesson well and throughout his reign, he consistently emphasized his rustic Englishness, his relatively spartan tastes, his attachment to the people, and most importantly, his 'domestic assets,' so that he became, to borrow Vincent Carretta's phrase, 'the first

⁸ Kenneth Lynn, in Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800*, p. 1.

⁹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), in *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford 1995, 1998) p. 25; William Cobbett, *Cobbett's America: A Selection from the Writings of William Cobbett*, ed. J. E. Morpurgo (London: Folio, 1985) p. 6, italics mine. Many communities expressed their outrage over George III's role in the war. In Glasgow, for instance, he became widely known as 'the wee eejit' and to further express their disapproval, Glaswegians halted work on what would have been a huge monument to the King in George Square--it was decided that, instead of the tyrant, it should be Walter Scott immortalized on the plinth.

¹⁰ Qtd. in Christopher Hibbert, *George III*, p. 11.

¹¹ Vincent Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1990) p. 44. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) pp. 203, 206.

British monarch to have a public family life'.¹² He was devoted to Queen Charlotte and their children and was content to pursue his agricultural and domestic interests. He resolutely demonstrated this side of his character and it held him in good stead: in the 1780s, public reception of George III underwent a slow but steady sea change. His personal qualities were essentially re-interpreted; whereas, for instance, his stubbornness had previously been perceived as blind intransigence, it now intimated consistency, loyalty, trustworthiness.

By 1790, the king's transformation had taken hold, and his political ineffectiveness seemed rather less important than his domestic qualities. He had become a moral touchstone. As the dissenter Dr John Aikin noted in his chronicle of George's reign, though there might have been 'scope for discussion' on the issue of his 'public conduct and political principles,' there was 'little variance of opinion' on the matter of his character and private conduct.¹³ Even the fervently anti-monarchical Charles Pigott was forced to concede in 1793, that Britons might be exposed 'to the most odious and abominable tyranny' under the reign of one of the parasitical princes, but 'the noble qualities that adorn the character of his father provided a sort of 'guarantee to his subjects, against any immediate exercise of despotism'.¹⁴ Pigott's statement reveals how the nation had come to view the king's personal character as a dependable measure of political ability: his domesticity and personal fidelity seemed to provide a guarantee of political moderation.

¹² Colley, *Britons*, p. 206; Carretta, *George III*, p. xv.

¹³ John Aiken, *Annals of the Reign of King George the Third; from its commencement in the year 1760, to the general peace in the year 1815*, 2 vols. (London: Longman et al, 1816). Like any political figure's reputation, George III's 'transformation' was not without its stops and starts, nor was it absolute. For an alternative interpretation, see

¹⁴ Charles Pigott, *Treachery no Crime*, p. 48-9, qtd. in John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-6* (Oxford 2000), p. 52. As Barrell rightly notes, however, this comment is more than a little ironic: elsewhere Pigott is more than critical of George III. See for instance, his contempt of Burke's 'high flown panegyric on the merciful disposition of George III' in his *Strictures on the New Political Tenets of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke, Illustrated by Analogy between his different Sentiments on the American and French Revolutions, etc.* in Claeys, vol. 2, p.141.

This shift in the reception of George III, and the degree to which his domestic image was implicated in it, can be visibly traced over the course of his reign in the stylistic evolution of graphic representations of him. Crucially, as Tamara Hunt has observed, early caricatures of the 1760s focussed almost exclusively on the king's politics, virtually ignoring his domestic life. He is most often portrayed either in overtly political spaces such as parliament or in such public spaces as London streets—but almost never within a domestic space.¹⁵ Then, in the 1770s, caricaturists began to portray the king occupied with some domestic hobby or agricultural pursuit, such as button-making or astronomy or like a farmer, keeping a concerned eye on the weather, but these representations demonstrated how such pursuits obstructed him from performing his political duties.¹⁶ Throughout the 1780s, caricatures increasingly satirized his homeliness, his simple pleasures and his fascination with what the poet Peter Pindar unfavourably referred to as 'the world of *small*'.¹⁷

The critics of George III emphasized these qualities so as to deflate his authority and to cast doubt on his ability to command. Yet, the effort to make the king appear ridiculous or pathetic also had the effect of making him appear familiar and affable—qualities that would seem to inspire a sense of affection in his subjects. One female correspondent, for instance, recorded how, after reading a satire in which the king appeared 'as familiar as any other scenes with Georges and Bettys', her esteem for him was 'greatly heightened, as the great object of ridicule appears to be virtues'.¹⁸ Though such ridicule did not make George appear as 'a great king,' she noted, it did reveal him to be 'a good husband, parent, and man'.

¹⁵ Consider for example, the caricature *Tempora Mutantur* (1763) which portrays a blindfolded George III on his thorn, impervious to the political chaos around him. See Tamara Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Aldershot, Hamps: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 230-234.

¹⁶ See George button-making in *Bedlam of the World* (1781), and as Farmer George at home, looking out the window with a (reversed) telescope to his eye in *Farmer G____e, Studying the Wind & Weather* (1771).

¹⁷ P. Pindar (John Wolcot), *Instructions* p. 485.

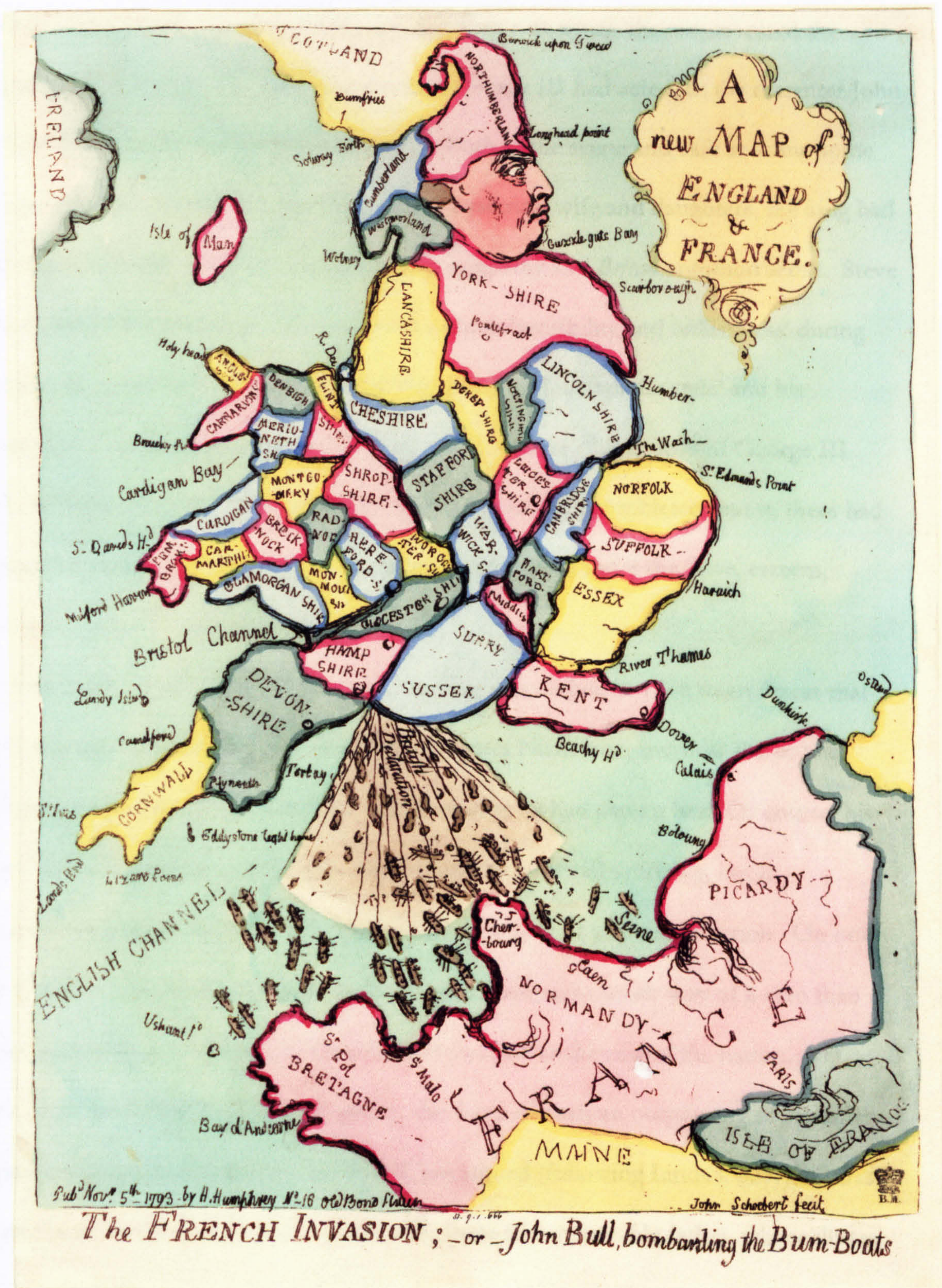
¹⁸ Martha McTier to William Drennan, c. December 1788, *The Drennan-McTier Letters*, p. 318-9, in Tamara Hunt, p. 234.

The gap that she identifies in this 1788 letter—between the political ability and the private character of the king—steadily narrowed throughout the 1790s. George’s personal values became increasingly synonymous with his political ones, and as he became more familiar to his people, he became identified with John Bull. In James Gillray’s *The French Invasion; -or— John Bull, bombarding the Bum-Boats* (Pl. 7), George III is John Bull is England. The image heroicizes the king’s earthiness, his stubbornness, his simplicity: qualities that were previously classified as negative were not expunged from the king’s persona, but rather recast in a much more positive light. The very features which had earlier been the target of satirists had become the best weapons for his supporters, and in the ensuing battle to oppose republicanism and to defend the cause of God and King, George III was transformed, as Vincent Carretta has aptly put it, from ‘a target’ to ‘a tactic’ and a ‘positive exemplar’.¹⁹ The extent of the king’s transformation is encapsulated neatly by a *Times* editor, who, looking back on the reign of George III, observed that between 1775 and 1783, his “obstinacy” and “pertinacity in error” was the cause of much political misfortune, including the loss of America, but that ‘from 1793 to the hour when he dropped the reins of Government,’ those same personal qualities had allowed Britain to triumph over her French foes.²⁰

Several key events in the late 1780s and 90s fostered this sense of familiarity between the people and their king—and greatly boosted his popularity. On 2 August 1786, a distraught needlewoman named Margaret Nicholson attacked the king with a small knife in front of St James’s as he approached her to receive a petition she was holding. The papers immediately reported that he was unharmed and that his first concern had been to ensure that the yeoman and footman who intervened at the scene would treat the mad woman with

¹⁹ Carretta, p. 317, p. 245.

²⁰ Qtd. in Ditchfield, p. 8.



Pl. 7. James Gillray, *The French Invasion; —or— John Bull, bombarding the Bum-Boats* (London: H. Humphrey, 1793). By permission of the British Museum.

sympathy.²¹ Though reports varied slightly in the degree to which they represented the king's generosity of spirit, the consensus was that George III had acted, as the dissenter John Aiken put it, 'with his characteristic humanity'.²² Both at the scene and safe at home some hours later, comforting his panic-stricken, almost hysterical wife and daughters, the king had conducted himself with *manly* composure, *fatherly* sympathy and *British* common sense. Steve Poole has pinpointed the king's demonstration of both 'sensibility and bullishness' during this episode as contributing factors to the development of his 'fatherly style' and his incarnation 'as a unifying factor in the national consciousness'.²³ The loss of George III would have been a national and a personal tragedy, for as one pamphleteer put it, there had never been a husband and a father who received and deserved more the 'love, esteem, respect and admiration' of his own family.²⁴

Following on the heels of this event, the king succumbed in 1788 to an illness that would render him as vulnerable and as mad as Margaret Nicholson, but now the public extended the same type of sympathy and compassion as he had shown her. Of course, his porphyria-induced madness would also open him up to potential satirizing, but it contributed much more to his transformation into an object of popular affection. On one level, it could be said that his debilitating illness made him seem much *more* of a man than a king, that is, as plainly vulnerable to the cruel hand of fate as the rest of the nation. Yet, at the same time, as an object of such sympathy, the focus of such an outpouring of sentiment, he also appeared *less* manly; for as John Barrell has argued (following Linda Colley), he was sentimentally represented as 'a mild, tender, and above all a vulnerable father, whose illness

²¹ For a further analysis of this incident, see Steven Poole, *The Politics of Regicide in England, 1760-1850: Troublesome Subjects* (Manchester: MUP, 2000), pp. 69-89.

²² Aiken, p. 369.

²³ Poole, p. 72, p. 70.

²⁴ *High Treason Committed by Margaret Nicholson* (London: n. pub., 1786), quoted in Poole, p. 70.

had unmanned, had feminized him'.²⁵ As a father figure, then, he embodied both an authority that earned him respect, and a vulnerability that earned him affection. As we have seen in the first chapter, in 1793, propagandists emphasized this vulnerability, and incited an outpouring of public affection when Louis XVI and his family became victims of the republican rage of their subjects. In the subsequent aftermath of their deaths, a whole succession of eyewitness accounts, poetry, pamphlets, broadsides, coins and tokens, paintings and engravings portrayed the heartrending, uncivilized and unnatural separation of Louis, the husband and father, from his family.²⁶ Such powerfully affective—humanizing—representations not only went far to rehabilitate the Bourbons, but also to stimulate British anxiety, and affection, for George and his family. 'The pathos' surrounding the French royal family was, as Barrell observes, 'parlayed into a sympathy for George III, recalling his earlier vulnerability' as a mad king.²⁷ This sympathy manifested itself into a need to champion him, to defend him from the republican threat that radiated from France and from British coffeehouses and bookstalls.

At the same time, however, the fatherliness and unwavering character of George III answered the public need, particularly after 1792-3, for reassurance, for a coherent, secure, recognizable symbol of tradition and nationhood. 'In the midst of disaster and disillusionment,' to use Linda Colley's words, his 'undoubted domestic probity' became representative of 'reassuring stability and honest, uncomplicated worth'.²⁸ Indeed, in 1795, one alarmed 'Old Englishman' argued that if George III 'had been a bad man, and consequently a bad king,' then England would have been as 'convulsed to the centre' as

²⁵ Barrell, *Imagining*, pp. 54-5.

²⁶ See Barrell, *Imagining*, pp. 55-74 and Brewer, pp. 23-4.

²⁷ Barrell, *Imagining*, p. 56.

²⁸ Colley, p. 212.

other nations who had overturned their governments.²⁹ Whilst ‘an outcry against kings and powers has been raised’ in Europe, he argued, British republicans found ‘very powerful obstacles ... in the virtues of the reigning Monarch,’ for no one could or would oppose a king who ‘loves his people, who blends with public care the private virtues; whose court encourages no profligacy, and whose palace exhibits an exemplary scene of domestic excellence’.³⁰ As nations crumbled and political systems dismantled, George III remained unchanging in his routines and in his devotion to family and community. He remained blissfully, reassuringly, engrossed in his telescopes, the finer points of sheep farming, and the best place for his groomsmen to go for a quick drink of ‘purl’ (although never in the morning).³¹ He pottered contentedly around Windsor, stopping in at the local bookstore to leaf nonchalantly through Paine’s *Rights of Man*, and he continued, unfailingly, to drop by on his tenants for a cup of tea, at times discreetly leaving spare change behind on his chair.³² In the words of one of his loyal proponents (and an equally devoted critic of the Prince of Wales), as long as George III remained as he was, as ‘the father of his people, there can be no reason to fear the public prosperity and happiness of Great Britain’.³³

This is not to say, however, that George III was without his detractors; indeed, at times he faced strong, even physically violent, opposition.³⁴ As mentioned previously in this section, the focus on the king’s character and family life cut both ways, and in the 1790s, anti-monarchists, Whigs and other political critics culled their material from the same private recesses of his life as his loyalist and Tory supporters. Those same personal qualities that

²⁹ ‘An Old Englishman,’ *Two Words of Counsel and One of Comfort in High Life, Now Happily Adjusted to the Satisfaction of All Parties Concerned* (London: n. pub., 1795), p. 13.

³⁰ ‘An Old Englishman,’ pp. 7-8.

³¹ Hibbert, *George III*, pp. 198-9.

³² Hibbert, *George III*, pp. 199-200.

³³ ‘An Old Englishman,’ p. 11.

³⁴ There were several attempts on the king’s life: he was the target of the St James’s Park riot in 1795; James Hadfield shot at him in the theatre in 1800; he was the target of the Despard Conspiracy of 1802-3. For more, see Steve Poole’s *The Politics of Regicide in England 1760-1850* and Barrell, *Imagining*.

endeared him to the public were also used to undermine him. James Gillray, for instance, produced a series of prints mocking the royal sense of economy. Both Gillray's *Anti-Saccharrites,--or--John Bull and his Family leaving off the use of Sugar* (1792) and *Temperance Enjoying a Frugal Meal* (1792), portray the miserly king and avaricious queen dining parsimoniously on sugar-less tea and boiled eggs, and salad and water, whilst behind-the-scenes they stockpiled private funds at public expense (Pls. 8 & 9).³⁵ Gillray takes a similar tack in his *Affability* (Pl. 10), but here he depicts George and Charlotte as country rustics on a visit to one of their Windsor farms, their rural simplicity signifying their unsuitability for the throne. The king, who is placed much closer to the level of his tenant, wears spurs and his ubiquitous blue coat in the manner of a gentleman farmer or a country squire. Indeed, the king's language, 'Well, Friend, where a 'you going, Hay?—what's your Name, hay?—where d'ye Live, hay?—hay?' (and the spelling of 'hay') seems to find remarkable resonance in the tenant farmer's own (albeit slightly more alarmed) expression.³⁶ The satirical poet Peter Pindar creates a similar scene, portraying the simpleton 'Farmer George' interrogating an equally simple verger about the difficulties of mopping the roof beams of Salisbury cathedral.³⁷ Pindar associates the king's agricultural interests and his confusion about the menial labours of rustics with his alleged intellectual weakness in an effort to underscore the indecency of a system of court sycophancy sustained by blissful ignorance.

Charles Pigott connected the king's notoriously spendthrift household and his agricultural interests to his political incapacity. It would be advantageous for the nation, Pigott argued, if the king remained occupied with farming and out of the nation's affairs. In

³⁵ See also Gillray's *Toasting Muffins*, vide *Royal Breakfast* and its companion piece, *Frying Sprats*, vide, *Royal Supper* (1791).

³⁶ See also *The Royal Dairy or Geoge [sic] Split Farthing selling his Skim Milk* (1792).

³⁷ *An Apology for Kings in The Remonstrance. To Which is added, An Odd to My Ass, The Magpie and Robin, An Apology for Kings, and an Address to my Pamphlet* (Dublin: W. Porter, [1799]), pp. 27-29.



Pl. 8. James Gillray, *Anti-Saccharites,—or—John Bull and his Family leaving off the use of Sugar* (London: H. Humphrey, 1792). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.



Pl. 9. James Gillray, *Temperance Enjoying a Frugal Meal* (London: H. Humphrey, 1792). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.



Pl. 10. James Gillray, *Affability* (London: H. Humphrey, 1795). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

his *Political Dictionary*, he suggested that since George III, like the biblical King Nebuchadnezzar, was a beast who 'ate grass and potatoes,' then 'it would greatly conduce to the welfare of his people, if [he] ... was turned out to grass before the meeting of every session of Parliament'.³⁸ Such undignified representations of the king were intended to unmask him, to uncover his most private foibles, frailties and fallibilities, and thus undermine his political authority and challenged his right to rule. Referring to these types of representations, James Sack has questioned Linda Colley's findings that George III had undergone an apotheosis in the last decades of the eighteenth century. He argues that there was 'very little evidence of any cult of royalty or cult of George III,' even among a loyalist press, who, he claims, idolized William Pitt, rather than the king.³⁹ Moreover, Sack contends that as the king's role as '*pater familias* [of] perhaps the most scandalous royal family in British history' put his role as head of state in question.⁴⁰

However, this lampooned king was often also cast in the role of people's defender *against* the grasping hands of Pitt and his ministers. In Gillray's image of the John Bullish George III defecating ships against France, he heroically—bullishly—defiantly—defends his nation against republican invaders in his own 'rustic' style. As Marilyn Morris has rightly pointed out, though it might have been an exaggeration to call George's rise in popularity as an apotheosis, he was often preferred to Pitt, who was 'accused after 1788 of usurping the crown'.⁴¹ She points to several caricatures which reveal how the blame for war, repressive legislation and high taxes was passed increasingly from king to minister. In his *A Specimen of Light Horsemanship*, for instance, Isaac Cruikshank, portrays Pitt riding the white horse of

³⁸ Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary, Explaining the True Meanings of Words, illustrated and exemplified in the lives, morals, character and conduct of the following most illustrious persons, and among many others* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1795), p. 83.

³⁹ Sack, in Morris, p. 161.

⁴⁰ Sack, in Morris, p. 161.

⁴¹ Morris, *British Monarchy*, p. 161; see p. 163.

Hanover through an angry mob to the garrison of the Treasury. In Cruikshank's *The British Menagerie*, Pitt greedily robs not only the people but the king (whose pockets are turned inside out). George was also depicted as the people's defender against Pitt's oppressive taxation policies. In Cruikshank's 1798 *Voluntary Subscription*, the king is affiliated with a larcenous Tory government, but whilst the grasping members of parliament look out for *their* own families and households, the king defends the interests of *his larger* family, that is, the British public. Here Dundas and Pitt solicit subscription funds 'for the preservation of our Places—our pensions our Candle ends—our Cheese parings' and, significantly, 'our Grandmothers Our wives our Sisters'. The king's plaintively protests: 'Cant afford it. I tell you—can't afford it. allways some new fangled nonsense or another—I wish you would let us be at Peace and Quietness'. This is a supplication for candour, transparency, a sort of agrarian simplicity, against innovation or 'new fangled nonsense'. The nation's true enemies are the professional politicians, Dundas and Pitt, the latter of whom, with finger to lips, attempts to silence George, the people's advocate.

Moreover, for the most part, such satirizing of George III lacks the intensity and frequency of those attacks that ushered Marie-Antoinette and to a lesser extent, Louis XVI, to their deaths. (Nor, for that matter, does it have much in common with the venomous satirizing of the Prince of Wales). Indeed, more often than not, as critics have noted, the satirical treatments of George III would be more accurately categorized as comic lampoons than as mutinous attacks. Marilyn Morris has observed that whilst the French had used scandal, or 'exposé to chip away at the mystique of monarchy,' the British tended to use more gentle satire.⁴² This would seem to be much more the case with George III and Charlotte, than as we will see, for the royal princes. Britons may have had, to use Richard

⁴² Morris, *British Monarchy*, p. 175.

Godfrey's perceptive phrase, a 'perverse affection' for George and Charlotte, but they did not feel similarly toward their sons.⁴³ The loyalty shown the king demonstrates the 'insulating' qualities of his familial persona: in the words of the diarist Nathaniel Wraxall, "the father, and the husband, protected" the king, and his 'private virtues, and domestic character, drew a veil, even in the opinion of his enemies, across the errors of his Government and Administration'.⁴⁴ That his domestic character had obscured his political sins to such a degree, that his popularity continued to grow even whilst Britain was plagued by corruption, war and Tory taxation policies, was a source of deep frustration for radicals, many of whom attempted to turn this tide of public favour by stripping away the king's domestic persona.

As we have seen, with his knowledge of the rampant gambling, drunkenness, family breakdown and sexual licentiousness that characterized high life, Charles Pigott had all the material necessary to direct the 'tide' of 'popular favour' and to 'wage[] war ... with those of an exalted condition in life'.⁴⁵ His project, largely carried out in his three-part *Jockey Club* and his *Female Jockey Club*, used scandal to reveal of what 'superior materials' the aristocracy were 'composed' in an effort to loosen their political hold.⁴⁶ Pigott's project should not be confused with the emerging 'reform or ruin' movement of middle class moralists, for as Jon Mee points out, 'his Whiggish libertinism was both disavowed (in his attacks on upper-class immorality) and reinscribed through a radical embrace of sexual "freedom."'⁴⁷ In the case of George III, however, Pigott gets rather caught up in his own argument: for whilst his goal is

⁴³ Richard Godfrey, *James Gillray, The Art of Caricature* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001) p. 174. Godfrey's comment refers to Gillray's *Affability*, a fine example of the teasing attitude often adopted toward the king by satirists.

⁴⁴ Qtd. in Carretta, p. 281.

⁴⁵ Pigott, *The Jockey Club*, Part 1, p. 183.

⁴⁶ Pigott, 'Dedication,' *The Jockey Club*, Part II, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Jon Mee, 'Libertines and Radicals in the 1790s: The Strange Case of Charles Pigott I,' in *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century* (Palgrave: Basingstoke) 2004, p. 186.

to 'expose the vices' that deform humanity and to rouse 'general indignation' against immorality and corruption, he was at the same time obliged to make allowance for the 'reputed domestic virtues' of George III.⁴⁸ Cognizant of the people's affection for the domestic George, Pigott was forced to make an exception, in effect to alter his own criteria. 'However exemplary' the king was 'in a private station,' Pigott backtracked, his domestic qualities were 'unprofitable in the great scale of public affairs'.⁴⁹ Pigott uses a language—so ubiquitous in 1790s political writing—that conflates the private and the public, but he drastically reworks the thrust of his argument. The most damaging criticism Pigott could offer of a king whose private life fit the very model of morality he promoted in the *Jockey Club* pamphlets, was that he was a 'nominal father' who had not shown the nation the same 'parental tenderness' he had shown his spoiled sons.⁵⁰

In many respects, however, such claims could not compete with George's increasingly positive image. In the mid-1790s, the British public were inclined to look past his overtly political role, so that either his policies were overshadowed by his private character, or, as would increasingly become the case, his political principles were *conflated* with his domestic virtues. It was as important, a pamphleteer identified as 'One of the People' wrote, to have a king 'as good as he is great, as illustrious in virtue as he is exalted in place, and as superior to all other potentates in the moralities of the heart and all the decencies of life as he is in wealth, dominion, and domestic felicity'.⁵¹ This opinion developed out of the principle that since 'the sovereign is the model of the court, and the court of the nation,' then 'the manners of a good or bad king must be the greatest blessing

⁴⁸ Pigott, *The Jockey Club*, Part 1, pp. i, vi, 6.

⁴⁹ Pigott, *Jockey Club*, Part 1, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Pigott, 'Dedication,' *Jockey Club*, part II, pp. x, xi

⁵¹ *Duties of Man, or Civil Order Public Safety: Being Plain Thoughts of a plain Mind on THINGS AS THEY ARE, and what the Well-Being of the Community now requires of every good Citizen* (London: Richardson, 1793), p. 68.

or the greatest curse'.⁵² Such criteria rendered the political and private selves of George III practically indistinguishable. As Simon Ditchfield has noted, to a people who were themselves 'increasingly exhorted to the pursuit of morality,' such 'a family man' as George III was a monarch to be loved and admired.⁵³ For a nation that expected increasingly to see its political leaders demonstrate familial values in both their public and private capacities, George III was an exemplary monarch—in that sense at least.

The Prince

The Prince of Wales, however, embodied almost everything his father did not. In both his public and private affairs, he was reckless, promiscuous, unrestrained, disloyal. From the first years of the 1790s, the prince made it exceedingly difficult for alarmed loyalists and nervous moderates to maintain the cause of God and King. Increased access to the king's life fostered public affection, but equivalent access to the prince's affairs only incited public displeasure. Whilst Pigott struggled to chip away at the domestic virtues of George III, no great effort was required to find, in the life of his son, grist for the anti-monarchical mill. From the late 1780s, radicals emphasized the connection between the Prince of Wales's disastrous finances and his profligate life. He had monopolized public funds to support activities distinctly at odds with the people's sense of morality and decency. He brazenly expected the people to fund his every private pleasure 'out of their pockets,' a disgruntled pamphleteer styling himself 'A Hanoverian' declared.⁵⁴ He had even left it to the people to recompense his discarded mistresses, to make good the worthless bond he had issued to the actress Mary Robinson ('a piece of paper which was good for nothing, for

⁵² *Duties of Man*, p. 68.

⁵³ Ditchfield, *George*, p. 143.

⁵⁴ 'A Hanoverian,' p.11.

favours of equal value').⁵⁵ Such actions were incompatible with the growing cultural emphasis on domestic order and the virtues of restraint; they were also, the argument was, contrary to the example set by George III.

Since public money supported kings and queens, then the people had a reasonable right to 'cashier' them—and not only for their political failings, as the Dissenting minister Dr Richard Price had proposed in his famous *Discourse* of 1789. If Britons truly loved their country, then they would not support royal prodigality. This was not a 'complex political question which eloquence can confound, or sophistry misrepresent,' A Hanoverian argued, for even the humblest peasants 'who support themselves and their families upon one, two, or three shillings a day' clearly recognized 'the character of a *prodigal*'.⁵⁶ 'Had a private individual acted in like manner,' Pigott declared, 'he would have become the outcast of his family; and the whole world had abandoned him'.⁵⁷ This 'prodigalization' of the prince tactically lowered him to the level of the people in a much different way than had the 'domestication' of the king. Increased access to the private life of George III boosted his public standing, but such admission to the Prince of Wales' life only lowered his. Good-natured anecdotes circulated about Farmer George and his hog-raising, his prodigal son was caricatured languishing in the mire of foul debauchery and in the filthy troughs of swine. In one of many pictures, a herd of pigs—the 'swinish multitude'—rightly showed their displeasure by trampling the three-feathered 'Ich Dein,' the emblem of the Prince of Wales, in the mud beneath their feet.

Significantly, in the 1790s, the public's dissatisfaction with the prince, as expressed in this type of propaganda, stemmed much less from his overt political role and from his

⁵⁵ 'A Hanoverian,' p.11.

⁵⁶ 'A Hanoverian,' pp. 7-8, italics mine.

⁵⁷ Pigott, *Jockey Club*, part 1, page 5.

political opinions than from his inability to be a moral figurehead. It was the example of his private life, not his politics that made him dangerous. His promiscuity and dissipation had more than a 'share ... in relaxing those ligaments which unite and bind men together'.⁵⁸ For this reason, William Augustus Miles argued that 'it had become more than ever expedient, that the *prodigality* of Princes should be ... restrained, within the limits of Sobriety and Reason'.⁵⁹ Miles, like other propagandists who urged the prince's moral reform, used a type of politico-personal vocabulary that forcefully situated individual action within the larger political landscape. Such a meaning-laden language underscores the causality between the personal and the political: the nation resented 'with becoming warmth, a conduct as *impolitic*, as it is universally felt and acknowledged to be shameful and iniquitous'.⁶⁰ Since the prince, more than anyone else, had 'set a bad example when it was incumbent on him, as heir apparent, to have set a good one,' Miles argued, then he should also 'be selected *for the first example of reform*'.⁶¹ When the word 'reform' was thus used in reference to the prince (as it so often was), it carried a patently moral message, *and* it levied a distinctly political threat. It was incontestably, Miles reiterates for effect, the prince's duty to 'be the first to set an example of *reform* ... by exercising the virtue of self-denial' and by 'abstain[ing] from whatever tends to propagate vice and immorality'.⁶²

Indeed, such a discontented public posed a very real threat in the 1790s, for whilst the private life of the king inspired familial sentiment in his people, the prince's affairs encouraged *revolutionary* sentiments. In fact, many individuals argued that the republican impulse stemmed not so much from overt political causes as it did from a growing

⁵⁸ Miles, p. xv.

⁵⁹ Miles, p. xxii.

⁶⁰ Miles, p. 1, italics mine.

⁶¹ Miles, p. xiv.

⁶² Miles, p. xv, italics mine.

resentment that, among the prince's circle, 'Luxury, Corruption, Adultery, Gaming, Pride, Vanity, Idleness, Extravagance, and Dissipation' had taken priority over their public duties.⁶³ 'To say that the times are corrupt,' was an excuse that could no longer be made for the prince, for though the times were 'indeed most lamentably so ... however *bad* the morals of the country were, when his Royal Highness descended from the nursery, ... he has contributed to make them *worse*.'⁶⁴

Loyalists and reformers alike sounded warnings that the origin of revolutionary sentiment could be traced to a widespread dissatisfaction with a morally apathetic aristocracy. In his meaningfully titled *Reform or Ruin*, the loyalist John Bowles argued that the dreadful example of the higher orders had created a nation in which 'all Ranks of People' spoke 'of nothing but Grievances and Oppressions, War and Ruin' until they seemed to exist in a perpetually 'unhappy state'.⁶⁵ It would be 'impolitic' for the nation's first families to continue as they were in their illicit pursuits and pleasures. The nation might need reform, Bowles argued, but not electoral reforms; rather, the real antidote to widespread unrest was a complete amelioration of morals and manners.⁶⁶ The nobility must regain their status as the pillars of the community: they must be 'diligently employed,' both 'in the service of their King and Country' and 'in regulating their own Families and their Neighbours'.⁶⁷ In other words, Bowles suggests, they should take an example from George III, whose 'private Life' was always as good as his 'public Conduct'.⁶⁸

There were, observers noted, many parallels between the prince's licentious existence and the sexual depravity of the Bourbon court; there were also marked similarities

⁶³ John Bowles, *Reform or Ruin; Abridged. In which every Man may Learn the True State of Things at this Time: and What that Reform is, which Alone can Save the Country* (London: J. Hatchard, 1797), p. 9.

⁶⁴ Bowles, pp. xiv- xv

⁶⁵ Bowles, pp. 4, 7.

⁶⁶ Bowles, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Bowles, p. 9.

⁶⁸ Bowles, p. 7.

between the discontent of the French people and the dissatisfied rumblings heard in British coffeehouses and at political meetings. 'The example of France should be a warning' to the prince and his family, William Miles warned, since 'it was owing to the scandalous waste, profligacy and profusion of the Court of Versailles, and of its worthless princes, that the former ha[d] been deservedly annihilated, and the latter become despicable'.⁶⁹ To such alarmed observers, the prince's private life more closely resembled the treachery and wickedness of the French court than it reflected the British penchant for wholesome domestic values and financial restraint. He was often compared to his sexually promiscuous and politically traitorous friend, the Duc d'Orléans, or, as he renamed himself in the 1790s, 'Philippe-Egalité'. Just as the Duc, the republican cousin of Louis XVI, had welcomed his own nation's destruction and, worse still, had willingly surrendered his own family to the bloodthirsty Jacobins, the suggestion was that the Prince of Wales had been equally willing to sacrifice his own father in a bid for the throne during the Regency Crisis of 1788-9. Yet as much as the French duke deserved censure, the *Times* argued in one June edition of 1796, even *he* had maintained certain loyalties, felt certain affections, and displayed certain familial virtues:

WHILST the infamous Duke of Orleans was rioting in the lowest sensual pleasures, he was always observed to show the greatest respect for his truly respectable consort; as if he endeavoured by this external homage to indemnify her in some measure for the disgrace of being united with a MAN SO UNIVERSALLY DESPISED.⁷⁰

In marked contrast, the paper contended, Britain's own heir apparent seemed utterly incapable of such sentiments, for he had refused to display even this most rudimentary show of respect to his own consort, Princess Caroline of Brunswick (whom he wed in 1795). The case of the French duke demonstrated what 'an ascendant does virtue possess even over

⁶⁹ Miles, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Times*, 4 June 1796.

THE MOST DEPRAVED MINDS' and yet, the prince could not make even an outward appearance of loyalty, decorum and conjugal affection. For this reason, wrote the *Morning Chronicle*, 'those who in their zeal to impute to the French every vice which can degrade the human character,' should look more critically at how their own prince treated his family.⁷¹

The prince was viewed as the unwitting 'muse' of revolutionaries and republicans, not just throughout the 1790s, but also during his reign as regent after 1811 and as king from 1820 until his death in 1830. His abhorrent personal life, Miles wrote, inspired 'the sanguinary views of those who wish to convert our nightcellars into revolutionary tribunals, and to erect guillotines in all our public squares'.⁷² For this reason, 'A Hanoverian' warned, 'there are none of his Majesty's subjects who have so much reason to be alarmed' as the prince himself, for 'hereditary power' had 'been chiefly attacked by the new Theorists, and that was among the least defensible part of the constitution.'⁷³ Picking up on this thread, 'An Old Englishman' informed the prince that, of all the royal family, he alone had motivated intriguing theorists: when republicans 'endeavoured to strengthen their arguments, and heighten the delusion of their projects, by seducing ... the attention of the people' they need only turn to the king's 'apparent successor'.⁷⁴

The threat of political extinction at the hand of the mob was consistently used to apply political pressure and, as was more often the case, to urge the prince to treat his wife better, to give up a mistress, or to settle into domestic harmony. When, for instance, it became known that the prince had hypocritically, underhandedly, instigated a secret parliamentary investigation into his estranged wife's affairs in 1806 (about which we will seem more in a later section), the example of revolutionary France was used to censure him.

⁷¹ MC, 12 January, 1797

⁷² Miles, p. 1.

⁷³ Miles, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Miles, pp. 8-9.

The prince was warned that ‘after the dreadful example which the French Revolution has exhibited to the Sovereigns of Europe, it behoves them to be most circumspect in their conduct, to afford not the shadow of ... calumny to blacken their characters’.⁷⁵ The revolution had demonstrated how critically ‘fame’ functioned in this new era of public access, indeed, reputation was often the crux upon which a public figure’s very existence rested. Thus ‘A Friend who is no Parasite’ impartially advised the prince that it was “not only necessary that [princes], in fact, be blameless, but that their conduct be such as to prevent even the suspicion of crime.”⁷⁶ The crimes of princes are not political here, but moral.

The Press

In this era, ‘the voice of truth’ spoke ever more loudly through the press, and the prince, who reportedly took in 546 copies of eight different newspapers daily—and that just to his London residence, Carlton House—could not avoid hearing it. Indeed, he was reported to have ‘read every newspaper quite through’.⁷⁷ The press, as the provider of such a proximate link between the public and their leaders, claimed to speak *to* the people by supplying them with inside information at the same time that it spoke *for* the people by familiarizing leaders with the tide of opinion. The newspapers of the 1790s took very seriously their self-appointed roles as ‘Public Informer’ or ‘Voice of the People’—the self-designations of the Opposition papers the *Courier* and the *Morning Post* respectively.⁷⁸ The moderately liberal *Star* professed that ‘The PRESS’ was the true ‘MODERN MAGNA

⁷⁵ Review of ‘A Friend Who is no Parasite,’ *An Admonitory Letter to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, on the Subject of the late Delicate Inquiry; containing Anecdotes never before published, which may probably lead to the Detection of the real Authors of the late Scandalous Attempt to sully the Purity of an Illustrious Personage*, qtd. in *AJ* vol. 24 (August 1806), pp. 436-442 (p. 436).

⁷⁶ ‘A Friend Who is no Parasite,’ p. 437.

⁷⁷ Qtd. in Hibbert, p. 759.

⁷⁸ *MP*, 30 March 1795.

CHARTA of BRITISH LIBERTY,' whilst the loyalist *True Briton* pledged to safeguard the nation's 'dearest ties'.⁷⁹ Preserving this ideal of British liberty, wherein families felt 'the advantages of their house being truly their castle,' absolutely necessitated a certain level of public familiarity with the private lives of those with political influence.⁸⁰

Individuals would no longer be protected by rules of decorum or respect for personal privacy. Even the loyal *True Briton* placed its journalistic duty before social deference:

We do not mean to defend the propriety of attacking the private Characters of Individuals, except where such Characters have a necessary and inevitable influence on their public situations. In that case, it becomes indispensably necessary, and woe be to the Nation that checks or discourages the investigation!⁸¹

The *True Briton* could have been speaking here for every other newspaper, whether Tory or Whig, Radical or Conservative. It was 'the bounden duty of a public writer' to bring to light questionable conduct, 'by *whomever* observed,' one *Anti-Jacobin* reviewer urged, if such conduct 'openly outraged' the 'moral feelings of the public'.⁸² For surely, there did not exist 'a sycophant so abject, a parasite so base' who would deny the 'self-evident proposition ... that vice and sin, when committed by the highest classes of society'—including princes—must be censured, even if it damaged those 'parties in the eyes of the public'.⁸³ It was only right, the opposition *Courier* maintained, that 'the eye of the people' had increased access to 'the private lives of Princes' and that 'their passions, propensities and pursuits' be laid open to perusal.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press, 1772-1792* (Lincoln, U of Nebraska P, 1963) p. 234; TB, 1 January 1793.

⁸⁰ TB, 1 January, 1793.

⁸¹ TB, 1 January 1793; TB 11 January, 1797.

⁸² 'A Review of Nathaniel Jefferys' *A Review of The Conduct of the Prince of Wales in his various Transactions with Mr. Jeffreys, during a Period of more than Twenty Years: containing a Detail of many Circumstances relative to the Prince and Princess of Wales, Mrs. Fitzherbert, &c*, *AJ* vol. 24 (June 1806) pp. 186-195, p. 186.

⁸³ 'Review of Nathaniel Jefferys,' p. 186.

⁸⁴ *The Courier*, 19 March 1795.

A caveat must be inserted here: though the press fulfilled a moral-political role, the business of news was not a saintly enterprise, for it was just that—an enterprise. Profit-seeking newspapers attracted their fair share of adventurers who competitively, shamelessly exploited political anxieties and the taste for gossip. Since the early 1770s and the birth of the *Morning Post*, it had been common practice for politicians and society types to submit and pay for scandalous paragraphs attacking their rivals. By 1788, the political affiliations of every paper had been purchased: the treasury and the opposition had taken advantage of the fact that the right bribe paid to the right editor could sway a newspaper's politics. (Perhaps the most blatant example of press control occurred when the Prince of Wales bought the *Morning Post* outright in 1789, after years of paying its editors not to print damaging material about his exorbitant expenditures, his scandalous affairs and most of all, his secret marriage to the Catholic divorcee Mrs. Fitzherbert).⁸⁵

Yet the point remains that the purpose of scandal in the 1790s was not simply to titillate, to profit, or to even engage in self-indulgence. After the French revolution, as newspaper editor and early media critic Caleb Whitefoord observed in a 1799 pamphlet, the widespread opinion of the people was that they could no longer “stand neuter”; the “state of political furor” that held Britons in thrall had transformed scandal into a game with much higher stakes.⁸⁶ Exposure to such a momentous political event as well as to the scandalous private lives of public figures had effectively turned otherwise passive readers into active ones. Newly politicized readers bridged the gulf between the personal and political spheres. The time had come, Whitefoord wrote, when

all descriptions of men, from the peer to the shoe-black, feel it their duty to give their advice as to the government of the kingdom; when even the women, whose newspaper reading was heretofore confined to the lists and accounts of marriages,

⁸⁵ See Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press*, pp. 95-108.

⁸⁶ [Caleb Whitefoord], *Advice to the Editors of Newspapers* (London: Alexander Mac Pherson), 1799, p. 1.

deaths, divorces, fires, murders, and executions, are now eager to observe the progress of the revolutions of empires.⁸⁷

The newly burgeoning taste for politics had not eclipsed the slightly older taste for newspaper gossip; rather reader interest in marriages and divorces had become *supplemented* by a desire for political knowledge—so much so, that in many cases, these interests were practically conflated. Newspaper writers, and by extension, their readers felt it their duty to make public enquiries into the lives and characters of their political representatives and their social “superiors.”

The press presented itself as negotiating a certain moral code on behalf of the public. As newspapers struggled to gain credibility and authority in the politically turbulent years of the 1790s, scandal adopted the language of moral probity. In such a way, newspapers—of all political affiliations—fulfilled a vital public service in a time when the nation was threatened. Deviance was identified and censured, whilst proper, honourable modes of conduct were praised. Although the press had been associated with scurrilous, bawdy news, papers had strategically enveloped that scurrility in a high moral tone. By targeting the unruly private lives of the privileged classes, newspapers—regardless of political affiliation—could claim a dominant role in a reform or ruin movement that urged moral reform as a way to stave off social degeneration.

Newspapers claimed to take as much pride in their ‘*duty* to RELATE FACTS’ as their responsibility ‘to correct *mistakes*’.⁸⁸ Indeed, journalists often used a legal vocabulary to describe their punitive role: they were ‘bound like a witness’ to “speak the truth, the whole

⁸⁷ [Caleb Whitefoord], p. 1.

⁸⁸ TB (8 June 1796); also reprinted in *A Review with Suitable Remarks*, p. 15.

truth, and nothing but the truth.”⁸⁹ They also sought to rehabilitate offenders: to ‘point out the path of reformation, and to indicate the means by which the party addressed may become the object of general affection, esteem, and reverence’.⁹⁰ Journalists claimed to defend dutifully those vulnerable victims who could not launch their own ‘appeal to the tribunal of the public’.⁹¹ Since the prince’s private life directly influenced British society, his illicit affairs needed to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the moral law so that his example might be used to *deter* other such offenders. Thus, on those many occasions when he was judged to have contravened the parameters of decency and decorum, the press reminded both him and their readers of the need for restraint. To prosecute the prince was essentially, as the *True Briton* put it, to defend ‘the virtuous part of the Community’.⁹²

At the centre of this scandal mill was, of course, the royal family. By its very nature, the image of a domesticated monarchy fuelled and fed the public demand for ever more entry into their daily lives. Pamphleteers produced biographies that narrated the most intimate accounts of court life, and news writers obliged their audiences with court levee attendance lists, descriptions of theatre trips and holidays in Weymouth, details of royal dress and equipage, but most significantly, writers and artists of all types narrated royal scandals. This public mania for details about royal private lives marked a new juncture in the relationship between the monarchy, the press and the public. Some members of the royal family adapted to this closer relationship more easily than others. The prince’s correspondence reveals how powerfully aware he was of negative public opinion and how vulnerable he was to it. He was conscious that such opinion could, if not destroy the British

⁸⁹ *A Letter to Nathaniel Jeffreys, late Goldsmith and Jeweller to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, late Member of Parliament for the City of Coventry, on the subject of his extraordinary Pamphlet, entitled ‘A Review of the Conduct of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales &c.’* qtd. in *AJ* vol. 24 (June 1806), p. 195.

⁹⁰ ‘Review of Nathaniel Jefferys,’ pp. 186-7.

⁹¹ *MC*, 1 June 1796.

⁹² *TB*, 11 Jan 1797.

monarchy (which seemed possible in light of the guillotining of Louis XVI), then at least seriously circumscribe the power of that institution. At times, his vulnerability would give rise to paranoia, and rather than simply bribe newspaper editors with exorbitant amounts of money, he would deploy spies to coffeehouses to gather gossip about himself and urge government ministers to initiate prosecution against authors who scandalized him.

Although advisers often accused the prince of being insulated from the real world and unaware of political reality, his correspondence reveals that he was also mindful of the danger of being too isolated from public sentiment by a 'high & exalted situation'.⁹³ In a letter to his mother, Queen Charlotte, he expressed his worry that she and the king were 'totally ignorant' of the political mood of the people, and that they were 'perhaps intentionally sometimes kept so'.⁹⁴ The family should not be fooled into thinking that 'those democrattick principles wh[ich] Have plunged [France] into the abyss' would be contained in that nation, he writes, for 'whispers' were circulating 'in the small ale houses in & about London'.⁹⁵ His personal contingent of spies had found that:

There were a number of French Jacobines who were industriously & strenuously endeavouring to propagate their infernal doctrines by treating the lower classes of people, & by inveighing openly ... upon the French Revolution & upon the blessings yt. must come to this country was she alike drenched & delug'd with blood as France is.⁹⁶

With this panicked letter he enclosed what he saw as perhaps the greatest threat to the royal family and to national security: Charles Pigott's *Jockey Club*. It was, he declared, a 'dangerous' pamphlet, an 'infamous & shocking libellous production' which promoted the 'damnable

⁹³ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 285.

⁹⁴ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 285.

⁹⁵ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 285.

⁹⁶ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 285.

doctrines of the hell-begotten Jacobines'.⁹⁷ This would seem to contradict Pigott's perhaps rather tongue-in-cheek claim that he had it on good authority that the prince had merely laughed at the first volume of the *Jockey Club* and had not been at all disturbed by its revelations.⁹⁸

In fact, the prince was exceedingly concerned, and in his letter to Queen Charlotte, urged a swift legal response, for, he wrote,

if this is not taken up in a very serious manner by Government & prosecuted as a libel upon the King, yourself, & the constitution, there will be no end to these atrocious publications, as they are not only intended to be sold but are studiously distributed amongst the common people ... to instigate everyone to adopt the principles of the French Revolution.

These passages reveal two crucial particulars about the construction of scandal in the 1790s. In the first place, the mention of the wide distribution and consumption of the *Jockey Club* pamphlets seems to undermine previous critical arguments, put forward most notably by Nicholas Rogers, that their 'witty, elaborate' writing style and their relatively high price 'precluded a genuinely *popular* audience'.⁹⁹ In addition to the prince's alarm that all three parts of the work were being circulated in 'all the pot houses,' there are other factors which suggest a much wider audience: besides the sheer number of sequels and editions, a contingent of society figures, government officials and loyalists took great effort to quash the scandalous pamphlets. Not only was Pigott himself personally attacked in *An Answer* from 'One Member of the Jockey Club,' but he was also prosecuted for libel. More crucially, the loyalist headquarters at the Crown and Anchor tavern received letter after panicked letter describing the groups of 'journeymen, apprentices and footmen' clustered around

⁹⁷ Jon Mee, 'The Political Showman at Home: Reflections on Popular Radicalism and Print Culture in the 1790s,' *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1848: Essays in Honour of Malcom I. Thomis*, ed. Michael T. Davis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 42.

⁹⁸ Pigott, *Jockey Club*, Part II, p.

⁹⁹ Nicholas Rogers, 'Pigott's Private Eye: Radicalism and Sexual Scandal in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 4 (1993), p. 261-2 and 248-9, italics mine.

booksellers' tables in Chancery-Lane and Covent Garden, freely reading (or listening to) just this type of material.¹⁰⁰ On 11 Dec 1792, one anxious Society subscriber wrote in that 'as the publication entitled the Jockey Club contains in my opinion a most scandalous Libel upon his Majesty I think it my *duty* to inform you that it continues to be publicly exhibited for Sale'.¹⁰¹ In similar fashion, another informant insisted that 'to counteract the mischief' of Pigott's pamphlets, a fast and forceful response which employed the same type of 'medium' was required.¹⁰²

The other important feature about the operation of scandal that becomes apparent here is just how much this genre of political writing quite literally 'exposed' public figures, and in doing so, posed a real threat to their political authority. Refusing to condescend to status and rank, scandal supersedes the bounds of respectful deference. By tearing 'to pieces every private character ... my own among the rest,' the prince declared, the pamphlets 'palpably & impudently' promoted 'Republican principles' and attacked 'King & country ... in open defiance of all law and decency' and in 'violation of every principle & even tie either human or divine'.¹⁰³ The prince recognized the effrontery of scandalous texts, and he acknowledged the *political* power of doing so. Such literature could, he imagines, actually provoke unseen masses of citizens to rise up against him and his family.

¹⁰⁰ In *An Answer to Three Scurrilous Pamphlets, entitled The Jockey Club*, second ed. (London: J. S. Jordan, 1792), Pigott's sexual affairs, personal habits and notoriously bad hygiene contrasted with the admirable personal qualities of George III (see p.15); [Author unknown] (10 December 1792), *Reeves Papers*, BL, MSS 16,921, vol. 3, f. 133.

¹⁰¹ [Unknown author] (11 December 1792), *Reeves Papers*, BL, MSS 16922, vol. 4, p. 97.

¹⁰² [Author unknown] (2 November 1792), *Reeves Papers*, BL, MSS 16, 919 vol. 1, f. 1. See Rogers p. 261-2 and p. 248-9.

¹⁰³ On the same day, the Prince urged his brother the Duke of York to forward this pamphlet to the government, and several days later, on 5 October, 1792, Henry Dundas thanked the Prince for forwarding the offensive work to him, informing him that he had left it with Lord Grenville who would forward it to the Attorney-General (see Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. II, p. 298). The Queen, too, sent a reply from Weymouth, urging the Prince to send the *Jockey Club* to Pitt, who could then initiate the proper legal steps to proscribe it.

The People

Queen Charlotte responded to her son's alarm with some characteristically shrewd advice. She urged him to *exploit* Charles Pigott's scurrilous pamphlets for his own advantage by making a public stand against them, *not* in defence of himself, but of his father the king. Such a move, she advised, would greatly benefit the royal family, for if it were publicized in the papers, he would do himself 'credit in the oppinion [sic] of the world by interfering where so invidious an attack' was made on his beloved father.¹⁰⁴ The queen's proposition was not without its rationale, for the prince, whose relationship with the king had been rather strained since the Regency Crisis, was in desperate need of some good press. Both he and the queen were keenly aware of how fervently the British public desired a reconciliation between father and son.

In fact, those numerous *injunctions* against the prince's prodigality that we have seen thus far were most often supplemented with a set of *directives* that energetically urged him to seek his father's pardon. The press made it clear that to reform himself, the prince would have to do much more than simply curb his lifestyle, he would also have to fulfil three interrelated requirements: first, he would need to be reconciled with the king; second, he would need to marry an appropriate wife; finally, he would need to produce a (legitimate) heir. The fulfilment of the first of these directives rested upon the realization of the latter two: marriage was, without question, the cornerstone of the prince's reformation process. If the future of the throne balanced on maintaining public affection, and that affection was contingent on a restoration of family harmony, then that harmony was dependent on the prince's marriage.

¹⁰⁴ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 292.

Indeed, there was very little chance that the prince would be reconciled to his father if he did not find a suitable wife. From an early age, the subject of the prince's sexual affairs had been a major source of conflict in the troubled relationship with his father. In 1781, when the prince was nineteen, the king had had to arrange for the purchase of the prince's melodramatic love letters to the actress Mary Robinson. In 1786, the prince had then taken the even more impetuous step of secretly marrying the twice-widowed Catholic Mrs. Fitzherbert—a marriage sanctioned neither by law, nor by the royal family, nor by the British public. The king had advised the prince that, as heir to the throne, his marriage would be a distinctly public act, and he had enshrined this principle in legislation. The Royal Marriages Act of 1772 was intended to keep the royal family from 'irretrievable ruin[]', from dishonouring themselves in the public eye, and from adding to the existing lack of respect shown the crown.¹⁰⁵ The act compelled the prince and his siblings to marry Protestant sovereigns who met with the king's approval, thereby avoiding the types of mistakes made by his 'incorrigible' brother, the Duke of Cumberland.¹⁰⁶ Not only had the duke married a woman with a more than questionable moral and political past, but there was also some uncertainty regarding her relationship with the Prince of Wales.¹⁰⁷

To many individuals, the prince's marriage to Maria Fitzherbert in 1785 was a betrayal on many levels: it was an act of selfish insolence against the king and an insult to the nation's moral and legal laws. This marriage was an act of filial recalcitrance that had both physically and emotionally wounded a loving father. One court observer recounted how George III 'was so hurt' at 'the bare suspicion ... that his son should have acted contrary to the laws of succession,' and it 'so preyed upon his mind,' that as 'with other family

¹⁰⁵ Christopher Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History* (London: Viking, 1998), p. 170.

¹⁰⁶ Hibbert, *George III*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁷ Hibbert, *George III*, p. 171.

disturbances, it produced a violent paroxysm of a disorder which was near proving fatal to his life'.¹⁰⁸ David Williams argued that the prince's marriage had shocked and panicked the public to such a degree that it had made them willing to forget the previous political errors of George III, and 'with a fervor little short of idolatry' they 'hailed the King's recovery a national salvation'.¹⁰⁹ The prince's marriage and his father's reaction to it demonstrated the fundamental differences between them. It also demonstrated the differences between them, and more generally between two conflicting ways of life.

The public saw the prince and his marriage to Mrs Fitzherbert as the product of a politically unreformed parliament *and* a morally unreformed aristocracy. The woman that the prince would have the people accept as his consort, Charles Pigott claimed, had been so 'ill adapted' to 'celibacy' that she had freely exploited her 'many opportunities of indulgence' with a series of—French—lovers before taking up with the prince. David Williams argued that Mrs Fitzherbert had been part of a Whig cabal to overturn the government and to install the prince in his father's throne. Since 'the great object' of the affair was 'political power,' he argued, then the prince's union must come before the public.¹¹⁰ In her pact with such sordid Whig revellers as the Devonshires and the Sheridans, Mrs Fitzherbert had ensnared the prince in hopes of introducing herself among the 'purlieus of royalty' and establishing the Whigs in the 'projected Court of the Regent'.¹¹¹ This cabal greatly alarmed the entire nation in its barefaced demonstration of immorality and ruthless ambition.

Polite society was shocked by such a shameless contravention of the social order. In effect, one *Anti-Jacobin* reviewer declared, the prince's marriage had obliged 'women of the

¹⁰⁸ *The Deathbed Confessions of the Late Countess of Guernsey, to a Lady Anne H******, sixteenth ed. (J. Carmichael et al.: Glasgow, 1821), p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ David Williams, *Lessons to a Young Prince, by an Old Statesman, on the Present Disposition in Europe to a General Revolution*, sixth ed. (London: H. D. Simmons, 1791) in Claeys, vol. 3, pp. 23-110 (p. 33).

¹¹⁰ David Williams, in Claeys, vol. 3, p. 33.

¹¹¹ David Williams, in Claeys, vol. 3, p. 34.

highest rank, and some of character too, [to] degrade themselves, and risque the ruin of their daughters' by asking them to accept a woman who 'court[ed] that vice which every religious and moral duty teaches them to abhor and to shun'.¹¹² That some members of polite society would, however, willingly accept Mrs Fitzherbert, or even worse, seek her out, was indicative of the deep-rooted hypocrisy of an unrepentant aristocracy. These sycophants would expose the entire nation to the worst example of immorality. In fact, 'nothing betrays more strongly the wretched depravity of the times, and the profligate servility of the great,' the anonymous reviewer argued, than how quickly 'the barriers that separate virtue and vice' are erased, and 'all manly attachment in the one sex, and all honourable principle in the other' are sacrificed.¹¹³ Those unprincipled members of society who did not 'banish' Mrs Fitzherbert, would be responsible for the moral destruction of a nation 'which has hitherto maintained its proudest pre-eminence, in the purity of her women, and the integrity of her men'. England would become like her Gallic enemy, a nation that had welcomed 'a monstrous intercourse between chastity and adultery, virtue and pollution'; for if it 'persist[ed] in *adopting the vices of France*,' then it would share '*the destiny of France*'.¹¹⁴

Mrs. Fitzherbert was an embodiment of France's worst vices. She had resided there, she was Catholic, and she had formed various liaisons with rakish Parisian *bons vivants*. Newspapers and pamphleteers hinted that the heir to the British throne had married her on the continent in a cabalistic ceremony presided over by a Romish priest. Her character had less in common with the feminine sentiments of her British compatriots than with French courtesans. She felt nothing for the weak prince she dominated: "It is a notorious fact," one pamphleteer advised the prince, that she 'does not, and never did, feel the slightest

¹¹² 'A Review of an Admonitory Letter,' p. 440.

¹¹³ 'A Review of an Admonitory Letter,' p. 439.

¹¹⁴ 'Review of An Admonitory Letter,' *Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 440, italics mine.

predilection for your person. Interest, and interest alone, attaches her frigid heart”.¹¹⁵ Still the unmanly prince seemed perfectly willing to purchase her affections (with public funds) as if she were a common Parisian prostitute.

The prince’s morganatic marriage not only emphasized the fundamental *personal* differences between father and son, but also highlighted their *political* disparity. It handed the political enemies of both the prince and king a golden opportunity to embarrass the monarchy and to undermine royal authority. In 1787, the radical John Horne Tooke produced *A Letter to a Friend on the Reported Marriage of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales*, in which he defended the marriage and used it as a means to launch an attack against the king and his Tory politics. There was, Tooke argued, something deeply unnatural about a father who would use legislation (the Royal Marriage Act) to restrain his son’s natural desires. This was, he insisted, analogous to prohibiting a child from eating or from using his eyesight.¹¹⁶ Surely, Tooke argued, true Britons would never be

so base as to advise or to assist a parent to degrade his children to something worse than castration, to the unmanly state and abject condition of a Friar ... to compel them by an unnatural law, *without any fixed period*, to a life of forced celibacy, until ... like the pope, [he] shall be pleased to grant a dispensation to restore them to the dignity of manhood, and reinvest them with the natural rights of an animal.¹¹⁷

Tooke indulges in some ‘Frenchification’ of his own in his pamphlet, but the target is the king. Appealing to anti-Catholic sentiment, Tooke portrays him as a tyrannous pope who had circumscribed his subjects’ liberties by subjecting them to the rule of some perverse political sacrament. The Royal Marriage Act was an ‘unnatural act of parliament,’ a ‘political superstition,’ a manifestation of the king’s interventionist policies.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ ‘A Friend Who is no Parasite,’ qtd. in ‘A Review of An Admonitory Letter,’ p. 436

¹¹⁶ Tooke, *A Letter to a Friend on the Reported Marriage of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales* (London: J. Johnson, 1787), p. 19.

¹¹⁷ Tooke, pp. 21-22.

¹¹⁸ Tooke, pp. 22, 6.

Tooke also describes the prince as *unmanly*, but rather than the scheming Mrs Fitzherbert who had unmanned him, it was his own authoritarian father. At first glance, it seems rather surprising, given the prince's notorious and well-publicized sexual affairs, to compare him to a celibate. Yet, as the prince's supporters often did, Tooke suggests that it was the abstemiousness the king forced on his children, that had driven his sons to seek passionate encounters and reckless amusement. The father had made it impossible for his sons to obtain domestic bliss and to act in a responsible, manly way. This argument would be forwarded again, when in 1795-6, the prince's state-sanctioned marriage to Caroline of Brunswick failed miserably. That marriage, the satirist John Williams (known as 'Anthony Pasquin') argued, demonstrated how 'barbarous' was the practice 'of compelling the youth of both sexes to intermarry, independent of the genial emotions of sympathy'.¹¹⁹

Two years later, at the height of the Regency Crisis, Tooke's *Letter to a Friend on the Reported Marriage* sparked public debate again on the status of Mrs. Fitzherbert and the prince's right to rule. In January 1789, the Rev. Philip Withers responded to Tooke's pamphlet, but addressed his *Strictures on the Declaration of Horne Tooke, Esq.* to Mrs. Fitzherbert directly. If she was not a whore, but a virtuous woman, Withers contended, she would publicly admit to the marriage and bring the issue before Parliament; in which case, the prince should have to give up the crown for committing what was tantamount to a treasonable act. Withers produced more letters recounting Mrs. Fitzherbert's previous sexual dalliances, increasingly vituperative in tone. In *Alfred to the Bishop of London*, Withers demanded to know whether she were 'either a WIFE' or 'a CATHOLIC WHORE'.¹²⁰

Withers' efforts escalated when he released another pamphlet, this one supposedly authored

¹¹⁹ John Williams, [Anthony Pasquin], *The New Brighton Guide; or a Companion for Young Ladies and Gentlemen to all the Watering-Places in Great Britain*, a new edition (London: H. D. Symonds, 1796), p. 54.

¹²⁰ Philip Withers [Alfred], *Alfred to the Bishop of London on Mrs. Fitzherbert's Case* (London: n. pub., 1789) p. 7, 47.

by a Windsor 'Page of the Presence' who had daily access to the royal family.¹²¹ In *History of the Royal Malady, with a Variety of Entertaining Anecdotes, to Which Are Added Strictures in the Declaration of Horne Tooke, Esq. respecting "Her Royal Highness Princess of Wales," Commonly Called (the Hon.) Mrs. Fitzherbert*, Withers used the prince's secret marriage as an opportunity to print abusive alleged eyewitness anecdotes about the royal household, and, in particular, the ailing king.

Withers' motive in publicizing very unflattering accounts of the royal family was, he insisted, a purely patriotic one, for though he had nothing against the king, he thought this was a way to support Pitt and his government against the Whigs. The problem was that Withers' attacks radiated outwards from the prince, to include other members of the royal family. In such a fashion, the prince's outright rejection of his father's ethos of domestic virtue had resulted (not for the last time) in terrible repercussions for the entire royal family. This incident illustrates how the prince's muddled affairs, which *invited* such attacks, became exceedingly entangled with the interests of party. At the same time, his private life rendered him practically indefensible for the party that supported him: he was becoming, for the Whigs, and for his own family, a public relations liability.

The Withers attack undermined the image of George III as the 'patriot' king who, though firmly affiliated with the Tories, was perceived to be somehow aloof from unscrupulous party wrangling.¹²² The prince greatly jeopardized this image by initiating a familial rift, which in turn deepened the existing political rift that divided parliament *and* nation along party lines. This factional atmosphere invited further personal attacks on the

¹²¹ Philip Withers, *History of the Royal Malady, with Variety of Entertaining Anecdotes, to Which Are Added Strictures in the Declaration of Horne Tooke, Esq. respecting "Her Royal Highness Princess of Wales," Commonly Called (the Hon.) Mrs. Fitzherbert; With Interesting Remarks on a Regency: By a Page of the Presence* (London: n. pub., 1789).

¹²² See Ditchfield, *George III*, pp. 138-140.

royal family. On 21 February 1789, John Walters, Tory propagandist and founder of the *Times*, published severely disparaging observations on the prince and his brothers:

The Royal Dukes, and the leaders of the Opposition in general, *affect* to join with the friends of our amiable Sovereign in rejoicing on account of his Majesty's recovery. But the *insincerity* of their joy is visible. Their late *unfeeling* conduct will forever tell against them, and contradict the *artful* professions they may think it prudent to make. It argues infinite wisdom in certain persons to have prevented the Duke of York from rushing into the King's apartment on Wednesday. The rashness, the Germanic *severity*, and the *insensibility* of this young man might have proved ruinous to the hopes and joys of a whole nation'.¹²³

The king's scheming sons, so cold-hearted as to be insensate, are almost accused here of attempting the worst of crimes, patricide and regicide. Then, five days later, *The Times* informed the public that the king, now cognizant of the Prince of Wales' filial and political treachery, had justly condemned his perfidious son.¹²⁴ This account reveals the degree to which Walters' attack undermined monarchical authority. What would the people think, William Cobbett wrote, about a family against which 'the Treasury itself could unite, and cause to be published, infamous libels against two of the King's sons!'¹²⁵ It would make observers wonder, to use Cobbett's words, 'how it comes to pass, that we *obey* a family, whom we so abuse'.¹²⁶

The prince facilitated the royal family's exploitation: they were being made the tools of party. The prince's feud with his father was profoundly implicated in battles of political one-upmanship—a circumstance with which the royal family's political advisers were acutely familiar. In July 1789, the Whig MP and court flatterer John Macpherson advised the prince that, more than ever, the people expected the royal family to project a sign of *unity*, to 'preserve the quiet of the State,' and bring an end to 'those violent contentions of party

¹²³ *Times*, 21 February, 1779, italics mine.

¹²⁴ Werkmeister, *London Daily Press*, p. 325.

¹²⁵ William Cobbett, 'The Royal Family of England,' *Political Register* XXX., c. 161, in *The Opinions of William Cobbett*, ed. G. D. H. Cole and Margaret Cole (London: Cobbett Publishing, 1944) p. 99.

¹²⁶ Cobbett, 'The Royal Family,' p. 93.

which, at every shock, bring the Constitution into danger'.¹²⁷ The British people,

Macpherson suggested, shared with the king and queen a vision of

the repose of the King sweetened by his confidence in the Prince of Wales! The Princesses forming family-compacts for the British Empire throughout Europe!— and the Princes ... forming an arch round the Throne, and protecting it on one side from the modern republican rage, and on the other resisting any dangerous unions of the aristocratic Party.¹²⁸

This utopic vision of monarchical harmony might rather overstate the case, but it presses the point that if the prince continued as a divisive force at court and in parliament, he could never gain the confidence of the nation. '*Prince's Friend*' was 'a term not yet created,' Macpherson warned, and unless the prince made efforts to reunite the royal family, 'the non-monarchical appellations of PITTITE and FOXITE' would resound in the streets.¹²⁹ The nation was in danger of becoming as divided as parliament, and the blame for such a schism would fall squarely on the son.

On 30 January 1793, the ministerial *Oracle*, spurred on by reports of the prince's growing estrangement from the Foxite Whigs and his recent affiliation with the Tory-aligned Portland Whigs, announced a royal reconciliation.¹³⁰ The SACRED TIES OF FILIAL AFFECTION!' had proven a stronger impulse than the malignant influence of his Whig friends, and so the Prince of Wales 'had withdrawn himself from the Political Discord' to reunite with his father.¹³¹ Now, the reformed prince could be welcomed into the 'bosom of a LOYAL and FREE PEOPLE,' where he was due to receive the loyalty and 'the joyful gratulations of every HONEST ENGLISHMAN'.¹³² Though this would seem to be a rather naïvely optimistic announcement on *The Oracle's* part, it is a distinctly tactical move. By

¹²⁷ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 25.

¹²⁸ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence* vol. 2, p. 26.

¹²⁹ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 25.

¹³⁰ *Oracle*, 24 January 1793.

¹³¹ *Oracle*, 24 January 1793.

¹³² *Oracle*, 24 January 1793.

presaging such a happily momentous reconciliation between the prince, the king and the public, the paper encouraged that realization of that event. The *Oracle's* announcement, which appeared six days after the disquieting news of Louis XVI's guillotining had reached England on 24 January 1793, should be read as a desperate, yet insistent appeal for the restoration of the royal family compact, as much as it is a plea for national cohesion, for unity, for resolution.

For the next two years, the prince would be barraged by warnings from alarmed family members and advisors: the queen warned him that 'every opposition to the Crown, headed by a branch of the Royal Family [sic] *lessens the power of the Crown!*'¹³³ The Earl of Moira, veteran of the American war and one of the prince's closest advisors, warned that such a familial breach would be made 'visible to all the world' by partisans and revolutionaries who would 'irritate & influence' the public with a 'thousand invidious remarks & misconstructions'.¹³⁴ The Secretary of War Henry Dundas agreed: the onus fell to the prince 'to cultivate the King & to be well with him' for, without question, George III held the upper hand in the public opinion stakes.¹³⁵ The son could not win against a king whose 'popularity' had rendered him 'a tower of strength' to the politicians who 'had the cause of monarchy to maintain'.¹³⁶ George III's fatherliness, his family values, and his unimpeachable personal conduct had earned him the love of his people; if the prince wanted to gain a share of that public affection, he must model himself on that same domestic image.

¹³³ *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. .

¹³⁴ *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 41.

¹³⁵ *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 42.

¹³⁶ *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 39.

THE WIFE

The Prince of Wales had received very reliable counsel in 1784, when James Harris had told him that 'till you are married, Sir, and have children, you have no solid hold on the affections of the people'.¹³⁷ This might have been a rather harsh statement, but it was an astute one. This opinion was seconded by Edmund Burke, who, not for the first time, understood something about the public mindset. Until the Prince married, Burke observed, he would continue to be 'liable to every suspicion and to daily insult'.¹³⁸ He would 'not be considered as one of the corps of Princes, nor aggregated to that body which people here, even more than in other countries, are made to look at with respect,' for in the eyes of the British public, Burke argued, 'no Prince appears settled, unless he puts himself into the situation of the father of a family'.¹³⁹

As a bachelor (or at least an illegally married bachelor), the Prince of Wales was regarded as more dangerous to society than even the most pernicious radical. He was, the royal biographer Robert Huish claimed, a figure more licentious and predatory than a French Jacobin at the height of the Terror, for it was unimaginable to 'conceive for one moment that the sensual powers of one man could survive amidst such a continued series of fresh excitements'.¹⁴⁰ His unquenchable appetites ate into the very fabric of society. From his own circles and down through the various levels of society, he had preyed on families, leaving their lives in ruin. Women were, Huish exclaimed with disgust, actually '*run down*—the peace of many families destroyed—the confidence between man and wife weakened, if not wholly destroyed—and all in the name of the Prince of Wales'.¹⁴¹ He had allegedly gone

¹³⁷ Steve Parissien, *George IV: The Grand Entertainment*, p. 73.

¹³⁸ Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 406.

¹³⁹ Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 406.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Huish, *Memoirs of George IV: Descriptions of his Private and Public Life*, 2 vols. (London: Kelly, 1831), p. 525.

¹⁴¹ Huish, *George IV*, p. 525.

so far as to bribe men to give up their wives to him in exchange for royal favours; in just one case, he had devastated a respectable merchant family by promising courtly favours to a bedazzled husband. As a result, 'the ruin of Mrs. B-----n was determined upon; and an easy access to the board of the infatuated, inflated husband was obtained'; in the end, the wife had 'died broken-hearted for the loss of her honour, and the husband languished in prison until his death'.¹⁴²

This was, Huish claimed, only one incident in what had become, since his youth, a lifelong routine of seducing women whose husbands he had fashioned into his own personal procurers. The appetites of the prince, like those of the levelling Jacobins, extended beyond the boundaries of rank and status; in fact, when no 'suitable objects' could be found amongst the women of his own circles, 'every class was ransacked' to find recruitments for 'the brothels' of the prince and his circle of voluptuaries.¹⁴³ Under his influence, even the most resilient women had been forced to:

sacrifice their virtue, and surrender all the consolations arising from the good opinion of a world not always just in its decisions, but, in its moral rules and regulations, exercising a wholesome influence over the sensual and the profligate, which tends materially to check altogether the subversion of society.¹⁴⁴

Huish's comments reveal the degree to which the prince's marital status was understood to influence directly every facet of society, even its most entrenched values, manners, morals, and the condition of its families.

Only a marriage could provide the prince with an opportunity to rehabilitate himself fully in the public eye. By 1794, he realized that such an event would not only entice the people to forgive his past sins, but would also entice parliament to increase his income.

Consequently, at the end of March 1795, his betrothed, Princess Caroline of Brunswick, was

¹⁴² Huish, *George IV*, p. 524.

¹⁴³ Huish, *George IV*, p. 527.

¹⁴⁴ Huish, *George IV*, p. 526.

on her way to England. A delighted George III urged his son to use the marriage as an opportunity to leave behind the personal habits that had previously compromised his standing with the people. Acutely aware of how the expectant British public would scrutinize every phase of an event in which they were so interested, the king offered his son advice, including a caution against hiring too many servants for the new household. To do so would appear 'a terrible scene of expence,' he advised, and as the aim was 'to regain the opinion of the public you must set out with a most rigid plan of œconomy'.¹⁴⁵ On this issue, the prince firmly agreed with his father (a very rare occurrence); indeed, his desire to placate the public overrode most other of his concerns at this time. Ignoring all cautions about the danger of travel through war-torn Europe, the agitated prince demanded that Caroline arrive speedily in England: 'as the publick expectation is now awaken'd & has been so for some months,' he declared, any delay would invariably produce a 'bad effect'.¹⁴⁶

Yet, in spite of all the prince's efforts to establish good public relations, the ill-suited couple were not pleased, to say the least, with each other's habits and appearances (as Richard Godfrey has so aptly summarized it, the case was: 'He was fat. She stank').¹⁴⁷ Their instant mutual dislike was not helped by the fact that the prince had been unwilling to make one very crucial concession: he believed that he was entitled to retain his current mistress, Lady Jersey, and that it was his privilege to have her established at Carlton House as one of his new wife's Ladies-in Waiting. As Lord Auckland wryly observed, it appeared that the prince had 'not taken warning by the histories of the French Court,' for 'the world' was aware that the prince had installed his mistress in his rooms at Brighton and 'talk[ed] very

¹⁴⁵ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 460.

¹⁴⁶ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 495.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Godfrey, *James Gillray, The Art of Caricature* (London, 2001), p. 179.

freely' of such audacity.¹⁴⁸ Even before Caroline's arrival in 1795, the anonymous caricaturist of *Thoughts on Matrimony*, depicted the prince as preferring his mistress to his as yet unseen bride. In a gallery of his past conquests, which include a pretty milliner, an unknown woman with child, his morganatic wife Mrs Fitzherbert, and the actresses Mrs Robinson and Mrs Crouch, he gazes longingly at a painting of Lady Jersey whilst a miniature of Caroline dangles, disregarded, at his side. In the right hand corner of this picture, the fire's flames lick at a poker, signifying that in all likelihood, the prince's uncontrollable libido has already jeopardized the upcoming nuptials—a fact that will cause him much heated discomfort.

When it was suggested to the prince that Lady Jersey should be dismissed from Caroline's service, he insisted that such a move would only 'fasten upon her & upon me that injurious imputation' of adultery and 'confirm every slander which has been so industriously propagated relative to ... the nature of her intimacy with me'.¹⁴⁹ His response indicates the degree to which he misread public sentiment on this issue. Observers could barely contain their venom at such a blatant contempt for morality and such a display of personal shamelessness. The pseudonymous pamphleteer 'A Hanoverian' remarked sardonically that the fact that the grasping, cuckolded Lord Jersey had received, in exchange for his wife, an 'office near his Royal Highness's person' provided 'proof that the Prince is capable of feeling both friendship and generosity'.¹⁵⁰ Appointing Lady Jersey in his own household was a cunning plan, he spat, for 'the lady's age and faded charms must convince the most incredulous, that there can be no cause for suspicion. For what mind was ever so perverted as to prefer a respectable grandmother, to an elegant and virtuous Princess'.¹⁵¹ Throughout 1796, the newspapers cast Lady Jersey, a beautiful woman by all accounts, into the picture of

¹⁴⁸ Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 482.

¹⁴⁹ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 188.

¹⁵⁰ 'A Hanoverian,' p. 12.

¹⁵¹ 'A Hanoverian,' p. 12.

hideousness, consistently exaggerating the twelve year age difference between her and the prince. The *Morning Post*, for instance, termed her 'the elderly Lady' and the *True Briton* referred to her as 'a certain old woman'.¹⁵² Whilst some graphic artists did portray her as a younger sexualized character, others like the anonymous caricaturist of *Fashionable Jockeyship* (Pl. 11) portrayed her as a shrivelled, haggardly, night-capped woman whose husband, equally as old and frail, offered her to the prince. The Jerseys' physical appearance is greatly at odds here with their youthful, immature behaviour: she acts the coy virgin in her demure nightclothes and he 'piggybacks' the prince, for whom he eagerly plays the cuckold in a sort of debased sexual game. These representations underscored how the prince's supposedly unfathomable tastes had destroyed his own marriage and had sabotaged the hopes of a nation. Around his unnatural desires, a web of reckless corruption extended, affecting the highest social and political levels.

In the summer of 1796, the prince's affair took an even more scandalous turn when, in a bid to drive an even wider wedge between the royal couple, Lady Jersey intercepted Caroline's private letters to her family in Germany, and then communicated the contents to Queen Charlotte. The queen was unimpressed that the lonely Caroline had sought respite from her homesickness by describing, not always in flattering terms, the quirks and mannerisms of the British royal family. When the story of the intercepted correspondence leaked out however, the press expressed outrage that Lady Jersey had had the effrontery to open the princess's private letters (no matter what they contained). On 24 May 1796, the *Times* accused her of being 'guilty of a treacherous breach of trust' and of 'infringing the

¹⁵² *MP*, 30 May 1796; *TB*, 16 June 1796. In subsequent years, Lady Jersey would continue to be periodically referred to in such a way and particularly during the Queen Caroline agitations of 1820-1. One poet, 'A Wild Irish Woman,' looking back to 1795-6 from 1820, described her as 'a fiendish 'Lady of fifty, just passing her prime' who captured the prince's fancy with 'the charms of a Grandmother'. *The Magic Lantern; or Green Bag Plot Laid Open; A Poem* (London, 1820) pp. 5, 6.



Pl. 11. Artist unknown, *Fashionable-Jockeyship* (London: n. p., 1796). By permission of the Library of Congress.

laws.’¹⁵³ The *Sun* rendered a similar verdict three days later: there are, it claimed, ‘few crimes, which in the eye of morality, are more atrocious; few, which, in the eye of the law are more seriously deserving of punishment,’ for this was a ‘violation of virtue, of decency, and of honour, so gross, so scandalous, so offensive’.¹⁵⁴ In such a way, the press turned the prince’s private infidelity into a public crime and appointed itself as his judge and jury. Lady Jersey’s postal heist called into question the prince’s ability to occupy the throne. The *Herald* reported that, based on the ‘conjugal charges’ against the prince and his mistress, many individuals had demanded the repeal of his ‘hereditary birth-right’; in like vein, the *St. James’s Chronicle* argued that if ‘the rumours, now in circulation, are founded in truth, we know *no punishment too severe*, even to the LOSS OF HIS MOST SPLENDID PATRIMONY’.¹⁵⁵

The prince’s wider crime, the newspapers insisted, was that he had transgressed British ideals of chivalry, honour, honesty, fair play and familial harmony. His ‘behaviour,’ the *St. James’s Chronicle* declared rather dramatically, was effectively the ‘worst of SUICIDES,’ for not content to destroy ‘life,’ the prince had destroyed ‘all that is worth living for—fame, peace, and honour, at a blow’.¹⁵⁶ In the dealings with his new wife, the heir to the throne had failed to display British manliness and honour, but the press certainly would not. Except for a very few exceptions, the newspapers were remarkably united in their chivalrous pledge to defend the princess (and perhaps more importantly, British values) from the

¹⁵³ Helpfully, these newspaper reports were also gathered up and reprinted in at least two pamphlets. The professed aim of the pamphlets’ editors was to demonstrate how foul were the assertions made by the papers and how dreadful was their language. However, in light of their obvious re-dissemination of such reports, such claims seem rather tongue-in-cheek. See *Observations on the Various Accounts of a Late Family Difference in High Life, now happily adjusted to the satisfaction of all parties concerned* (London, 1796). See also *Remarks and Reflections, of the Astonishing Misrepresentations and Gross Contradictions which have been Circulated in all the Daily Papers relative to a Late Domestic Fracas, in a Family of the First Rank; and which has been fortunately succeeded by a Perfect Reconciliation: together with Most Curious Particulars, which have been inserted in various papers since the reconciliation* (London, 1796). The *Times* passage I quote here, for example, can be found in this latter pamphlet on p. 20. In this section, I will hereafter follow newspaper references with a page reference to this pamphlet designated as AR (where applicable).

¹⁵⁴ *Sun*, 27 May 1796, in AR pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁵ *Herald*, 3 June 1796; 26-28; *SJC*, May 1796, in AR pp. 28, 44.

¹⁵⁶ *SJC*, 26-28 May 1796.

machinations of a corrupt husband and his scheming mistress. The *Morning Herald* declared its position in the first days after the scandalous story broke: 'NOTHING can be more honourable to the feelings of the English nation,' the paper's journalist wrote on 31 May, 'than its defence of a woman, who has thrown herself on its protection, and on reliance of its good faith.'¹⁵⁷ It was incumbent upon all citizens to take part in such a defence, he continued, for to do so was 'not only consistent with the laws of gallantry, and the dues of hospitality,' but was 'an honour to the feelings and *candour* of the country.' Sharing these sentiments, the reform-minded periodical *How Do You Do?* alternately condemned the actions of the prince and agitated for public support for the wronged wife. Since it was not in the natures of Englishmen 'to forget injuries done to an unprotected woman,' the paper avowed, they would 'stand forth the champion of an injured Lady'.¹⁵⁸

Such a discourse confirms what it is that constitutes the British character or 'nature'—a term, incidentally, which is consistently repeated in the reportage of this affair. The unnaturally perverse characters of the prince and his circle formed a stark contrast against good-natured Britons who, undistorted by sycophancy and pretence, were more than capable of distinguishing principled from unprincipled behaviour. It was for this honest part of society that the press claimed to speak. When the facts of the case were reported, a *Telegraph* journalist explained, and John Bull was then 'left to his *natural* feelings,' he could '*do no wrong*.' That was precisely why he had '*very properly* taken side with the injured, and, otherwise, friendless' Caroline.¹⁵⁹ Thus the press presented Caroline, a German princess who preferred to write and speak in French, as more English—more virtuous—than her native-born husband. Her 'real' nature was incidental; it was more important that, against

¹⁵⁷ *Monthly Herald*, 31 May 1796, in *AR* p. 26.

¹⁵⁸ *How Do You Do?*, 13 Aug 1796, 18; 8 Oct 1796, 20.

¹⁵⁹ *Tg*, 4 June 1796 in *AR* p.38, first and second italics mine.

her husband, she was a virtuous, wronged wife and a princess of the people. It was much more important that, by taking her side, newspapers appeared to be defending British values against the immorality and corruption of the privileged orders.

The case of the purloined letter also focussed negative public attention on an otherwise beloved king and queen. Though revered for their affectionate marriage and their domestic habits, the press suggested that George and Charlotte had not taken an effective stance against their son's philandering. The *True Briton* reported that members of the public were especially appalled that 'the first female personage in the kingdom should sanction her son's IMPROPER TREATMENT of his amiable consort.'¹⁶⁰ As the nation's foremost matriarch, she was expected to set the highest example of virtuous behaviour instead of blindly indulging her depraved son. The press applied almost daily pressure, demanding that she act honourably in the affair: on 30 May 1796, the *Morning Chronicle* printed the seemingly innocuous statement that 'Lady Jersey is honoured with the confidential patronage of the Queen.'¹⁶¹ But the tone was much different a week later when the *Morning Post* reported that since the Earl and Countess of Jersey had not resigned their places in the prince's household, a mob had expressed their dissatisfaction by pelting the queen's carriage as it passed through the streets.¹⁶² Then, two weeks later, on 15 June, the *Morning Herald* reported that Lady Jersey had 'received a formal intimation from her Majesty, that her future attendance at Court, or at Carlton house, will be dispensed with.'¹⁶³ The people should accept this resolution, it continued, 'as a sufficient refutation of the reports lately circulated respecting her Majesty's conduct on the occasion of the unhappy differences which at present subsist

¹⁶⁰ TB, 10 June 1796, in AR, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ MC, 30 May 1796, in AR p. 17.

¹⁶² MP, 7 June 1796, in AR p. 11.

¹⁶³ MH, 15 June 1796, in AR p. 34.

between an ILLUSTRIOUS COUPLE.¹⁶⁴ Yet, these reports must have been premature, for three days later, the *True Briton* exasperatedly reported that 'BETS are laid that Lady J. will be dismissed before the end of three months. We have in vain looked so long for the event, that we almost despair of seeing any thing in a certain quarter that is *decorous* or *proper*'.¹⁶⁵

This type of moral corrective, directed at the very highest levels of society, demonstrates the far-reaching aggressiveness of this type of scandal. The publicization of the Lady Jersey incident—what would have likely been, in a previous era, an otherwise relatively insignificant private affair—allowed society to articulate its expectations with regard to the public and private roles of the royal family and to hold them accountable for their failure to fulfil those roles. Of course, the king and queen were somewhat insulated by their position, but the supposed sanctity of the throne provided far less of a defence than their domestic virtues did. In fact, the same newspapers that had reproached the queen were also willing to remunerate her for her unwavering familial devotion. On 27 May 1796, for example, the *Herald* allowed that the queen and king may have been unfairly implicated in their son's affair: the Lady Jersey incident, it stated, had caused 'much uneasiness to a certain amiable couple, whose conduct has ever been a pattern of domestic virtue and worth'.¹⁶⁶ To their expressions of empathy for the beleaguered royal parents, *Bell's Weekly* added a bit of moral guidance for the Prince and Princess of Wales: their goal should be to emulate the king and queen, who were 'so much admired' for their 'conjugal felicity and harmony'.¹⁶⁷ The anonymous caricaturist of *Future Prospects or Symptoms of Love in High Life* (1796) (Pl. 12) contrasted intriguingly the two generations of royal couples by crowning a scene of domestic turmoil (owing to the prince's refusal of his marital and fatherly duties) with an intertextual

¹⁶⁴ *MH*, 15 June 1796, in *AR* p. 34.

¹⁶⁵ *TB*, 18 June 1796, in *AR* p. 36-7.

¹⁶⁶ *MH* 27 June 1796, in *AR* p. 24.

¹⁶⁷ *BW*, 29 May 1796, in *AR* p. 41.



Pl. 12. Artist unknown, *Future Prospects or Symptoms of Love in High Life* (London: S.W. Fores, 1795). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

reference to a previously published image of George III and Queen Charlotte. Hanging on the wall in the centre of his scene is the *Constant Couple*, a 1786 picture that portrays the unassuming, affable king and queen contentedly sharing a horse to Windsor. On the right, lurking in the background are the ever-present figures of the cuckolded Lord Jersey and his sprawling half-naked wife.

This close monitoring of the private lives of the royal family raises the crucial issue of press *access*. The fact that journalists could report their disapprobation of the prince's behaviour underscores their close physical proximity to him. As Linda Colley has shown, this sense of closeness between the crown and the people was a particularly English phenomenon of late eighteenth-century society. Unlike the isolated French monarchs who were insulated in their 'beehive court' at Versailles, the British court was not a self-contained

entity. Rather, it *was* the theatre and opera house, the haunts of the London aristocracy and the seashore at Weymouth.¹⁶⁸ This aspect of English spatial politics proved a boon for some members of the royal family (namely, George III) and disastrous for others. Well aware that London crowds could be either incredibly generous or astoundingly hostile, newspapers urged their readers to make their views known, whether in the street or at the theatre.

In the case of Lady Jersey, not only did the papers relentlessly pursue the prince and Lady Jersey, describing where and when the couple were spotted, but they continuously urged their readers to publicly greet the couple, wherever they were seen, with the most unsympathetic display of public sentiment. Using the strongest terms to pressure readers to denounce her socially, a *Times* reporter wrote that it was ‘*hoped for* and EXPECTED, that, if an old grandmother is this evening at the Opera, every woman of virtue and decency will show their indignation.’¹⁶⁹ This language was reiterated, at times word-for-word in almost all the papers, from the *Sun* to the *True Briton*. The scandalous ‘violation of virtue’ that Lady Jersey had displayed should so ‘excite the most marked and general indignation’ that polite society would ‘effect the exclusion of the culprit from all societies in which vice is detected and virtue cherished’.¹⁷⁰

Caroline, of course, merited the opposite response. On 30 May, the *Times* was pleased to report that ‘a scene at once extremely affecting and highly gratifying’ occurred at the opera when the princess ‘was received with the most generous and rapturous plaudits.’¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Colley, p. 199. For more on the issue of proximity, see also Steve Poole, *The Politics of Regicide in England, 1760-1850* (Manchester, 2000).

¹⁶⁹ *Times*, 4 June 1796.

¹⁷⁰ *SU* 27 May 1796; *TB* 30 May, 1796, in *AR* p. 6-7. Indeed, the newspapers were almost relentless in tracking their targets. During the Lady Jersey letter affair, they reported almost every move of the parties involved; on one occasion for instance, *The Times* reported that the prince had sipped out of his house incognito, so that his own servant had no idea where he was going. On the same evening ‘Lady Jersey left her house in Pall Mall, INCOG. She has retired, though NOT UNOBSERVED to the house of her daughter, Lady Ann Lambton, in Berkley-Square’ (6 June 1796).

¹⁷¹ *Times*, 30 May 1796, in *AR* p. 25.

The paper went on to describe how ‘the whole house rose, and for full a quarter of an hour maintained a continual acclamation of “Bravo” “Welcome” “God Bless the Princess” and “Long live the Princess!”’¹⁷² More than mere reportage, such commentary urges readers to participate actively in a public commendation of the princess—an act that serves to define in much wider terms what was unacceptable conduct, in private and public life. Using the strongest language, the *Morning Chronicle* reminded its readers on 30 May that since ‘the present instance of matrimonial infidelity is advanced to a height that makes all delicacy on the subject unreasonable’ then *all* Britons

owe[d] it to morality—to public manners—to national gallantry ... to take notice of the *general burst* of COMMISERATION, which took place at this Theatre, on Saturday night, in consequence of the indignities which they understood the amiable Princess to have suffered.¹⁷³

The papers consistently used such a language, steeped in Burkean romantic pathos and chivalrous ardour. On the same day as the report above, the *Times* declared that it had ‘never witnessed any public emotion with more pleasure’ than when the ‘British character BROKE OUT’ in a spectacle of sensibility at the Opera house.¹⁷⁴ The gentleman performers had so warmly expressed ‘their *feelings*’ for the wronged princess that they had proven ‘that Burke had been mistaken, for that *the age of chivalry is not passed ... were it possible ANY ONE should wrong the royal stranger, ten thousand swords were ready to leap out of their scabbards in her defence.*’¹⁷⁵

Five days later on the fourth of June, the *Morning Chronicle* also reformulated Burke’s famous apostrophe to Marie Antoinette, in order to express its worry that ‘in the present STATE OF PEOPLE’S MINDS’ the description of ten thousand vengeful swords would ‘appear

¹⁷² *Times*, 30 May 1796, in *AR* p. 25.

¹⁷³ *MC*, 30 May 1796, in *AR* p. 17.

¹⁷⁴ *Times*, 30 May 1796, in *AR* p. 20.

¹⁷⁵ *Times* 30 May 1796, in *AR* p. 20.

INFLAMMATORY.¹⁷⁶ Unlike Burke's defence of royal station against the mob in the *Reflections*, however, these passages are unconcerned to defend her royal station per se. Instead, Caroline is placed at the zenith of feminine majesty and represented as a sort of 'Burkean Britannia' because she allegedly displays feminine virtue and fortitude in the face of faithless debauchery. The people, far from threatening the princess's position here, are cast as the *protectors* of it.

The degree to which the private life of the royal couple was monitored was perhaps, rather surprisingly, most apparent when one or both of them purposely stayed *out* of the public eye. When, in the middle of the purloined letter affair, Caroline was absent from the opera in the first two weeks in June 1796, the papers claimed that the prince, jealous of the favourable attention she received when in public, had cruelly prohibited her attendance. On 2 June, the *True Briton* was furious that the prince had kept the princess from her adoring public and remarked sarcastically that the '*new way to recover public favour*' was to prevent 'the voice of truth to reach your wife' by forbidding 'her excursions to the Opera.'¹⁷⁷ Two days later, the *Morning Herald* declared that 'AN UNFORTUNATE Female received ... the *most positive* COMMANDS not to make her appearance again this season at the Opera!' and so she had sacrificed 'her ONLY amusement to the harsh and rigid demands of CONJUGAL obedience.'¹⁷⁸ Other papers claimed that the deferential Caroline, of her own volition, had chosen not to appear in public so as not to incite further antipathy toward her husband. 'The Princess of Wales was not at the Opera last night,' both the *Morning Post* and *Bell's Weekly* reported, 'as it was thought HIGHLY INDECOROUS to have the appearance of

¹⁷⁶MC, 4 June 1796, in AR p.18.

¹⁷⁷TB 2 June 1796, in AR p.13.

¹⁷⁸MH June 1796, in AR p. 29.

TAKING PART in the public voice against her husband.¹⁷⁹ ‘Whatever the conduct of the Prince may be,’ a reporter for the *Morning Herald* added, his wife had felt respectfully ‘the impropriety of being instrumental in CREATING HERSELF A PARTY among the public at the expence of her husband’.¹⁸⁰

What should not be missed in this process, is the way in which public scandals such as the Lady Jersey affair created an opportunity for society to negotiate and to define moral boundaries—not just for the royal family, but crucially, for private citizens as well. As scandal targets *public* figures, it also, by implication, targets the *consumers* of scandal, enforcing moral boundaries for the people themselves. Newspaper reports urge the public to sanction the royal family demonstrably, but they also promote the idea of an arena of consensus, a public forum, within which prevailing social values could be enforced for society at large. Notice, for instance, how the *True Briton* uses a non-specific language to levy a wider moral caution:

As virtue is sure to meet with PUBLIC applause, so is VICE certain to meet with PUBLIC censure. Those, therefore, who are sensible that their conduct is such as to meet the MOST MARKED disapprobation, should expect to receive it.¹⁸¹

These passages persuade readers to monitor not just the highest levels of society but *all* of society, including, crucially, themselves. The feeling was that it was no longer sufficient, as the *St. James’s Chronicle* put it, ‘for the friends of Order, throughout the country, to be peaceable and rational—they must use active virtue’.¹⁸²

Since one of the ostensible purposes of this type of commentary (besides participating in a game of political one-upmanship), was to enforce traditional family values,

¹⁷⁹ The two papers printed identical paragraphs on 8 June 1796 (*MP*) and 12 June 1796 (*BW*), respectively; also reprinted in *AR*, pp. 15, 43.

¹⁸⁰ *MH* 13 June 1796, in *AR*, p. 32.

¹⁸¹ *TB*, 3 June 1796, in *AR*, p. 14.

¹⁸² Qtd. in Clark, *Scandal*, p. 179.

newspapers consistently pressured the prince to reconcile with Caroline. 'The disreputable quarrel' between the couple must end, as it was so 'injurious to public morals and to the decencies of polished life,' the *Morning Chronicle* asserted.¹⁸³ But any reunion must be heartfelt: the couple's public appearances at the theatre must provide evidence of genuine feeling, for the people would not stand for 'an idle exhibition without the slightest value; a political manceuvre upon which no reliance could be placed'.¹⁸⁴

In light of the strength of such warnings, monarchical advisors rather frantically counselled the prince as to the expediency of bowing to public opinion on this matter. 'It is not your private feelings alone, Lord Malmsbury advised the prince, 'that you have to consult,' for

it is impossible for you to take any material step on which the public will not claim a right to form a judgement and expect that a very considerable degree of deference should be paid to it ... the public saw in [the marriage] a pledge of your regard for them. Let the same laudable & becoming motive still guide your Royal Highness in preserving a connection, the breach of which will far more deeply affect the public mind than your not having ever thought proper to form [a marriage] could possibly have done.¹⁸⁵

Lord Malmsbury's counsel is instructive: it reveals something of the changing function of the monarchy and the relationship between sovereign and subject. The prince's role was to be, foremost, an exemplar of domesticity. The public would construe a permanent marital separation as a complete negation of monarchical responsibility, thereby supplying his political enemies with evidence that he was as incapable of conducting state affairs as he was his own life.¹⁸⁶

Regardless of such advice, however, the heir apparent did anything but 'preserve' his connection to Caroline, and much as Malmsbury had warned, his enemies—political and

¹⁸³ *MC*, 20 June 1796, in *AR*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁴ *Oracle*, 13 June 1796, in *AR*, pp. 40-1.

¹⁸⁵ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 159-60.

¹⁸⁶ Prince of Wales, *Correspondence*, p. 160.

moral—continued to exploit the conflict for the next twenty-five years. Moreover, the absence of a ‘beehive’ court, which would have shielded him from his disappointed subjects, proved politically and personally disastrous. His proximity to the people meant that Londoners were constantly reminded of his failed marriage and they let it be known to him that it was an issue they would not let lie. He was forced to face crowds who hissed and threatened and shouted ‘Where’s your wife?’ as his carriage travelled to various engagements. This question would have disastrous personal and political repercussions. When he ascended to the throne as regent in 1811 he did so under a dark cloud of unpopularity. In fact, his decline in public estimation that year had its source in a domestic-political event that had occurred eight years earlier.

In 1806, a group of ministers met secretly to determine the legitimacy of rumours surrounding Princess Caroline, by then having lived separate from the prince for ten years. It had been alleged that in that time she had been unfaithful and had possibly given birth to an illegitimate child. Although it was officially George III who oversaw what became known as ‘The Delicate Investigation,’ very few doubted that it the son who had insisted that the king’s ministers investigate the allegations put forward by Caroline’s former acquaintances, Sir John and Lady Douglas. The Douglasses, embittered over a rental dispute with the princess, had alleged that she was not the guardian of an out-of-work dockworker’s son as she claimed, but had actually given birth to him after an affair with either Sir Sidney Smith or Captain Thomas Manby. In the end, the investigation decided that the vengeful Douglasses had been unreliable witnesses and determined that there was insufficient supporting evidence. The prince was incensed. The Commissioners had shown his estranged wife “too great a degree of lenity,” he contended; indeed, they should recommend, and the King

should approve, that an Act of Parliament be brought forward “to dissolve the Marriage” immediately.¹⁸⁷

The Crown and parliament chose instead to settle the issue quietly. They took great pains to quash any public leak of the secret investigation, for Caroline had herself attempted to initiate public support by publishing a letter of protest. Initially suppressed by the government, the famous letter condemned as unjust her interrogation at the hands of an improvised committee that had assumed the powers of a court, but had adopted none of its controls. Though news of the secret investigation still managed to make the rounds in 1806, the details did not become officially public or widely known until 1812-1813, when both parties and their political supporters took the issue to the press. By then the political lines in this tug-of-war had been redrawn. When the regent had taken on the ailing king's duties, he had cut ties with his Whig associates, who he accused of not wholeheartedly supporting him against his wife or protecting him from public disfavour. The regent was now allied to the Tories (who had previously supported Caroline during the Investigation). It was therefore left to the Whigs to pick up Caroline's cause.

For their part, the Tories, by way of reward for this most important of political defections, began to defend publicly the regent's claims that the secret investigation into his wife's affairs was a patriotic act. It was vital, they claimed, to ensure the purity of the succession. The Tories were also willing to support the prince's claim that his marriage and the education of his daughter constituted a sphere over which he should have complete dominion. In opposition, the Whigs insisted that whilst the Glorious Revolution had established the right of parliament to intercede in matters of monarchical succession, that right belonged *solely* to Parliament. Thus, the regent had no grounds to use ministers to

¹⁸⁷ Fraser, *Unruh*, p. 176.

bring what were essentially private motions against his own wife. 'The principles of the constitution,' the barrister Charles Dunne contended, should not 'be unhinged to please the prejudices of a Prince'.¹⁸⁸

Advocates of monarchical reform were also enraged that the regent would use parliament as his own personal, corrupt court of law and would force ministers to consider perjured testimony. A pamphleteer claiming the name of 'Junius' published a *Last Letter* in 1812 in which he accused the regent of compelling the state to be 'answerable to the bias of private feeling' and of coercing the nation to 'rest upon a Tale of Slander ... the simple evidence of a Husband's humanity'.¹⁸⁹ Such cold-heartedness, Junius sardonically noted might lead observers to believe that the prince was a subscriber to the new philosophy of William Godwin, for the regent had 'resolved philosophically to separate' from his wife and then, like Godwin, had done everything 'to blast her character'.¹⁹⁰

This type of support for Caroline, as might be imagined, infuriated the immensely unpopular regent, and in an effort to turn the tide of popular opinion, he leaked the testimony of Sir John and Lady Douglas to the *Post* and the *Herald*. In response, there appeared in the newspapers and in pamphlet form, a *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, ostensibly written in Caroline's own hand, but thought to be authored by William Cobbett. In a brilliantly strategic move, Caroline expresses her 'reluctance' to publicize 'matters which may, at first, appear rather of a personal than a public nature'.¹⁹¹ If her marriage only concerned herself, she humbly implores, she would be content to continue to suffer in silence a complete lack of 'domestic comforts,' since, through no fault of her own,

¹⁸⁸ Clark, *Scandal*, p.182.

¹⁸⁹ [n. a.] *The Last Letter of Junius, addressed to the Prince Regent* (Sheffield: J. T. Saxton, 1812), pp. 4, 9.

¹⁹⁰ *The Last Letter of Junius*, p. 25-6.

¹⁹¹ *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 3.

the regent had sentenced her to a comfortless life.¹⁹² But more than ever, the princess contends, she was bound by 'considerations of a higher nature'; namely, the duty she owed her family and the British people.¹⁹³ That duty inspired her to challenge directly the regent's contention that his household and his daughter's education were strictly private affairs over which he alone had jurisdiction. The regent's maltreatment of his daughter, the heir to the English throne, was a distinctly public affair with real constitutional repercussions. By keeping his daughter isolated from her mother and her community, he was effectively preventing her from maturing into a fair, educated, sympathetic monarch. He was an unfeeling father who was stunting his daughter's natural affections, corrupting her principles, destroying her happiness, and improperly circumscribing her education. In such a way, he was preventing the British people from ever having 'a virtuous and constitutional monarch'.¹⁹⁴

This important letter—Caroline's first direct plea to the nation—carefully negotiated the line between her public and private roles. She claimed to be acting in both capacities, as the wife of the monarch and as 'the Mother of her who is destined, I trust, at a very distant period, to reign over the British Empire'.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, she is an advocate for her subjects, and for wronged women in particular—though that advocacy prudently remained within the bounds of respectability. Since she is bound to defend her 'two dearest objects'—her public reputation and her child—she is compelled to intrude on the public and the prince.¹⁹⁶ In articulating such a defence, Caroline used a language similar to that employed by Marie-Antoinette at her 1793 trial before the revolutionary tribunal. As we

¹⁹² *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 4.

¹⁹³ *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁵ *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 29-30.

¹⁹⁶ *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 6.

have seen in the first chapter, she had defended herself against the charge of incest by appealing to mothers who were as incapable of committing such a heinous crime as she. Though obviously in a different context, Caroline expresses a comparable sense of outrage—a righteous indignation—at the surreptitious assault on a woman’s reputation, and at the same time, she similarly uses a language of sensibility, to appeal to ‘the feelings of every woman in England’ who would themselves resent such an ‘unmanly’ attack.¹⁹⁷

Until this time, Caroline’s standing with some groups had not been especially favourable. Her case was of little interest to radicals, many of whom like William Cobbett, had considered the breakdown of the royal marriage to be the natural by-product of aristocratic sexual license. Cobbett was infuriated that society would tolerate another indulged royal, whilst humbler folk were persecuted for minor offences like the selling of produce on Sunday.¹⁹⁸ Another pamphleteer thought the royal affair demonstrated how perverted society’s priorities had become, that people would stoop to defend “‘a Dignified Prostitute”” who “‘TRIUMPHS in her turpitude, and insults virtue with impunity”” whilst poor women were forced to seek “‘the bitter and humiliating resources of prostitution””.¹⁹⁹ Yet by 1813, Cobbett had thrown his support behind Caroline and her daughter against a regent who was trying unjustly to keep them from the throne, and by 1820, he was insisting that ‘the Queen’s cause’ was ‘naturally align[ed] ... with that of the Radicals, as they were both ‘*complainants*’ against corruption and tyranny at the highest levels.²⁰⁰ That same year, he dedicated his *Grammar of the English Language* to her, as she alone ‘amongst all the Royal Personages of the present age,’ had ‘justly estimated the value of The People’.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ *Letter of the Princess of Wales to the Prince Regent*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ in Clark, *Scandal*, p. 181.

¹⁹⁹ in Clark, *Scandal*, p. 181.

²⁰⁰ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, July 29, 1820, col. 77.

²⁰¹ William Cobbett, *A Grammar of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (London; John M. Cobbett, 1823), ed. Robert Burchfield (Oxford and New York: OUP), 1984, p. xvii.

It was not that *all* radicals abruptly took up Caroline's cause after 1813, or that those who did shared precisely the same motives.²⁰² As at least one historian has observed, radicals became increasingly aware in these years of 'the utility in royal scandal,' particularly after the Mary Anne Clarke Affair of 1808-9.²⁰³ When it had been revealed that Clarke, the Duke of York's mistress, was taking bribes to obtain military promotions from the duke, the corrupt practice of buying and selling places and sinecures in the military and government was publicly exposed. Even if radicals recognized how powerfully scandal in high life could draw attention to corruption, the fact remained that in order to throw their support behind the princess, they needed something more than the promise of political efficacy. Cobbett might recognize how Caroline's cause could give the reform movement momentum, but she could only be adopted as their figurehead *if* she was cast as an innocent victim. Perhaps it was for this reason that the publication of her *Letter to the Regent*, which portrayed her as a wronged wife and a dedicated mother, coincided with her cause being publicly taken up by radicals. In the interim between Cobbett's censuring of Caroline and his championing of her cause, her public image as a victimized, exiled, but steadfastly devoted wife and mother had been solidified in the press. It was her deliberate fashioning into a virtuous, wronged woman—a veritable icon of domesticity and parental devotion—that facilitated what would prove to be her meteoric rise in public esteem.

The Queen

Caroline's public persona and the support she had gained would hold her in good stead when, in 1820, George III died and the regent ascended the throne to become George

²⁰² There were some radicals, for instance, who were slower to adopt the Queen as their cause. In the *Black Dwarf*, editor Thomas Wooler characterized the Queen Caroline Affair as a 'foolish quarrel between a man and his wife,' 5 July 1820, p. 2.

²⁰³ Clark, *Scandal*, p. 182, see chapter 7.

IV. Caroline, who had escaped tedium in England in 1814 to travel the continent and the Holy Lands, was now officially queen. She returned to England from her home in Italy, in spite of much advice (and some bribing). Meanwhile, her estranged husband had again initiated proceedings against her, this time under the auspices of an obscure statute, the Bill of Pains and Penalties. If it was determined that Caroline was guilty of adultery, she would be divorced of husband, titles and throne. This trial—an event described variously by historians as an ‘unprecedented commotion, a ‘cause célèbre,’ ‘a spectacular popular mobilization,’ and ‘a political bombshell’—became a national obsession.²⁰⁴ The particulars of the case were dissected in West End drawing rooms, Piccadilly coffeehouses, country churches and provincial town meetings. The ‘Queen Caroline Affair,’ as it became known, was a yearlong incident that enthralled Britons, and ‘let loose for a time every tongue and pen in England,’ as Cobbett put it.²⁰⁵ Not just writers, reporters, artists and politicians, but also individuals who customarily shunned politics and scandalous subjects felt compelled to petition in support of Caroline or, alternatively, to participate in one of the many king and country demonstrations against her.

As has been widely documented, the ensuing contest raised a number of wider political issues. Her prosecution became a collective focus for the political protests of radicals who brought her cause within the sphere of their movement. They used a ‘double articulation of the Queen as the victim of domestic and political oppression’ to mobilize Britons against the king and his ministers and to impel them to address the need for

²⁰⁴ Lacquer, Thomas. ‘The Queen Caroline Affair,’ Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV,’ *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982): pp. 417-66 (p. 417); Dror Wahrman, “‘Middle-Class’ Domesticity goes Public: Gender, Class, and Politics from Queen Caroline to Queen Victoria,’ *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993) pp. 396-432; p. 400, Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 248.

²⁰⁵ in Lacquer, p. 417.

monarchical and parliamentary reform.²⁰⁶ In doing so, she became not only a victim, but also a symbol of resistance to political tyranny. For many women in particular, she became a champion of their right to legal protection and security in marriage. For the king's supporters, however, she was an usurper who threatened the sanctity of the throne and the authority of the state. For these reasons, the Queen Caroline Affair has received a considerable amount of critical attention from historians interested in its constitutional implications and its impact on mass politics. Consequently, there has been a move against designating these agitations as an 'affair,' for according to Jonathan Fulcher, that term diminishes the significance of its role in the history of reform politics.²⁰⁷

However, my goal here is to *re-present* this event *as* an 'affair.' I will treat the episode, to use William Hazlitt's characterization, as 'the most perplexing *domestic question*' and will show how, in many ways, this was a battle of domestic virtue, or at least, a battle of representations of domestic virtue.²⁰⁸ It is an obvious yet pivotal fact that the prosecuting 'crown' was a disgruntled husband; thus, this 'affair' was above all other things, a domestic dispute. To the vast majority of observers, it was a case of a shamelessly dissipated, despotic, and serially cheating husband prosecuting his victimized, vulnerable wife. Whilst whiggish readings have emphasized how an otherwise personal matter—the king's attempt to divorce his wife—became a political event, this section will largely confine itself to examining how *politics* provided the people with an opportunity to debate *domestic* issues, that is, issues of marriage, morals and manners. In this battle, the private lives of both Caroline and George IV, opened as they were to public examination, were used to negotiate and

²⁰⁶ Rogers, *Crowds*, p. 250.

²⁰⁷ Fulcher, Jonathan. 'The Loyalist Response to the Queen Caroline Agitations,' *Journal of British Studies* 34 (October 1995), pp. 481-502 (p. 482); see 481-2.

²⁰⁸ Hazlitt, 'Commonplaces,' no. 73 (15 November 1823), qtd. in Laqueur, p. 417 and in Davidoff and Hall, p. 150.

entrench domestic values, to foster a moral consensus and to enforce gendered codes of behaviour.

Critics and biographers have often quoted Caroline's remark that 'nobody cares for *me* in this business. This business has been more cared for as a political business than as the cause of a poor forlorn woman' as evidence that Caroline realized astutely that she was a tool for battling politicians and discontented reformers.²⁰⁹ However, her statement also underscores how much her character figured in this contest. The public's reception of her as 'a poor forlorn woman' ensured that her case could and would actually become a cause. The outcome of the contest between her and George IV would largely depend on the public's perception of personal character and private behaviour. Indeed, one of William Hone's immensely popular satires on the affair posed what were arguably the most pivotal questions in this affair. The title page of *Non Mi Ricordo* contains one starkly defiant question to the George IV: 'Who are you?' and the last line on the last page is: 'What are you at? What are you after?'²¹⁰ In another of Hone's popular pamphlets, *The Queen's Budget*, similar questions were posed, but it was Caroline who plaintively inquired: 'Was I a wife—a mother not so long—/What am I now?'²¹¹

The answer to these questions, according to Caroline and her mixed bag of defenders—Whigs, liberals, radicals and various anti-George propagandists—was that she was a 'poor woman,' a bereaved mother, a betrayed wife and a queen who was willing to sacrifice her private happiness for the nation. In one address, 'Caroline' asserted (or was represented as asserting) that '*I am what I seem, and I seem what I am*': a woman who had 'never sought any refuge even from the infuriated eye of malignity in the coverts of duplicity, or in

²⁰⁹ Qtd. in Roger Fulford, *The Trial of Queen Caroline* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1967), p. 243.

²¹⁰ William Hone, *Non Mi Ricordo*, 26th edition (London: William Hone, 1820).

²¹¹ Hone, *The Queen's Budget Opened, or Correspondence Extraordinary Relative to the Defence of Her Majesty, a Companion to the Royal Letter Bag*, second ed. (London: T. Dolby, 1820).

the obscurities of fraud'.²¹² Most significantly of all, she claimed to be a mother who had been victimized by the cold political machinations and personal deceit of her ruthless, scheming husband-king. Propagandists were well aware that her defence rested on the inviolability of her personal reputation, and so she is made to speak with virtuous indignation:

My adversaries have all along treated me as if *I were insensible to the value of character*, for why else should they have invited me to bring it to market, and let it be estimated by gold? But infamy is not with me an affair of arithmetical calculation. *A good name is better than riches*; for I do not dread poverty, *but I loathe turpitude; and I think death preferable to shame.*²¹³

Whilst the prince and his men are concerned with mercenary priorities, her motivations appear to be of a much higher order. Unlike the regent's 'other' women—Mrs Robinson, Mrs Fitzherbert, Ladies Jersey, Hertford and Conyngham—all of whom received various sums of money, jewellery, and other gifts and privileges, she is the only woman impervious to such pecuniary enticements.

Caroline's addresses to the people employed a language of sensibility that complimented her hypothetical femininity, her motherliness and her victimhood, and married those qualities to a sensitivity to injustice and a sympathy for the plight of other victims of oppression. In another of her public letters to her husband, this one published in August 1820, her language shrewdly embodies a union of outrage and reticence. Though 'a sense of what is due to my character and sex forbids me to refer minutely to the real causes of our domestic separation,' she is bound by duty to confront a husband who would drive 'a wife ... with an infant in her arms' from her home because of his uncontrollable

²¹² 'Middlesex Address' (13 August 1820), *Selections from the Queen's Answers to Various Addresses Presented to Her; Together with her Majesty's Extraordinary Letter to the King; and an Introduction; and Observations Illustrative of Their Tendency* (London: John Hatchard & Son, 1821). p. 37.

²¹³ 'Reading Address' (28 August 1820) *Selections from the Queen's Answers*, p. 45.

‘inclinations’.²¹⁴ Caroline carefully negotiates the dual demands of female duty here: by maintaining a modest reserve about the details of private life, she upholds the integrity of the domestic realm, but all the while, she publicly defends the cause of offended virtue. She thus legitimizes herself to accuse the king of sexual misdemeanours: his politics, she contends, are shaped by his mistresses and his hatred for her. In fact, he had appointed ambitious ministers whom he otherwise deplored, for the sole reason that they were willing to prosecute her. In such a way, ‘the interest of the nation was sacrificed to the gratification’ of the king’s ‘desire to aggravate’ his wife’s already considerable ‘sufferings’.²¹⁵ The chief source of her despair—more than her husband’s maltreatment, her forced exile, or the loss of her family—was ‘occasioned by considering *the wound given to public morals in the fatal example produced by the indulgence of your Majesty’s inclinations*’.²¹⁶ Whilst the king is motivated by ‘inclination,’ ‘gratification,’ and ‘indulgence,’ Caroline claims to be motivated by the belief that Royalty must not be shaped by the personal penchants of the king, but must ‘rest[] on the basis of public good’.²¹⁷

This is not to say, however, that Caroline’s unselfish concern for her people could completely supplant her own personal sorrow, for as a sensitive, feeling woman, she could not *help* but suffer keenly her own maltreatment. Looking back over her marital disappointments and family tragedy, she addresses her tormentor directly:

Not to have felt, with regard to myself, chagrin ... would have argued great *insensibility to the obligations of decorum*; not to have dropped a tear in the face of that beloved child, whose future sorrows were then but too easy to foresee, would have marked me as *unworthy of the name of mother*; but, not to have submitted to it without repining would have indicated *a consciousness of demerit, or a want of those feelings which belong to affronted and insulted female honour*.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 4.

²¹⁵ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p.8.

²¹⁶ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 5, italics mine.

²¹⁷ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 3.

²¹⁸ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 5, italics mine,

Though Caroline claims to be sensitive to the boundaries of custom and decorum, she cannot be motivated solely by them, so strong are her maternal feelings and feminine sentiments. This language of sensibility aims to inspire responsiveness in its audience, to arouse the same feelings of distress and righteous anger that Caroline herself expresses. To this end, she shares how she was ‘bereft of parent, brother, and father-in-law,’ how she was prevented from receiving the ‘cheering caresses’ and ‘assurances of never-ceasing love’ from her own daughter.²¹⁹ ‘Even on the slave mart the cries of “Oh! my mother, my mother! Oh! my child, my child!” have prevented a separation of the victims of avarice,’ she declares, but the king’s ‘advisors, more inhuman than the slave-dealers, remorselessly tore mother from child’.²²⁰

Caroline’s language is again reminiscent of the deeply affecting defence speech of the indignant Marie-Antoinette. Like the French queen, she appeals directly to mothers, but this time it is to ‘those mothers who have been suddenly bereft of the best and most affectionate and only daughters’.²²¹ Only the more feeling sex could fully understand how devastating was the double blow she had received when in exile she had learned, belatedly, of her daughter’s death in 1817 and of her husband’s callous refusal to inform her of the terrible news.²²² Only those ‘with a heart of humanity ... will drop a tear of sympathy with me’.²²³ Her exclusion her from her daughter’s funeral was almost more than she could bear, she explained to the citizens of Greenwich:

“Can I forget? No; my soul will never suffer me to forget that when the cold remains of this beloved object were to be deposited in the tomb, *the malice of MY PERSECUTORS would not suffer EVEN THE NAME OF THE MOTHER to be*

²¹⁹ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 10.

²²⁰ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 10.

²²¹ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 11.

²²² Princess Charlotte died in 1817; see Chapter 6.

²²³ *The Queen’s Letter to the King*, p. 11.

*inscribed upon THE COFFIN OF HER CHILD It was a dagger directed by unrelenting hate, not to the surface, but to the very centre of a mother's heart.*²²⁴

This is a mother of 'agonizing sensibility' speaking directly to a people capable of equally deep feeling; her broken heart appeals to the people's own 'heart of humanity'.²²⁵

Crucially, this type of language justified the queen's own public protest at the same time that it legitimized her audience to take up her cause. Her rhetoric betrays a consciousness that the people's claim to political participation would be stimulated most by issues that resonated: domestic issues that struck *home*. It was the private nature of this affair that allowed, and obliged, individuals to address publicly the plight of Caroline: in this struggle, Britons could identify a plethora of meaningful political and moral causes *because* they were manifested in a clear cut domestic issue. By defining her parliamentary prosecution in familial terms, Caroline and her supporters encouraged otherwise disenfranchised individuals (the lower orders) and those with particularly strong feelings on marriage and morals (the middle orders), to become involved in her cause.

Radicals accused the king and his ministers of using a public prosecution to dupe the nation into participating in the private bullying of his wife. The speaker at a December meeting in Reading (which apparently attracted a thousand attendees), argued that it was laughable that the king's ministers had tried to convince the people that the accusation against her 'was not that her Majesty had injured her husband—NOT THAT SHE HAD CORNUATED KING GEORGE, BUT THAT SHE HAD CUCKOLDED THE STATE'.²²⁶ The people could easily distinguish the personal origins of the king's venom against his wife, as well as his illegitimate ruse to cast his private harassment as a state matter.

²²⁴ *The Queen's Letter to the King*, p. 41.

²²⁵ *The Queen's Letter to the King*, pp. 41, 11.

²²⁶ Artist unknown, *The Eloquent and Humorous Speech of H. Marsh, Esq. at the Reading Meeting, on Thursday, December 7, 1820*, author's collection.

With caustic wit, the meeting's corresponding broadside (Pl. 13) depicts the king's lackeys petitioning the queen to leave the country for the sake of the nation's morals. 'May it please your Majesty,' they plead, 'If you will but indulge us your humble petitioners Bible Society directors & suppressors of Vice; by quitting the country & not expose our Weakness & Wickedness, we will not only pay your £50,000 a year but stand Godfathers to your Character to all Posterity'. As the accompanying speech clearly states, the point is that though the government intended Caroline's trial to be 'a grand political drama for public exhibition ... with the view ... of improving and strengthening the tone of public morals,' only Britons themselves, and their chosen advocates, could be trusted with that role.



Pl. 13. Artist unknown, *The Eloquent and Humorous Speech of H. Marsh, Esq. at the Reading Meeting, on Thursday, December 7, 1820*, author's collection.

If Caroline's propagandists exploited and promoted an idealized version of British womanhood, they also used her cause to define patriotic manliness. The pamphlets, caricatures, newspapers, tokens, earthenware and snuffboxes that depicted the injured Caroline as the injured Britannia emphasized, Tamara Hunt observes, 'the need for true British men to step forward and protect' a woman who like Britannia herself, is 'symbolically linked to the state'.²²⁷ Significantly, it is all classes of men, and not just a certain *portion* of them who are asked to step forward. In an address to the 'Operative Classes' of London, Caroline recognizes, admires, and even claims to embody, the plain-speaking and upstanding character of John Bull. She is overjoyed, she declares, to find a virtuous people 'who condole with my sorrows, and who kindle with indignation at my wrongs':

The Industrious Classes have shewn that they still retain that independence of mind ... which was once the proud boast and the characteristic property of every Englishman. *Though the gangrene of corruption has engendered a debasing venality, and a fawning obsequiousness in detached portions of the community,* yet Britain still retains a large portion of that heart of oak, which for so many ages has made its name glorious and its annals bright.²²⁸

Caroline aligns herself with manly, independent, honest, 'real' Britons. These heart-of-oak patriots have little in common with the 'detached' and phony court of George IV.

In sharp contrast, the king's domestic conduct and his defiance of the constitution demonstrated distinctly un-English behaviour. In Robert Huish's words, the record of his sexual affairs demonstrated a deep-seated 'hatred of [his] race'.²²⁹ In fact, a pamphleteer claiming to be 'Junius' argued that his behaviour was more reminiscent of that of 'the Cadis,

²²⁷ Tamara Hunt, p. 277; Caroline and Britannia are closely allied, for instance, on one of the many tokens commemorating her return to England, inscribed with the phrase 'Hail! Britain's Queen! Thy Virtues We Acknowledge and Lament thy Wrongs' complements an image of Britannia preparing to crown Caroline with the wreath of victory. In George Cruikshank's *Transparency* (1821), Britannia holds up Caroline's image, again framed by a wreath of victory against tyranny. Britannia also looms large in Cruikshank's illustrations to *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, where she welcomes Caroline to England's shores and then becomes her advocate, chastising the suitably dunce-cap wearing George IV.

²²⁸ 'Address to the Operative Classes of London,' (16 August 1820), in *Selections from the Queen's Answers to Various Addresses*, p. 38-9.

²²⁹ Robert Huish, *George IV*, p. 525.

Bashaws, the Vizier, the Divan, and the Grand Sultan himself' and that his exploitation of the law would have better suited 'a country like Turkey'.²³⁰ In the style of an oriental sultan, George IV and his network of procurers, Huish affirmed, had installed a 'great number of females of light character' at Carlton House whilst at his Pavilion at Brighton, he had gone so far as to set up a Taj Mahal-inspired British seraglio.²³¹ In his *The Court at Bright a la Chinesell* (Pl. 14), Cruikshank depicts the king as embodying a whole range of exotic, alien creatures—a Grand Mogul, a Chinese Emporer, a Hottentot Venus—who, like himself, were unconstrained by moral or constitutional law. These tropic characters represented unchecked sensuality, irrationality, primitive sexuality, femininity, and, in the case of the first two, unimpeded despotic political power. Britain's 'orientalized' king, surrounded by foreign unctuousness, had polluted the nation with a licentiousness powerfully at odds with the principles of his fore(father)s, the loyalty of his wife, or the decency of John Bull.

During Caroline's trial, George IV was also 'Italianized,' his persona conflated with that of Caroline's former Italian servant, Theodore Majocchi. One of the Prosecution's key witnesses, Majocchi had been called to testify that Caroline had carried on an affair with another Italian servant, Pergami (alternatively referred to as Bergami). Majocchi alleged that on her travels, specifically during the Long Voyage, or the ship crossing from the Holy Land to Italy, Caroline had been bathed by, and slept in close quarters with, the married and rapidly promoted Pergami. Upon returning to Italy, Caroline and Pergami (and his whole family, minus his deserted wife) had settled in Lake Como, ostensibly as man and (second) wife. Though this testimony deeply damaged Caroline's image, it proved equally as damaging to George IV and his ministers when it was revealed under cross-examination that Majocchi had received Ministry funds in exchange for his testimony.

²³⁰ *Last Letter of Junius*, p. 32.

²³¹ Huish, *George IV*, p. 525.



Pl. 14. George Cruikshank, *The Court at Brighton a la Chinesee!!* (London: J. Sidebotham, 1796).
Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

For the duration of the trial, a deeply discomfited, stuttering Majocchi had only been able to respond to the Defence's queries with 'Non mi ricordo' ('I do not remember'). This phrase, which quickly became a popular slogan, was exploited most ingeniously by William Hone and George Cruikshank. The satirists portrayed an Italianate, non-English speaking George IV as a Majocchi-style 'Witness' who is cross-examined through an interpreter, in a courtroom presided over by such characters as Lord Precedent Furthermore, Lord Muddlepool and the Twister General. The pamphlet opens with three rapid-fire questions: 'WHO are you?' 'What countryman are you?—a foreigner or an englishman?' 'Do you

understand English?’²³² Throughout the text, the hybridized George IV-Majocchi’s most common rejoinder is ‘Non mi ricordo’—an evasive response he offers, for instance, to a query about how many wives he had accumulated since abandoning his own.²³³ This question is followed by an unflattering exchange in which the examiner asks the king if he is a Member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, to which he replies, ‘Yes (*with great energy*)’.²³⁴ There is a pause and the Interpreter informs the court that a mistake was made in the translation: the uncomprehending king had been asked mistakenly if he were a ‘Member of the Society for the suppression of *Wives*,’ rather than ‘*Vice*’.²³⁵ The fraudulent George IV, unable to understand his own subjects, is a foreign king not suited to England’s throne or to the nation’s values.

Such damning portrayals forced the king’s supporters to adopt offensive measures. The king could not be defended on the basis of his character, for very few Britons would find a portrayal of George as a virtuous figure or as a devoted husband convincing. Indeed, those few attempts to do so descended into such feebly worded and/or absurdly exaggerated rhetoric in their endorsement of the king that they sound almost burlesque. It was, for instance, rather wishful thinking on the part of loyalist J. Webster Wedderburn to argue that ‘few monarchs ever reigned in Europe whose sensual indulgences, or personal pleasures were ever less obtrusive, or more restrained’ than that of George IV.²³⁶ It seems as if Wedderburn anticipated an incredulous response, however, as he found it necessary to preface this statement with a qualification. He suggested that George and Caroline should at least *share* the blame for the destruction of their marriage, for George did not ‘put away’ his

²³² Hone, *Non Mi Ricordo*, p. 1.

²³³ Hone, *Non Mi Ricordo*, p. 5.

²³⁴ Hone, *Non Mi Ricordo*, p. 5.

²³⁵ Hone, *Non Mi Ricordo*, p. 5-6.

²³⁶ J. Webster Wedderburn, *The King’s Case Stated; An Appeal to both Houses of Parliament on the Proceedings Pending against the Queen* (London; Bowdery and Kerby et al, 1820), p. 65.

wife as the public assumed.²³⁷ Later in the pamphlet, he undermines his own description of George as a restrained king by arguing that the popular claim ‘that the aberrations of the husband, justifie[d] the infidelity of a wife’ was untenable.²³⁸ Even though he was a cheat, it had been her duty to remain loyal.

The king’s sexual improprieties would not go away. The Tories would have to contest the sympathetic image of the maternal, victimized yet valiant Caroline, and they would have to do so by strategically appealing to the same sense of patriotic emotion and chivalry as had Caroline’s supporters. All of the qualities that had been attributed to her over the years, first by the press in 1795-6, and then by the Whigs in 1813 (following George IV’s political volte-face), were brought sharply into question. Anti-Caroline propagandists represented her in terms remarkably similar to those that had been employed against her husband: she was portrayed as a selfish, promiscuous, hate-filled foreigner who not only displayed very un-British qualities, but threatened to destroy domestic harmony. The Tories directly rebutted her most powerful statements, most notably her contention, quoted above, that “*I am what I seem, and I seem what I am*”. What she seemed to be, according to the evidence gathered by the Milan Commissioners—the retinue of spies sent to Italy in 1818—was a vice-ridden ‘wanton’.²³⁹ Such evidence, along with the testimony of her own servants, one pamphleteer argued, had proved how false and misleading was Caroline’s imputing to herself ‘almost every virtue which can belong to the female character,’ not the least of which were ‘calm wisdom,’ honour, integrity and ‘christian charity’.²⁴⁰ Eyewitness testimony proved that it was not the king who had instigated a slanderous conspiracy against her; rather

²³⁷ J. Webster Wedderburn, *The King’s Case Stated; An Appeal to both Houses of Parliament on the Proceedings Pending against the Queen* (London; Bowdery and Kerby et al, 1820), p. 65.

²³⁸ Wedderburn, p. 64.

²³⁹ ‘Middlesex Address’ (13 August 1820), *Selections from the Queen’s Answers to Various Addresses*, p. 37. For more on the Milan Commission, see Fraser, p. 293-321.

²⁴⁰ ‘Address of the Queen at Lewes,’ (3 August 1820), in *Selections from the Queen’s Answers to Various Addresses*, p. 34.

'*she* has been the great conspirator against herself—the slanderer of her own honour—the destroyer of her own character'.²⁴¹

Not only had Caroline contravened Britain's legal code by referring to the king's subjects as her own, but she had transgressed the nation's moral laws by repeatedly and grossly attempting to eclipse a husband to whom she owed her submission. Using a sexualized vocabulary, propagandists argued that Caroline was brazenly 'courting the favour of a populace' and 'exhibit[ing]' herself 'in every place' in order to seduce the mob to turn against her husband and their 'master'.²⁴² Had she, one author asked, exhibited any 'truly *feminine*' virtues' by performing either 'acts of submissive conjugal duty to her king—her Lord—her Husband?' or had she displayed any 'acts of maternal, benevolent, kindness to his people?'²⁴³ If it could be proved that Caroline had demonstrated any personal merits as a wife or fulfilled any expectations as a queen, then she would be entitled not only to those monarchical trappings—a palace, an income, a queen's establishment—that she so loudly proclaimed as properly hers, but she would also be entitled to 'our gratitude—our love—our respect—our esteem'.²⁴⁴

The terms and representations used by both anti-George and anti-Caroline propagandists are remarkably analogous. One vehemently anti-Caroline pamphleteer argued that besides 'an inordinate revolutionary ambition' for personal gain, Caroline was motivated by illicit '*private personal enjoyments*' and a desire for selfish, depraved '*gratification*'.²⁴⁵ She was, like her estranged husband, incapable of self-restraint; she was equally willing to sacrifice the interests of her nation to her whims and indulgences and affairs. In her affair with Pergami,

²⁴¹ *Selections from the Queen's Answers to Various Addresses*, p. 16, italics mine.

²⁴² 'A Widowed Wife,' *A Letter to the Queen* (London: W. Wright, 1820), p. 12. See also *Selections from the Queen's Answers*, p. 2.

²⁴³ *Selections from the Queen's Answers to Various Addresses*, pp. 8-9.

²⁴⁴ *Selections from the Queen's Answers to Various Addresses* p. 9.

²⁴⁵ *Selections from the Queen's Answers to Various Addresses*, p. 9.

she had clearly demonstrated, one satirist declared, that 'mighty love had engross'd ev'ry feeling': it was clear that the self-indulgent queen preferred 'Bergami's lap ... to a throne'.²⁴⁶ Yet, she was also represented, as her husband had been, as faithful to none. She would gladly sacrifice Bergami to greater ambitions, for she was 'stung by still stronger lust': her heart's true desire was 'to kick down the throne.'²⁴⁷

George's destructive passions had been interpreted as a hatred for his people, so too propagandists argued, were Caroline's desires motivated by a similar hatred for her own kind. For one thing, she had allegedly revealed an abhorrence of womankind, for the instant she had departed England; she had was reported to have banished all female servants. Then, when she returned to England, she had happily supplanted the wives of her male supporters. Caroline would not allow 'men's wedded wives' to 'harbour in the house, wrote 'Old Tom of Oxford,' for she detested them much 'as some folks garlic loath, or chives,/And some hate rat, or mouse'.²⁴⁸ Propagandists alleged that she had deluded the nation into believing she felt affection for them, when in actuality she hated the English people. The instant she left England in 1814 she had 'contrived to get rid of every English attendant about her person' and then lavished 'THOUSANDS of good ENGLISH money upon this Italian minion [Pergami], and his *whole* family (ten in number), excepting only his wife'.²⁴⁹ 'An Englishwoman' was outraged to find that Caroline had cast off every semblance of etiquette, going so far as to adopt the ways of the lowest persons. No English woman of morals would ever have eaten, as Caroline had done, from the same plate or drunk from the same bottle as her Italian courier, nor would she have drunk beer like a German peasant or eaten

²⁴⁶ *Bartolomeo to Caroline: An Heroic Epistle* (London: W. Wright, 1820), p. 9. (Note: Pergami was often spelled 'Bergami').

²⁴⁷ *Bartolomeo to Caroline*, p. 16.

²⁴⁸ 'Old Tom of Oxford,' *Solomon Logwood: A Radical Tale* (London: W. Wright, 1820), p. 18; see pp. 18-9.

²⁴⁹ 'An Englishwoman,' pp. 13, 18.

Italian polenta like one of her kitchen servants (with a spoon, no less).²⁵⁰ Moreover, Caroline had grossly over-indulged in eating, and in light of such unfeminine behaviour, it was not an 'injustice to reckon the *size* of her Majesty amongst her *sins*.'²⁵¹

Caroline was accused of demonstrating a hatred for the English people by exchanging their most foundational values for the licentiousness of other nations. To one outraged 'Widow,' Caroline appeared a hoyden who, from the first moment of her marriage, had been unwilling to exchange 'the freedom of foreign lands' for the silken bonds of domesticity or to adopt 'the chaste reserve' of Britain.²⁵² She had deserted England in 1814, not because her husband had been overly severe, but because she was 'tired of the restraints of this country, and sought the freedom of others'.²⁵³ Caroline's perceived sexual immorality was represented, as her husband's had been, by a whole range of orientalized images. It was a farce, her opponents proposed, that she had been made the darling of the British public, when in reality she was an outsider who threatened British morality. Caroline had chosen 'base foreigners' over 'her own faithful Britons' and when 'to the land of the stranger and foe she fled from us, her honour, her virtue' fled as well.²⁵⁴ In her visit to the Holy Lands, she had benefited from 'Turkish art' and 'lessons from Mahomet's dance'; she had also performed daring 'feats' on her 'ass' and defied 'fierce Arabs' as she rode her mount 'like a stout Amazon' through the Palestinian deserts.²⁵⁵ She had learned valuable lessons on how to be a morality-flouting and law-breaking seductress from the examples of Bathsheba, the painted Jezebel and the murdering temptress Judith.²⁵⁶ When her Eastern pilgrimage ended,

²⁵⁰ 'An Englishwoman,' see pp. 7-13.

²⁵¹ 'An Englishwoman,' p. 8.

²⁵² 'A Widowed Wife,' p. 7.

²⁵³ 'A Widowed Wife,' p. 10.

²⁵⁴ [n. a.], *The Royal Wanderer Beguiled Abroad and Reclaimed at Home; or, a Sketch of St. Caroline's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land; etc.* (London: W. Wright, 1820), pp. 10, 9.

²⁵⁵ *Bartolomeo to Caroline*, pp. iv, 10, 11.

²⁵⁶ *Royal Wanderer*, pp. 6, 7.

she was not longer content to return 'to *domestic* devotion' and instead settled in Italy where she could be free to 'enjoy[] Eastern tastes at voluptuous Milan'—a location much more conducive to the release of passions and games of seduction'.²⁵⁷

Propagandists charged Caroline not just with contracting the worst moral diseases of the East and the South, but of returning to contaminate England with her foreign licentiousness. 'An Englishwoman,' shocked that England's queen was 'a leader of licentious pilgrimages' and a 'sultana of a seraglio,' felt compelled to address her concerns *To the Peers of England*.²⁵⁸ It was incumbent upon the more virtuous sex to defend the nation against a woman who so 'threatened English ideas of modesty and decorum'.²⁵⁹ Caroline was turning England into a gin-soaked celebration of debauchery. 'Riot and tumult,' Wedderburn declared, were 'the constant heralds of her approach; and her retreat is only marked by the victims of inebriety and vice, stalking through our streets'.²⁶⁰ Britons, greatly admired by the very nations whose uncivilized ways their queen was advocating, were becoming the objects of ridicule. For 'what opinion must foreigners have of the morals of a people, who, in the face of the strongest evidence ... could at once blindly adopt the cause of guilt and licentiousness?'²⁶¹

The flouting of established domestic manners betrays, according to these moralizing pamphleteers, an immoral, tasteless woman, but also something much more dangerous. Bad manners, tasteless display and debauchery were intimately 'connected with that democratic spirit, that love of assimilation with the vulgar' and with 'whatever is revolutionary and republican'.²⁶² Caroline's political sympathies were confirmed by her admiration of the

²⁵⁷ *Bartolomeo to Caroline*, p. iv.; *Royal Wanderer*, pp. 5, 8.

²⁵⁸ 'An Englishwoman,' *An Address to the Peers of England* (London: W. Wright, 1820), p. 18.

²⁵⁹ 'An Englishwoman,' p. 18.

²⁶⁰ Wedderburn, p. 53.

²⁶¹ Wedderburn, p. 55.

²⁶² 'An Englishwoman,' p. 10.

'jacobinical' Murat (Joachim Murat, the King of Naples and husband to Napoleon's sister, Queen Caroline), as well as by the fact that she was seen fraternizing habitually with servants and fishwives ('the offspring of fraud and Jacobinism!!') and 'mixing in the orgies of profligate peasants and village prostitutes'.²⁶³ One graphic artist portrayed her as 'Mother Red Cap' with the Phrygian cap and cockade of the French patriots perched on her head like a witch's hat (Pl. 15). In this image, she is the namesake of a bawdy public house, 'the Brunswick Radical House of Call,' and under her image, a rowdy, coarse clientele have gathered to drink Italian wine and to threaten the order and restraint of 'The King's Head'. As this image suggests, even if the private life of George IV precluded a full-scale defence of his character, then at least the monarchy, constitution and the nation itself, were worthy of



Pl. 15. Author unknown, *The Mother Red Cap Public House, in Opposition [sic] to the Kings Head* (London: W. Wright, 1820). Courtesy of University of Glasgow.

²⁶³ 'An Englishman,' pp. 5, 13,

protection. If the government could not wholeheartedly support George IV, Wedderburn suggested, then surely they would still prevent 'a woman ... convicted of having rioted in all the meretricious eccentricities of eastern obscenity' from 'pollut[ing] the Throne'.²⁶⁴ If the people could not love their king, he urged, if they could not grant him a divorce ('that relief which the humblest of his subjects would claim as a right') then certainly Britons would feel it their duty to divorce *themselves* from Caroline. For surely he pleaded, they could see 'that in removing so foul an example from the highest seat in society,' they would have also 'rescue[d] the moral character of the people from so baneful an influence'.²⁶⁵

On 6 November 1820, the vote on the Bill of Pains and Penalties received such a slim majority in the House of Lords that it was quickly deemed in the interests of public order to throw it out. The queen had effectively won. Indeed, the breadth and intensity of the support for the queen shocked many observers who would otherwise have expected that, as Sir Charles Colville commented, her 'flagrant conduct' and her 'indecent and imprudence ... would have at least prevented the middling classes of society, male and female, from openly espousing her cause'.²⁶⁶ Even if the queen's cause was only a means to advance their own protests against the crown, how could the people of England support an undeniably 'licentious woman' who had given 'publicity to her misconduct'?²⁶⁷

At least part of the answer to this question must quite simply be that when compared to her husband, Caroline was the lesser moral offender. It was not that the people loved her, it was rather that 'all who loved not the King, Made party with the Queen'.²⁶⁸ By prosecuting his wife for his own worst moral crimes, George IV had provided a long-

²⁶⁴ Wedderburn, p. 72.

²⁶⁵ Wedderburn, p. 72.

²⁶⁶ Tamara Hunt, p. 269.

²⁶⁷ Tamara Hunt, p. 269.

²⁶⁸ *Solomon Logwood* p. 26.

disgruntled people with the ideal opportunity to prosecute him for his own vast history of offences against the British family. His intolerable hypocrisy had raised questions about his own repeated contravention of the nation's moral values. If the 'crimes in a queen,' Earl Fitzwilliam wondered derisively, 'call down upon her the vengeance of the nation' in the form of such a vindictive trial, 'what is the nation to do in the case of a king, guilty of similar crimes?'²⁶⁹ Will the nation 'dethrone from his hereditary throne a king, *not charged with attempts to overthrow the liberties of the country*, but guilty of the crimes alleged against the queen?'²⁷⁰ Such queries demonstrate the extent to which the private life of the king had not only become irreversibly, intimately entwined with his political role, but had actually *superseded* it. It was the duty of England's royal family to be just that—a family—and to set the first example of propriety, civility, conjugal harmony and domestic felicity.

In fact, whilst Caroline had 'won' her trial, the publicization of her alleged affair cost her much more. After the initial fanfare (as spectacular as it was), critical attention focused more intensely on her moral standing. Her acquittal inaugurated a backlash against the reports of licentious behaviour and the prurient curiosity it inspired in the public. Moralists weighed the damaging effects of such a dangerous moral and legal precedent. 'An Englishwoman' accused Caroline of single-handedly demolishing that principle 'which Englishwomen have been taught from the earliest age' as their most important responsibility, that is, to "keep our bodies in temperance, soberness and chastity."²⁷¹ Not only had this proto-queen set a dangerous new 'ideal' of British femininity, but that precedent had become set in law. The anonymous author of the satiric poem *Bartolomeo to Caroline* congratulated her for having skilfully 'acted the part of the tutor' by 'teach[ing] sprightly dames how to act for

²⁶⁹ In Tamara Hunt, p. 271.

²⁷⁰ In Tamara Hunt, p. 271.

²⁷¹ 'An Englishwoman,' p. 4.

the future'.²⁷² She had succeeded in setting a new legal and moral standard for women could now be sure that the 'courts will acquit 'em' even if they 'sin[ned] past all possible credence'.²⁷³ Using a different language but motivated by the same fears 'An Englishwoman' addressed her pamphlet indignantly to the House of Lords—a group of men who, by acquitting a faithless, shameless wife, had transformed themselves from the 'guardians of public morals' to the 'encouragers of vice'.²⁷⁴ By establishing 'that adultery is not criminal,' they had effectively absolved the future crimes of would-be adulterous wives. Indeed, their votes had sanctioned their own wives and daughters to follow Caroline's example—that is, to become the paramours of groomsmen and lackeys.²⁷⁵

As a result, scores of moralists argued that the nation must again amalgamate behind a cause, but this time, it was a campaign for decency and honour. The Queen Caroline Affair had allowed sexually prurient material to infuse the public sphere, but this time it was the responsibility of the nation to re-define what had become a distinctly murky 'barrier between virtue and vice'.²⁷⁶ Caroline had set a dangerous precedent when, in order to stir up support against her husband, she had shared their private affairs with the public. She should have restricted herself to the circle of her family and court, for it was dangerous—and deeply inappropriate—to address the people in such a familiar and calculatedly affective language in order to gain their support. Her expressions of affection for the people had narrowed the necessary social distance between monarch and subject so that the people felt at liberty to insult their king and to disrespect their government. By relaxing protocol and stepping from her proper sphere to recruit the rabble, one satirist wryly noted, she had provided them with

²⁷² Bartolomeo to Caroline, p. 11.

²⁷³ Bartolomeo to Caroline, p.11.

²⁷⁴ 'An Englishwoman,' p. 4.

²⁷⁵ 'An Englishwoman,' pp. 16-17; see p. 6.

²⁷⁶ 'An Englishwoman,' p. 18.

an excuse—a *public* occasion—to commit the most licentious *private* acts. One scurrilous poem described how on the night of her acquittal, the people had ‘with gin and merry lay,’ and as a result, ‘many a bastard yet unborn/May thank that levee day’.²⁷⁷ Though rather crudely expressed, the point is that if she had been suitably kept in the bosom of her family, she would never have needed to—or been allowed to—come before the public. The nation would not have collapsed into such a state of debauchery and disorder.

Anonymous female pamphleteers (or men writing as females) carefully differentiated between Caroline’s public role and their own. ‘An Englishwoman’ emphasized that she would have refrained from presumptuously entering the public realm, but desperate times called for desperate measures:

I am well aware that our proper station is retirement, our duty not to discuss but to submit, and that in political affairs, though we may be allowed to feel a sentiment, we are precluded from expressing an opinion;—yet, my lords, the very modesty which should characterise our sex, the virtues we are required to follow, and those which we are expected to give, are all motives which suggest and justify this address.²⁷⁸

Since Caroline’s affair *was* an issue of manners and morals—matters which were supposed to be of particular interest to women—it was incumbent upon women to speak. As wives, mothers and daughters, they could hold the government and the nation accountable on issues that concerned public decency, family and marriage. They were entitled to ask ‘on what principle of moral policy’ a woman who was supposed to be a ‘model’ for all women, yet who ‘had been the spectacle and the scandal of Europe’ could be excused.²⁷⁹ For ‘An Englishwoman,’ as for other conservative women (Hannah More instantly springs to mind) who felt forced by the temper of the times to come forward in the name of public morals and social order, duty overrode the usual bounds of reserve.

²⁷⁷ *Solomon Logwood*, p. 39.

²⁷⁸ ‘An Englishwoman,’ p. 1.

²⁷⁹ ‘An Englishwoman,’ pp. 1-3

The incensed author of *Gyneocracy* was not required to make the same excuses for speaking out against Caroline. He had critical words for George IV, not so much for his unrestrained infidelity or ‘incontinence,’ as for his apparent willingness to let adulterous women usurp the throne.²⁸⁰ The real venom was saved, however, for Caroline and for women in general. ‘The chastity of wives,’ he spat, ‘is of the first consideration to society in general. Adutery is of the worst species of fornication; in a Queen, perhaps it is of the very worst species of adultery’.²⁸¹ It might be dishonourable for men to engage in hunts for new lovers, but such indulgences of their natural inclinations did not have as lasting repercussions on the family as women who strayed. The adulteress forced a trusting husband to love, to provide for, and to unknowingly bequeath his property to another man’s child. By polluting her ‘sacred home’ with ‘the embryo of her embraces,’ the adulteress threatened every legal, religious and social law of the nation, and sullied the purity of the British family.²⁸² Giving vent to paternity anxiety and voicing fears of moral decline, the author of *Gyneocracy* used Caroline to paint a picture of a Britain in which ‘old English customs ha[d] been exploded’ by women as unrestrained and immoral as her.²⁸³

At the nadir in relations between George and Caroline writers and caricaturists still expressed such hopefulness, even if was often tongue-in-cheek. An 1821 caricature, *The Royal Libertine Reclaimed, or the Anticipation of a Reconciliation* portrayed a reformed George IV willingly giving up a gaggle of resentful and distressed mistresses, some of whom were in the process of hanging or drowning themselves, and others of whom were clearly destined to return to the arms of their rejoicing cuckolded husbands. The king, who begs Caroline ‘to stay at home’ as it ‘is a great sign of the loyalty of marriage,’ promises to recompense her,

²⁸⁰ (n. a.), *Gyneocracy; with an Essay on Fornication, Adultery, and Incest* (London: J. J. Stockdale, 1821), pp. x, xvi.

²⁸¹ *Gyneocracy*, pp. 130-1.

²⁸² *Gyneocracy*, p. 133.

²⁸³ *Gyneocracy*, p. x.

and significantly, the nation, for his 'past follies'. The title of one poem expresses a similar wish: *The Royal Wanderer Beguiled Abroad and Reclaimed at Home; or, a Sketch of St. Caroline's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land; of her Lessons Learned and Omitted, and of her Return to Prudence and Royal Dignity* described a scene of reunion in which George IV conducted himself with 'discretion' and Caroline acted the model of wifely appeasement.²⁸⁴ Another pamphleteer, identified as 'A Widowed Wife,' insisted that if only Caroline would act the part of a dutiful wife, she could yet bring George around. Caroline should have remembered that it was a woman's duty, even after the marriage had proved unhappy, to conform to her husband's will and to use the 'best arts of our sex'—dignity, tenderness and 'unobtrusive virtues'—to win him over.²⁸⁵ If even those arts should fail, it was still much 'better to sigh in virtue than to triumph in vice'.²⁸⁶ This type of discourse, which gives marriage advice to sovereigns, makes demands of their private lives, and at the same time enforces moral parameters for readers. In such a way, the Queen Caroline Affair allowed the public to discuss, dissect, advise and admonish not just George and Caroline, but society in general.

Similar advice came from an unexpected source. In a best-selling 1821 pamphlet, the professed *Deathbed Confession* of 'Lady Jersey,' the king's old mistress blamed a corrupt society for spawning their affair and for setting the scene for the Caroline Affair of 1820-1.²⁸⁷ On her deathbed, 'Lady Jersey' had become the voice of morality. Her final act of contrition was to promote one kind of monarchy—the domestic reign of George III—over another. 'English wives,' she contends, would forever be indebted to the old king 'for their felicity,' as he had rendered 'domestic happiness ... fashionable'.²⁸⁸ The loss of his example, she

²⁸⁴ *Royal Wanderer*, p. 20.

²⁸⁵ 'A Widowed Wife,' p. 9.

²⁸⁶ 'A Widowed Wife,' p. 14.

²⁸⁷ *The Deathbed Confessions of the Late Countess of Guernsey, to a Lady Anne H******, 16th ed. (Glasgow, [1821]) pp. iii, 61.

²⁸⁸ *Deathbed Confessions*, p. 12.

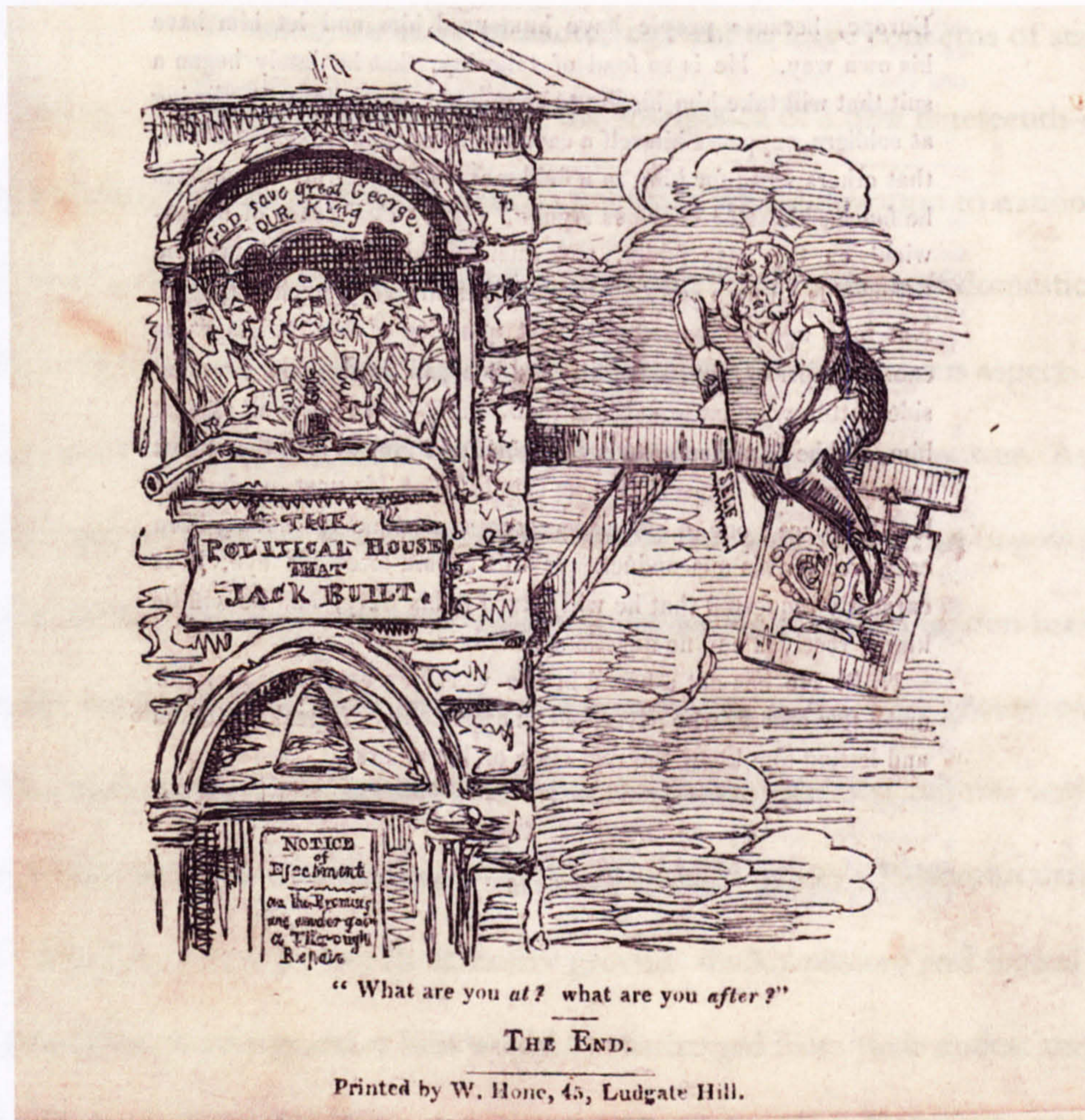
declared, could only be morally devastating for those who had learned to ‘revere and love’ him ‘with filial affection,’ *and* for the next generation who would ‘experience the most wo[e]ful effects’ under the reign of his debauched son: ‘morality itself would totter to its foundation.’”²⁸⁹ Such language is a product of a cultural moment that Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have identified as ‘one of the first *public* moments at which one view of marriage and of sexuality was decisively rejected in favour of another’.²⁹⁰ The predominant view held that just as domestic felicity must rule in the nation’s first family, so it ought to in *all* of the nation’s families. Public order and social harmony depended upon it.

Epilogue

In the end, the fates of both Queen Caroline and George IV were sad ones. She attempted to gain entrance to his 1821 coronation, only to be turned away, humiliatingly, publicly, forcibly, at the doors of Westminster Hall. With this last disgrace, it seemed as if she had lost all but the smallest shreds of public support. A broken woman, she died nine months later. George IV’s coronation, for all its expense and ceremony, was a markedly undignified affair. It was followed by a politically ineffective reign, during which the press pillaged him and Britons continued to hiss him in street and theatre. He would not or could not reform his ways (no matter how much he desired public approval). Perhaps the most representative image of his character and reign is Cruikshank’s closing engraving to Hone’s *Non Mi Ricordo* (Pl. 16). The picture of the king sawing away at the crown, the tool of his downfall clearly labelled ‘SELF,’ aptly captures his self-destructiveness. He could not, or would not, disentangle himself from the turmoil of his own debauched life. He remained embroiled in a perpetual conflict between fully exploiting princely privilege and prerogative,

²⁸⁹ *Deathbed Confessions*, p. 12.

²⁹⁰ Davidoff and Hall, p. 152.



Pl. 16. George Cruikshank, *Non Mi Ricordo* (London: Hone, 1820), author's collection.

and complying with what must have been bewildering demands for restraint, moderation, temperance, domestic stability, and (what would become principally middle class) codes of virtue.

George IV belonged to a segment of society that, in the years following the French Revolution, was consistently indicted for its abnegation of duty and its display of distinctly 'non-British' qualities. The king's strengths lay in his exquisite taste, his fine dress sense, his eye for art, his modish refinement, his ability to charm and the graceful ease with which he conducted himself in polite society, but these foppish qualities were greatly at odds with a changing cultural climate. He was a 'Prince of modern Macaronis,' or as Hone termed him,

a 'Dandy of Sixty' who 'sails about at his pleasure,' content to leave concerns of state to others.²⁹¹ He was a creature in decline against the emergence of a new nineteenth-century public figure: a much more disciplined, serious politician whose devotion to nation coincided with his loyalty to family and whose love of country paralleled his love of domestic harmony. That George IV would insist, many argued, on preserving the most odious aspects of princely privilege indicated a need to circumscribe monarchical political power. As a result, his relentless private excesses and his political indifference were used in an ongoing campaign to decrease monarchical intervention in day-to-day political decision-making, and to encourage the transfer of public trust from the monarchy to the Tory government.

This irreconcilable conflict between what were essentially two cultures sent George IV into veritable seclusion. After closing up the gates to St. James's Palace, he barricaded himself at Windsor, where he had its extensive grounds thickly planted and fenced. He decreed that servants who gazed at him would be discharged from their duties, and that any visitors to the grounds should "turn their eyes to the window, lest the king should be passing under it."²⁹² He slathered his ageing and fleshy face with powder and paint in an effort to protect himself from his detractors and the prying eyes of the public. He was painfully aware of how his gouty, swollen body provided his critics with the innumerable opportunities to deride him for his debauched life. Ironically, however, public disapproval at the end of his life stemmed not so much from his licentiousness, as from his isolation. He was, the press complained in a familiar refrain, unwilling or unable to act as a father to the people. His death, when it came, was largely unlamented, and his appropriately overblown funeral, in the words of the *Times*, was farcical, without 'a single mark of sympathy' (as he

²⁹¹ William Hone, qtd. in Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 405; Hone, *The Political House that Jack Built*, fourteenth ed. (London: W. Hone, 1819), p. 47.

²⁹² Hibbert, p. 708.

himself had appeared to be in life).²⁹³ Labelled by the press as the 'Leviathan of the *haut ton*,' his *Times* obituary was less an homage to a departed king than a harangue against 'reckless, unceasing and unbounded prodigality'.²⁹⁴ He was, the *Times* journalist railed, the 'destroyer' of his own family. His treatment of Caroline in their first year of marriage in 1795, when he had allowed 'a fashionable strumpet' to usurp his wife's rightful place in her own household, was forever 'a stain to manhood'.²⁹⁵ Such an obituary contrasted sharply with the reaction to the death of his father ten years before in 1820.

From the day of his funeral, the new king, his brother William IV, took great pains to present a very different persona to the world. William, like his royal successors, sought popularity and courted John Bull by at least appearing to adopt his values. He tore down his brother's expensive architectural projects, donated his invaluable art collection to the nation and made it a practice to walk the streets of London, amiably greeting his subjects as if they were old friends.²⁹⁶ The experiences of George IV had clearly demonstrated that the private lives of future generations of monarchs would be at the heart of their public roles. Propagandists had used the example of his life to designate just what kind of private life that must—and must not—be. One of the greatest lessons of his life was, as one social observer put it, that 'no pleasure remains where the virtues are not'.²⁹⁷ Such was the legacy of George IV.

²⁹³ Hibbert, p. 783.

²⁹⁴ Hibbert, pp. 783, 782.

²⁹⁵ Hibbert, p. 783.

²⁹⁶ Mme de Lieven in Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 784.

²⁹⁷ Williams [Pasquin], p. 19.

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMING DOMESTICITY: THE MAKING OF A
NATIONAL ICON

In the spring of 1812, the Prince Regent threw a sumptuous banquet at his Carlton House residence, and true to form, he indulged heavily in food and drink, and then rounded out the evening with one of his notorious political tirades. His subject on this particular occasion, however, was unusual. In a rage, he accused the Whigs who had been his personal and political allies since the early 1780s of failing to support his cause against his estranged wife Caroline. He also accused his associates of feeding material to the satirists who daily savaged him and his current mistress, the staunchly Tory Lady Hertford. This year, 1812, had been a particularly productive one for the caricaturists and a thus a very bad one for the regent and for Lady Hertford, his 'old lady of Manchester Square'.¹ In *The Political Medley or Things as They Were in June 1812*, the regent was portrayed as a mollicoddled babe in the arms of his scheming mistress who plotted to establish a new Tory ministry. In *The Prince of Whales or the Fisherman at Anchor*, he was a massive, fleshy fish bobbing about in the 'Sea of Politics'. He had fallen—hook, line and sinker—for the siren-mermaid Lady Hertford, who urged him to shower the Whigs with the 'Liquor of Oblivion' but to rain the 'Dew of Favour' on the heads of her Tories.

The regent's banquet night harangue greatly distressed and incensed one dinner guest in particular. His sixteen-year-old daughter, the Princess Charlotte was sympathetic to the Whigs, 'bred up,' as her father once proudly proclaimed 'in the

¹ Hibbert, *George IV*, 391.

principles of Mr Fox'.² In response to her father's blatant display of personal and political apostasy, she burst into tears and had to be escorted from the room by the old Whig Richard Brinsley Sheridan—himself a victim of the Prince's inconstancy. This politico-familial drama inspired an anonymous poet (later revealed to be Lord Byron) to contribute the following lines to the *Morning Chronicle*:

WEEP daughter of a royal line,
A Sire's disgrace, a realm's decay,
Ah! happy if each tear of thine
Could wash a father's fault away!

Weep for thy tears are virtue's tears—
Auspicious to these suffering isles;
And be each drop in future years
Repaid thee by thy people's smiles!³

'Sympathetic Address to a Young Lady' marks the beginning of the domestic mythologizing of Charlotte. She would become publicly fashioned into the hope of the nation, a 'figurehead for an emerging cult of domesticity' and an exemplar of reformed monarchy.⁴ The regent's fateful break with the Whigs also marked a break between father and daughter. In this family conflict, the public would take the side of a daughter who appeared a virtuous foil to her unrepentant, unreformed father.

After 'the banquet affair' of 1812, Charlotte's public and private life was dominated by three events—events that provided moralists with valuable opportunities to transform her into an exemplar of reformed monarchy and a model of domesticity. The first was her engagement to, and subsequent rejection of, the Prince of Orange in 1814, the second was her marriage to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg in May 1816, and

² Qtd. in Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 391.

³ MC, 7 March 1812; although anonymously inserted in the *Morning Chronicle*, Byron claimed authorship when he published this poem as 'To a Lady Weeping' with *The Giaour* in 1814.

⁴ Stephen C. Behrendt, *Royal Mourning and Regency Culture: Elegies and Memorials of Princess Charlotte* (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 34.

the third, was her death in childbirth on 6 November 1817. These private 'affairs' and struggles elicited an unprecedented and markedly demonstrative displays of public affection and sympathy, which in turn contributed to the post-Revolutionary entrenchment of domestic values and the establishment of the conventional family as the cornerstone of public life.

I

In her 1805 *Hints towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, Hannah More explained why she had felt compelled to produce a conduct book for Charlotte. In light of Napoleon's rise to power and the war with France, the education of a young heir to the throne was a concern of every patriot of the current generation.⁵ More than ever, the nation needed a royal figurehead who, unlike the behaviour of a certain disappointing prince, would inspire national unity and adopt the domestic example of George III and Queen Charlotte. Toward that end, More culled from history a group of female sovereigns upon whom Charlotte might model herself. There was much to be learned from Elizabeth I, a brilliant political strategist, but her deficiencies as a 'private female' prevented her from being a wholly great queen: 'if we look at the woman,' More wrote, 'we shall see much to blame; if at the sovereign, we shall see almost every thing to admire'.⁶ An imbalance between the public and the private also marred the life Queen Anne, but the scales were weighted in the opposite direction. Only Mary II was in all respects a queen worthy of veneration, for not only was her personal conduct exemplary but her marriage to William of Orange had fulfilled a vital

⁵ Hannah More, *Hints for Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, in *The Works of Hannah More*, first complete Amer. ed., 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), vol. 2, pp. 5-6; see also Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 263-68; Behrendt, pp. 47-59.

⁶ More, *Hints*, p. 34.

political function by defending English liberty.⁷ The inseparability of a sovereign's private and public selves meant that his or her personal reputation was absolutely critical (More explicitly refers to both males and females). Since monarchs were “‘the observed of all observers,’” it would be ‘inexcusable’ to neglect public opinion, to demonstrate ‘a contempt for the judgment of posterity,’ or to fail to appreciate how their example gave ‘the law to manners’.⁸ ‘The good conduct of the prince,’ More writes, ‘will make others virtuous ... It is the voluptuous, the prodigal, and the licentious’ who threatened the security of the nation.⁹

According to Charlotte's correspondence, she spent ‘hours so long’ at reading More's *Lessons*.¹⁰ Judging from her observations, she seemed to have imbibed at least some of what she read with regard to marriage, public opinion and her good conduct. Indeed, she expresses in 1814, how powerfully cognizant she was that ‘the eyes of the country’ were ‘fixed entirely upon me’.¹¹ The scrutinizing public was especially demanding on one issue in particular: ‘I am perfectly aware,’ she remarked, that ‘the country & my own family wish me to marry’.¹² In fact, much to Charlotte's frustration, the public was preoccupied with the issue of her marriage and the press was relentless with its demands. ‘The newspapers are *very insufferable* with their nonsense about me,’ she vented, ‘for they have given me proposals, & given me away a dozen times’.¹³ It was plain that her relationship with the public would be a reciprocal one: she would shape manners and morals, but the public would shape her life.

⁷ More, *Hints*, p. 61.

⁸ More, *Hints*, p. 56.

⁹ More, *Hints*, p. 59.

¹⁰ Princess Charlotte, *Letters of Princess Charlotte, 1811-1817*, ed. A. Aspinall (London: 1949), p. 38.

¹¹ Princess Charlotte, *Letters*, p. 155.

¹² Princess Charlotte, *Letters*, p. 155.

¹³ Princess Charlotte, *Letters*, p. 139.

II

In 1814, Charlotte agreed to marry the Prince of Orange. Although at first she had not been terribly impressed with the incompetent, uninviting individual whom the Whig lawyer Henry Brougham referred to as 'Young Frog,' there seemed to be nothing overtly offensive in his moral character.¹⁴ The regent greatly approved of the anticipated marriage, for a union with a Protestant prince who had fought under Wellington could cement an important alliance between Britain and Holland. Yet rumour had there was another reason the regent was happy about the marriage: it would likely remove his daughter from England to Holland. Threatened by her popularity and the popularity of her mother, he hoped that it would be a case of out of sight, out of the public mind.

However as Charlotte Bury, one of Princess Caroline's ladies noted, the princess was well aware of her father's hopes. Though the regent might 'not like a rising sun' in his own realm, Bury wrote, 'report also whispers that the *rising sun* is aware of this, and will not consent to the marriage, unless she is allowed to shine in her own dominions'.¹⁵ Indeed, in the course of the engagement, it became clear to the alarmed Charlotte that the Prince of Orange expected them to take permanent residence in Holland, where they must reside at least half of every year. After some consultation with her Whig advisors, she wrote to her father, informing him of her 'decided repugnance to a removal from this country'.¹⁶ To her confidantes, she shared her fears that if she were to lose the support of the British public, the regent would be

¹⁴ Hibbert, *George IV*, pp. 432-3; Robert Huish, *Memoirs of Charlotte*, p. 101.

¹⁵ Behrendt, p. 17.

¹⁶ Hibbert, *George IV*, p. 440.

free to divorce her mother, remarry and produce a (preferably male) heir who would supplant her:

As to going abroad ... I find by high and low that, naturally, it is a very unpopular measure in England ... and besides which, I have now no manner of doubt that it is decidedly *an object and wish of more than one* to get rid me if possible in that way.¹⁷

Charlotte, plainly sensitive to public sentiment, also identified one of the crucial reasons why the public would disapprove her choice of consort. The Dutch prince had, she confides, divorced his previous wife, and ‘*only for non-agreement of disposition & temper*’.¹⁸ Such personal inconstancy and disrespect for the vows of marriage would taint her own reputation with a British public that took marital fidelity very seriously.

Even after the Prince of Orange and his father agreed to sign a contract stating that Charlotte would not be forced to reside in Holland, she broke the engagement. Her intractability, coupled with the news that she had been entertaining a number of Prussian princes as possible alternative candidates, infuriated the regent. He called his daughter to Carlton House, where he informed her that her ladies in waiting would be dismissed immediately and she would be confined to a house in Windsor Forest. In what has been termed the ‘Warwick House Affair,’ the despairing Charlotte launched a small scale and short-lived, but on some levels, an effective mutiny. She fled (via a hailed hackney carriage) from her father’s to her mother’s house. In spite of her boldness and her one night of freedom, it became clear that she would have to accept her father’s punishment and settle into a life of enforced retirement. The Whig newspapers interpreted her refusal of the Prince of Orange as a patriotic stand against foreign usurpation. The regent was represented as an oriental despot, in parliament

¹⁷ Princess Charlotte, *Letters*, p. 162.

¹⁸ Princess Charlotte, *Letters*, p. 162.

where the Opposition accused him of acting as a barbarous Turkish tyrant or a Prussian corporal, rather than as a father. In such images as Charles William's *The Royal Pedagogue & his Ushers* (1814), his despotic tendencies were symbolized by his quasi-Chinese styled throne and his architectural plans for 'A Chines [sic] Bridge'. These oriental objects are connected to his dictatorial intentions to teach his daughter 'Chastity, Sobriety, and Fidelity with a birch-rod'.

The anonymous author of the Oriental political romance *Gulzara, Princess of Persia; or, the Virgin Queen*, cast the regent as 'Ali,' the ruler of Persia. He was a licentious husband and tyrant-father who had sacrificed his daughter, 'an unwilling victim to state considerations, in the manner of the more despotic sovereigns of Asia'.¹⁹ Making a none too subtle reference to the Warwick House Affair, the novel suggests that 'the more than usual restriction' that the regent-Ali placed on his virtuous and innocent daughter was directly related to the fact that his personal 'inclinations ... were not in his own power'.²⁰ The Prince of Orange was 'Calaf, the son of Ortugral,' a foreign prince who, for all his English (or Persian in the tale) education and his military service under Wellington (a Persian war hero named Selim), could never fit in with English customs and values. There was still 'something in him of the constitutional fog of the country of his ancestors,' the narrator explains, and the princess had no desire for 'a man of foreign ideas, habits, and idioms, whom it will take half a lifetime to naturalise or even understand'.²¹

The orientalizing of both the regent and the prince contrasted starkly with the representation of Charlotte as Britain's own beloved daughter. Charles Williams

¹⁹ [n. a.], *Gulzara, Princess of Persia; or, the Virgin Queen* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1816), p. 66

²⁰ *Gulzara*, pp. 62-3.

²¹ *Gulzara*, pp. 63, 186.

portrays the Warwick House Affair in his 1814 caricature *Plebeian Spirit or Coachée and the Heir Presumptive* (Pl. 17). The Prince of Orange is depicted as a tiny figure whose pose, as he hastily rides away, betrays his dishonourable intentions toward England's heir; in contrast, John Bull, Charlotte's slightly dumbfounded coach driver, is there to assist. The British lion—an omnipresent symbol in representations of Charlotte—appears to be slightly cowed, signifying her persecution (and thus, the persecution of the nation) by the manipulative regent (the figure lurking at the door). Here and elsewhere, Williams closely aligns the deeply wronged Charlotte with an equally wronged Britannia—a strategy which, as we have seen, her mother's supporters would fully exploit during the Queen Caroline Affair of 1820-21.²²

In another of Williams' 1814 pictures, *The Dutch Toy* (Pl. 18), Charlotte is a heroine with a serene, Madonna-like face who defends her honour and the honour of the nation from the machinations of a miniature toy prince. She is, in keeping with the English temperament, a markedly independent character. The Regent urges her on from behind the door, saying 'If you don't find pleasure in whipping the top, I shall whip the bottom,' but the song on the piano, from Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Duenna*, indicates that she knows her own mind:

An Obstinate Daughter's The plague of you [sic] life,
 No rest can you take tho your rid of your Wife
 At twenty she laughs at the duty you taught her
 Oh: what a plague is an Obstinate Daughter.

Charlotte's intentions are not those of a father who wants only to be free of her and her mother. Charlotte goes one step further in George Cruikshank's very similar image *Miss Endeavouring to Excite a Glow with her Dutch Play Thing*: refusing the regent's

²² See Chapter four; Charlotte is portrayed as Britannia in, for example, George Cruikshank's 1814 *The R-----t Kicking up a Row, or, Warwick House in an Uproar!!!*

Charlotte's intentions do not coincide with those of a father whose actions are determined only by his desire to be free of his daughter and his legitimate wife. In a remarkable similar picture, George Cruikshank's *Miss Endeavouring to Excite a Glow with her Dutch Play Thing*, Charlotte is portrayed as going one step further in her quest for independence. She refuses the regent's command to continue playing with her toy and taking up the whip, she tells him: 'No, No you may take the Top, but I'll keep the Whip'.²³

Such images reveal the extent to which Charlotte's personal life, like her father's, was made available for public consumption, but her trials and tribulations were interpreted in a much different light (and put to a much different use in the press). Charlotte's domestic conflicts, though naturally of some concern to a nation that celebrated dutiful daughters, was interpreted as a deeply patriotic stance. The press interpreted Charlotte's broken engagement and subsequent flight from her father's home as acts of resistance against foreign and domestic tyranny. She became an embodiment of British steadfastness, a source of national pride, a figurehead against internal and external threats to British culture. Britons used Charlotte to express moral outrage at the regent, to express the qualities they expected to see from future sovereigns and to define British values against the perceived sexual indulgence and excess associated with foreign cultures. Such verbal and visual portrayals of Charlotte as we have seen here demonstrate the morally and politically reactionary mood of the early nineteenth century.

In a royal biography, William Hone expressed such public sentiments when he

²³See also *A Broad Bottom Dynasty, the Orange Transplanted, or the Fruits of Union* (1814), where the prince is a 'broad-bottomed' interloper who had attempted to transplant his 'oranges' in the English rose garden. John Bull drives the outsider away, yelling 'Aye you may bump away Mr. Mynheer—but I'll be d---d if I give up the care of my Favourite Rose that I have water'd from the purest Stream'.



Pl. 17. Charles Williams, *Plebean Spirit or Coachée and the Heir Presumptive* (London: S.W. Fores, 1814). By permission of the British Museum.



Pl. 18. Charles Williams, *The Dutch Toy* (London: W. Holland, 1814). By permission of the British Museum.

interpreted 'her dislike of being obliged to reside in a foreign country' and her 'stipulat[ion] that she shall never be taken from her native shores' as proof that she possessed those two very British qualities, 'decision and frankness'.²⁴ As this commentary indicates, Charlotte's role tended to be expressed in what could be identified as cultural, rather than political terms. She was perceived as being above the fray of political factionalism and disconnected from the workings of government. The author of *Gulzara* insisted that the princess may have deeply influenced 'the moral sense' of the nation, but that on issues of politics, the people were 'confident' in their own endeavours and in the functioning of their government.²⁵ As such, enlightened and independent Britons did not require that their princess should sacrifice herself to forge a political alliance. The nation deplored the practice of giving away their own 'in the usual way of political wedlock, to *any petitioning foreigner* of the necessary rank'; rather they required that the heir to the throne choose a consort according to 'affection and reason' and with due consideration to compatibility of custom, principle and manners.²⁶ There were, Robert Huish noted, 'few individuals' of 'whatever party' who did not agree that an English princess should not be isolated 'from English manners and characters'.²⁷

A key aspect of Charlotte's Britishness was her defence of the family and advocacy of filial obligation. Her Whig supporters claimed that one of the real reasons she had ended marriage negotiations with the Prince of Orange was because he had joined with the regent against her mother. Once married, Charlotte would be barred

²⁴ William Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account of the Royal Marriage: consisting of original memoirs of Prince Leopold and Princess Charlotte* (London: Hone, 1816), p. 14

²⁵ *Gulzara*, p. 65, see 63-8, p. 66.

²⁶ *Gulzara*, pp. 164, 65, italics mine.

²⁷ Huish, *Memoir of Charlotte*, p. 117.

from visiting or receiving her mother.²⁸ It was alleged that, as a paragon of filial affection, she had been profoundly insulted that her betrothed had blatantly disrespected her mother by refusing to include her in the marriage negotiations. To her credit, Huish argued, she remained 'firm in her purpose of establishing a recognised and undisturbed right of intercourse with her royal mother'.²⁹ Charlotte had demonstrated that she would abandon neither a mother who needed the sympathy of a daughter *nor* a people who looked for a virtuous queen. Caricaturists portrayed Charlotte as the champion of filial fidelity against a corrupt father who attempted to prise apart mother and daughter. In George Cruikshank's 1814 *A Novice Entering the Convent of St. George*, a large and sinister abbess holds a nun's veil out for Charlotte and says 'Come! come Child take the veil & forget your own Mother & then your good papa will love you'. In his *British Spread Eagle*, the regent lavishes all his attention on Lady Hertford, whilst three other women wait in the wings. In stark contrast, Charlotte rushes forward to her mother, saying 'The Child that feels not for a Mothers woes can ne'er be call'd a Briton'. For her part, Caroline affectionately holds an oval miniature of her daughter and says 'then I'll to my Child my only Comfort'. In other words, the two women upheld those very values that the regent jeopardized.

The failure of Charlotte's engagement provided political rivals and moralists with opportunities to debate the wider effects of dissension in the royal family. Making no secret of his Whig affiliations, Robert Huish called into question the Tories' claim that the conflict between George and Caroline 'was merely a quarrel between man and wife,' and not 'a national concern'.³⁰ Although Huish supported Charlotte's decision to

²⁸ Huish, *Memoirs of Charlotte*, p. 119.

²⁹ Huish, *Memoirs of Charlotte*, p. 119.

³⁰ Huish, *Memoirs of Charlotte*, pp. 118-19.

end the engagement, the fact remained that ‘a matrimonial alliance, so favourable, so advantageous, to the country, in a political point of view, ha[d] been rejected, on account of the private and personal differences’ of her parents.³¹ Since Britons were themselves loyal and compassionate, then Charlotte’s display of filial duty must incite approval and sympathy in her subjects. Only those who did not have such a heart—that is, those who were not truly British—would withhold their support from such a princess, and such a devoted daughter.

III

In the oriental tale *Gulzara, Princess of Persia*, the nation’s politicians hope that Charlotte (Gulzara) will disregard the idea of a foreign consort and instead seek a suitor ‘whose views and hopes might be centered in Persia [i.e. England]’ and that his ‘manners, ideas, and expectations’ would match hers.³² In reality, there were no English candidates for Charlotte and she had married the German Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg in May 1816 (the year the book was published). Yet, Leopold was consistently represented as the consummate English gentleman. To many observers, it was natural that she, so innately British, would fancy someone like Leopold, who mirrored her character. Here is Huish’s analysis of her personal preferences when it came to men:

Her open, unsophisticated heart, alive to the dictates of truth, despised the unmeaning *verbiage* of the titled fool; and, in the fashionable grimaces of the effeminate coxcomb, she saw a degradation of the human character, and contemned the fluttering beings who practised them. It was the honest, blunt display of downright British worth that spoke to the heart of the Princess Charlotte; and the awkward salutation, and honest shake of the hand of an

³¹ Huish, *Memoirs of Charlotte*, pp. 118-9.

³² *Gulzara*, p. 67. check

English farmer, were to her of higher value than the touch of the velvet hand of the essenced beau, or the dancing-school bow of the *petit-maitre*.³³

Charlotte is cast here as the admirer of a certain type of male 'Britishness' that might more accurately be termed 'John Bullishness' against another type of man—the continental 'beau' or 'petit-maitre' that incessantly spouts worthless 'verbiage'. Consciously or unconsciously, the suggestion was that she favoured men who were the opposite of her dandyish father, and by extension, the opposite of the Dutch prince, who was in many ways himself a 'titled fool'.

At the commencement of their marriage in 1816, caricaturists produced a series of rather remarkable images—remarkable in that they all portrayed Charlotte and Leopold on the back of John Bull. Two of these, *Leap Year, Or John Bull's Peace Establishment and State Physicians Bleeding John Bull to Death!!* criticized the government allocation of funds for the establishment of the couple's household. In *Leap Year* (Pl. 19), the extremely overburdened John Bull is nearly crushed under the financial weight of Charlotte and Leopold, whilst the regent urges the couple to 'Push on! Preach Economy! and when you have got your money follow my example'. Charlotte indicates she will follow her father's example by informing Leopold, who came to the marriage virtually penniless, that she will teach him 'an English Waltz'. Leopold is at first unwilling to exploit the British people and begs his new wife to ease up. Nevertheless, his sword, marked 'German Steel,' suggests that like other members of the royal family, he will learn the waltz, that is, he will learn to 'steal' from John Bull.

³³ Huish, *Memoirs of Charlotte*, p. 145.



Pl. 19. Artist Unknown, *Leap Year, Or John Bulls Peace Establishment* (London: S.W. Fores, 1816). By permission of the British Museum.

The cost of maintaining the royal family is also an issue in *Balancing Accounts*. In this image, Leopold and Charlotte seesaw on the back of John Bull. The lightness of Leopold's pockets has him tottering high in the air with only his German sausage to provide weight. The financially well-endowed Charlotte, however, is securely weighted with British money. True to form, the regent attempts to balance this seesaw by adding weight to Leopold's side with bottles of punch, symbols of his profligacy. But in this second image, Charlotte, like John Bull himself, is associated with symbols of nationhood: the ubiquitous lion oversees his charge and she holds an English rose. John Bull kneels on the Magna Charta, his club of British oak at the ready (which, in the spirit of chivalry, he refers to as 'a Knight'). The royal couple are at once

disparaged and celebrated: for Charlotte's comment that 'I shall get heavier in time' suggests that she will gain monetarily from the nation, but it also suggests that the nation will prosper under her reign. Since it is she alone who will 'get heavier,' this is likely an anticipation of pregnancy.

The third caricature, an illustration to an essay on 'Royal Nuptials' in the Whiggish periodical *The Scourge*, John Bull again offers his back to the couple, but in contrast to the other two images, he wears a jovial expression, indicating his willingness to support the seesawing couple. Still, as the accompanying text makes clear, such an offer is not without its conditions. John Bull would enthusiastically 'consent to any reasonable sacrifice ... conducive to the happiness and comfort of the reigning family' but the couple must remember that he was 'a testy and recalcitrating animal' who would 'not be compelled to generous action, nor *dragooned* into charity'.³⁴ These images insist that public support came with certain obligations.

So that there was no confusion as to what was expected of the newcomer Leopold, pamphleteers like William Hone outlined his duties precisely. Quite simply, Hone wrote, the new consort must 'occupy a large space in the public eye' and if nature co-operated, become "'father to a line of Kings'".³⁵ Conspicuous from this short list of duties was any political role: Leopold would 'not indeed be called to the exercise of sovereign power,' Hone wrote, though this did not make his 'high' duties any less important.³⁶ In fact, the people's support hinged on Leopold's *renunciation* of any practical political power. He was expected to assume a domestic role, to be a father, to set a moral example for the nation. The 'truth' that the new prince must imbibe, Hone

³⁴ *The Scourge*, 11 (1 April 1816), pp. 246-47.

³⁵ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 30.

³⁶ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 30, italics mine.

urged, was that 'the surest road' to secure the affections of the people, was to demonstrate 'a regard for the virtues of domestic life, which thank Heaven, still *maintain a great empire in this country*'.³⁷ The tacit message here was that the public had grown increasingly intolerant of the royal family's scandalous relationships, but particularly those, to use Steven Behrendt's term, that were perceived to be '*politically* illicit' and therefore doubly dangerous 'because they stemmed not from sexual passion but from calculated designs on power'.³⁸ The regent's affairs with conniving mistresses (such as Lady Hertford) who held sway over his politics had demonstrated how politically detrimental and sexually threatening were these doubly illicit relationships.

To most observers it seemed that Leopold could not be more different from his father-in-law. The regent's form proclaimed his love of fashion and his affection for fine food and wine, but Leopold's 'manly person' displayed 'no appearance of frippery or false pride'.³⁹ Physically, in body and in dress, Leopold epitomized that powerful combination of manliness and Englishness, Hone wrote approvingly, for along with 'the plainness of his customary attire,' he had a face that was 'intelligent, good natured and diffident' and manners that were 'simple, unaffected, and unassuming'.⁴⁰ All of these things 'present a picture most congenial to English taste, because they are indicative of all that is most respectful in the English character'.⁴¹ The Tory biographer Thomas Green agreed that Leopold seemed to demonstrate 'qualities of the head and heart, with a character and principles that ... completely harmonize[d]

³⁷ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 31.

³⁸ Behrendt, p. 75.

³⁹ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 20.

with the feelings, the notions, nay even the prejudices of the British nation'.⁴² He was reported to have applied himself to the study of English so that he spoke 'remarkably well'; he had studied the nation's manners and its history, so that he could 'identify himself with his people ... and accommodate himself to their habits'.⁴³ In fact, the Leopold described by Hone was the model of a perfect country squire: rising early, he preferred to have an English breakfast of 'ham, eggs, and fowl, with his tea'.⁴⁴ Moreover, Hone proclaimed with not a little pride, the newspapers had circulated the story of the young consort's first fox hunt: after rapturously watching the event, he announced that it was his express wish to participate in future hunts.⁴⁵

The desire to adopt Leopold as the devoted consort of Britain's beloved princess gave rise to some rather resourceful, if not imaginative, readings of history. Hone, for instance, contended that the granting of Charlotte's hand to Leopold 'was England giving her daughter in marriage to the descendants of one of her earliest race of princes—the Saxons'.⁴⁶ This is a remarkably hospitable view of Leopold's origins since pamphleteers often decried the fact that certain less loved sovereigns of the Brunswick line originated from the alien nation of Germany. In this case, however, the union of Charlotte and Leopold was seen as a glorious *re*-union of two strands of the same heroic race—a race that had, lamentably, been divided by topography. Such a fashioning of Leopold's ancestry was part of a compulsion to identify and glorify Britain's cultural origins. Whether the original Britons be imagined as Celtic or Saxon, they were characterized as manly, heroic, honourable people—characteristics that

⁴² Thomas Green, *Memoirs of her late Royal Highness Charlotte-Augusta of Wales and of Saxe-Cobourg* (Liverpool: Nuttal, et al., 1818), p. 188.

⁴³ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Hone, *Hone's Authentic Account*, p. 30.

contrasted sharply with the perceived 'effeminate and luxurious' state of society associated with the regent and his circle.⁴⁷ Linking Leopold with the nation's ancestry established a sense of 'continuity' with the past, and as Sheila Cottrell points out, 'continuity conferred legitimacy, it proved efficacy, it was the test of character'.⁴⁸ Leopold passed the test of character: his manliness, his openness, his affection for Charlotte, his love of the country and the simple pleasures of home enabled the nation to adopt him as their own, much as they had adopted Charlotte—a daughter tyrannized by her father and forcefully separated from her mother—a few years before.

IV

The happy union of Charlotte and Leopold was short-lived, however, for Charlotte died in childbirth on 6 November 1817. Her unexpected death was a truly momentous public event that inspired, rather ironically, an unprecedented upsurge in her already significant popularity. Reams of newspaper notices, memorial lectures, sermons, poems and numerous consumer goods such as china, silver and tokens commemorated her for removing herself from the glare of public life to settle in domestic retirement with her beloved husband. Here, for instance, is Leigh Hunt's tribute to the departed princess, published in *The Examiner* three days after her death:

The first and greatest feeling of the country on this occasion is *certainly not a political one*. If any dreary sceptic in sentiment should ask why the sorrow is so great for this young woman, more than another, we answer, because this young woman is the representative of *all* the others—because she stood on high, in the eyes of us all, embodying as it were the ideal as well as actual images of youth, and promise, and blooming womanhood—not only these *but the images of happy love, and wifeliness, and approaching maternity*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cohen, p. 317. See Colin Kidd, *British Ethnicity before Nationalism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

⁴⁸ Sheila Cottrell, 'The Devil on Two Sticks: Franco-Phobia in 1803,' *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. Raphael Samuel, 3 vols. (London, 1989), I: 263.

⁴⁹ Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner* (9 November 1817); first and third italics mine.

What is immediately striking is how Hunt identifies the death of Charlotte as a distinctly non-political event. Hunt's report not only celebrates her for what she *was*, but also, for what she was *not*. She 'stood on high' in public estimation because she chose to the roles of wife and mother over a political function or affiliation.

In fact, Hunt was only one of a body of writers—Tory, Whig, radical, Catholic, Anglican, Dissenting, male and female, young and old—who represented Charlotte in almost purely domestic, familial terms. As heir to the throne, she would have been the head of the body politic, but she was fêted for being distinctly *apolitical*. She had contributed to public affairs, a reviewer for the *British Review and London Critical Journal* wrote, because she had 'raised very high the *moral* credit of the country'.⁵⁰ The social reformer, lecturer, and a leading Scottish evangelical, Dr Thomas Chalmers acknowledged that as heir, Charlotte's death was ostensibly a 'matter of deep political interest,' but it had been 'so blended and mixed up with' such a 'very deep and affecting tenderness' that it did 'not wear the aspect of an affair of politics at all, but of an affair of the heart'.⁵¹ According to Joseph Ivimey, the famed minister of the Eagle Street Church in London and author of the *History of English Baptists*, the affection that Charlotte's life had inspired separated her from the era's other national heroes. 'The love of country' led citizens to mourn the loss of such brotherly figures 'as Pitt, Fox or Nelson,' but the loss of Charlotte was more deeply felt because her 'conjugal affection' brought her 'close home to the loyal Briton's heart!'⁵²

⁵⁰ italics mine, 'The Late Princess Charlotte,' *The British Review, and London Critical Journal*, 11:21 (February 1818), p. 9.

⁵¹ Thomas Chalmers, *A Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church, Glasgow, on Wed, Nov. 19, 1817, the Day of the Funeral of Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales* (Glasgow: John Smith and Son, etc. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, J. Hatchard, etc., 1817) p. 7.

⁵² Ivimey, Joseph. *Reasons Why the Protestant Dissenters in Particular Lament the Death of her Royal Highness The Princess Charlotte Augusta* (London: Button and Son, et al., 1817), p. 15.

This is not to say that politics was never mentioned in conjunction with Charlotte's death. In his essay 'On the Death of the Princess Charlotte,' for instance, Percy Shelley had much to say about such timely political issues as the current monarch's 'thirst for expenditure and bloodshed,' the need for 'a free representation of the people,' and the execution of three men (Brandreth, Ludlum and Turner) found guilty of treason.⁵³ Yet, Shelley did not speak of politics in relation to Charlotte, but rather questioned the reasonableness of mourning a privileged princess whilst the families of the government's victims were left destitute, heartbroken and forgotten. On those occasions when writers and orators used a political language in relation to the princess at all, it was often redefined so that its political meaning was replaced with a moral one. So for example, 'liberality,' as demonstrated by Charlotte, was defined as giving charity to the poor and 'rationality,' as exemplified by Leopold and Charlotte, was the quiet study of religious doctrine.⁵⁴ The Unitarian Nathaniel Philipps defined 'LIBERTY' as Charlotte's rejection of 'all political considerations' in favour of the cause of personal happiness.⁵⁵ Similarly, to be 'useful' did *not* require any intervention in the public sphere nor did it entail active participation in politics; rather a life of usefulness was one dedicated to the cause of domestic bliss.

In fact, Charlotte's domesticity was represented as the antidote to the political extremism of the French Revolution. The *British Review and London Critical Journal* noted that 'there was something in the style of [Charlotte's] sentiments and habits that partook strongly of a period anterior to the new principles which had their origin in the

⁵³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'An Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte' (1817), *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 623-631 (pp. 627, 628).

⁵⁴ 'Sermon by Joseph Kerby, V. D. M., preached at the Old Chapel, Cliff, Lewes, Sussex,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 35, 'Sermon by William Marsh, A. M., preached at Colchester,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 28.

⁵⁵ 'Sermon by Nathaniel Phillips, D. D., preached at the Unitarian Chapel, Norfolk-Street, Sheffield,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 29.

revolutionary epoch of France'.⁵⁶ Though this reactionary statement infers that Charlotte herself had been anti-revolutionary, it is clearly her perceived moral—not her political—conservatism is eulogized. Charlotte had promised to be a figurehead for a very different kind of a revolution: a revolution of manners and morals. She was, the *British Review* proclaimed, a figure in whom 'the old and faded English mind, with its *indigenous* properties and *national* enthusiasm, seemed to be restored ... to its *original* freshness and *primitive* lustre'.⁵⁷ Within the singular figure of Charlotte, 'something so warm and womanly, something so *natively* noble, so much soul, so much reality, so much *natural* relish, such heartiness of sentiment' had withstood the corrupting influence of court life.⁵⁸

The royal couple's decision to settle at rural Claremont House in rural Surrey was a rejection of the vices of London as the continental licentiousness that had allegedly infiltrated English society. The couple's 'taste for those simple and domestic pleasures' that 'were *once* the characteristics of our country,' an observer wistfully noted; 'seems to carry us back into the ease and simplicity of ancient times'.⁵⁹ The pair had seemed to have adopted a British, rural, much more gracious and honest way of life which hearkened back to some idealized past when families and communities were more harmoniously and intimately knit. Somewhat paradoxically, this domestic retirement was perceived to be the best kind of preparation for the throne; in fact, many writers argued that it actually *guaranteed* her future success as the political head of state. 'By the culture and improvement' of 'the private virtues of a domestic situation,'

⁵⁶ 'The Late Princess Charlotte,' *The British Review, and London Critical Journal*, 11:21 (February 1818) p. 9. *italics mine*.

⁵⁷ *The British Review*, 11:21 (February 1818), p. 9.

⁵⁸ *The British Review*, 11:21 (February 1818), p. 9, *italics mine*.

⁵⁹ [n.a.] *Nation in Tears, A Sermon, Occasioned by the deeply-lamented death of her Royal Highness, the Princess Charlotte Augusta*, 6th ed. Enlarged (London: D. Cox, 1817) pp. 26-27.

the Lord Bishop of Chester informed his congregation, 'she was qualifying herself for that exalted office' of Queen.⁶⁰ Her potential greatness on the throne, James Lindsay preached, was discernible in her preference for 'private duties' over 'public amusements' and in her

voluntary retirement from the gaieties of fashion and the adulations of the great,—in her preference of simple pleasures and improving occupations,—in her affability to her dependents,—her consideration for the poor—and above all, in her unremitting devotedness to the man of her heart.⁶¹

These were the pivotal criteria that separated the great monarchs from those who won neither the loyalty nor the affection of their subjects. More than anything else, Lindsay emphasized, Charlotte's preference for 'the comfort of a husband' over 'the admiration of a court, proved that she had 'fitted herself for the successful government, of a free, a generous, and a truly loyal people'.⁶²

These arguments propose that Charlotte performed her *public* duty from within her *private* life. As Esther Schor has observed in her study of such mourning literature, the theoretically separate realms of private and public life were '*identified* with one another expressly to argue for the necessity of domesticating the nation's rulers'.⁶³ A domesticated sovereign offered the nation justice, understanding, selflessness, equanimity and benevolence. The belief was, as Lindsay put it, that 'the offices and endearments of the domestic state' provided 'the only effectual check against the projects of ambition, and against the abuse of power to the purposes of selfishness'.⁶⁴ Such sentiments were consistently repeated, at times almost word-for-word: Charlotte's

⁶⁰ 'Sermon of George Henry Law, the Lord Bishop of Chester, preached at the Cathedral Church of Chester,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 4.

⁶¹ 'Sermon by James Lindsay, D. D., preached at the Meeting-House, Monkwell-Street,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 68.

⁶² Lindsay, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 69.

⁶³ Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), p. 199.

⁶⁴ Lindsay, *Sacred Memorial*, p. 69, italics mine.

conspicuous display of 'the numerous virtues of domestic life' and her 'mild and maternal' manner proved, the Rev. James Rudge told his Limehouse congregation, that once 'invested with the first authority of the state,' she would have tempered the administration of justice with mercy.⁶⁵

In light of the fact that she had never—nor ever would—occupy the throne, the tendency to rank her amongst the greatest of England's historic queens, seems rather a stretch. Yet, scores of mourners did just that. Britons had anticipated the same happiness and prosperity 'achieved under female reigns' in the past'.⁶⁶ Charlotte would seem to have very little in common with the political acuity and driving ambition of Elizabeth I; yet in his *Reasons Why the Protestant Dissenters in Particular Lament the Death of her Royal Highness The Princess Charlotte Augusta*, Joseph Ivimey not only compared Charlotte to the exceptional Queen Elizabeth, but found the latter wanting. He proposed that both women were witty and intelligent, but that Charlotte surpassed her predecessor because she was warmer, more affectionate and showed greater generosity: 'she possessed qualities to which Elizabeth had no pretensions—singleness of mind, openness of manner, and the most gushing tenderness of heart that ever warmed a female breast'.⁶⁷ Charlotte was also like 'Mary (not the bloody) but the virtuous and amiable consort of William III,' he claimed, in that both women occupied themselves with domestic duties and such commendable pastimes as reading.⁶⁸ The comparisons made here reveal something of the changing definition of a great sovereign. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, domesticity had plainly become the underpinning of

⁶⁵ Rudge, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 17.

⁶⁶ 'George Henry Law, Lord Bishop of Chester, preached at the Cathedral Church of Chester,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Ivimey, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Ivimey, p. 19.

‘greatness.’ Since in her very short life Charlotte was perceived to have fulfilled this criterion, she joined the ranks of those great queens that Hannah More had assembled for her instruction in *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* twelve years earlier. As a child, Charlotte had imbibed Foxite principles; as a young adult, she had been supported by the Whigs in her struggle for some small independence. But as the numbers of sermons and pamphlets that inventoried her estimable domestic qualities indicate, the nation required—or desired—very little political participation from the current generation of sovereigns. Charlotte fulfilled her public role perfectly, not by performing any overt political acts, but by living a virtuous private life and by appearing to be the perfect daughter and wife. In death, she had become the definitive standard of the domestic model of monarchy.

V

In the 1790s, the national split over the issue of the French revolution had given rise to a climate of suspicion that had greatly eroded the sense of national unity. Since then, the feelings of alienation, or, as Scottish clergyman Robert Culbertson put it to his Leith congregation, the growth of ‘jealousies’ between ‘those in power and the community at large’ had seemed to have intensified, so that, in the last decades, the people’s mistrust of the government and each other had become deeply implanted in society.⁶⁹ Otherwise, Culbertson posited,

why are we at this moment sitting under the suspension of the Habeas corpus act? Whether our rulers did right or wrong in laying this restraint upon our liberties, is not a topic for pulpit discussion. But one thing certain is, and in this light we have every where to do with it, that when the rulers of a nation

⁶⁹ Robert Culbertson, *The Pillar of Rachel’s Grave; or, a Tribute of respect to departed worth: A Sermon, Preached November 16, 1817, before the Associate Congregation of Leith, on Occasion of the Deaths of Her Royal and Serene Highness the Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales and Saxe-Cobourg, and her Infant Son*, second ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh: Ogle, Allardice & Thomson, 1817), p. 38.

and the people come to be filled with *jealousies* of each other ... that nation appears to be upon the verge of ruin.⁷⁰

'Jealousy' was the root cause of the deep divisions that had appeared in the political landscape, and those divisions had since proliferated so that the nation's communities and even its families were in conflict.

It was time, propagandists such as Culbertson argued, that the entire nation—people, princes, nobility and government—fulfilled a collective duty to reunite and to mend the schisms that divided the nation. In 1817, the deceased Charlotte provided the necessary focus for this project of reunification. Propagandists and religious moralists effectively kept her alive in the public eye so that they could trade on her appeal as a shared cultural experience. As a symbol of the values shared by all Britons, she could be used to counter disaffection and to turn public attention from political grievances. Charlotte *could* become the figurehead for this project of national reunification because she, like George III, appeared to remain above political infighting and party factionalism. Rather ironically then, the very process by which she was apoliticized or domesticated, actually imparted her with the critical political role of countering dissension and promoting a unified, conservative politics.

She was used to cast radicals, anti-monarchists, republicans, reformers and even Whigs as threats to national unity and patriotic feeling. The British nation 'mourns as ONE,' the Baptist poet and children's writer Susanna Watts claimed, so that 'there is no Party *here*—no private view'.⁷¹ Similarly, the Rev. T. Jervis congratulated Leeds mourners for being unmoved by the 'motives of party spirit, or the paltry prejudices of

⁷⁰ Culbertson, p. 38, italics mine.

⁷¹ Susanna Watts, *Elegy on the Death of the Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales* (Leicester: I. Cockshaw, Jr. [1817]), p 11.

political intrigue'.⁷² In Glasgow, Thomas Chalmers expressed his pleasure at observing that 'all party-irritations' had transmuted 'into one common and overwhelming sensibility'.⁷³ The death of Charlotte, these orators and writers insisted, was a national family tragedy that superseded comparatively unimportant and self-interested political concerns. There was no room for opposition, no place for the voice of dissent, no scope for political debate.

In addition, commentators used the opportunity of public mourning to suggest ways of countering the 'political jealousy' that also festered between the people and a prince who had raised himself to such 'a height of inaccessible grandeur; that he was 'beyond the reach of their sympathies'.⁷⁴ Princes, John Philip advised, could not command the allegiance of their subjects with 'a parade about the principles of legitimacy, or by the mere trappings of royalty'.⁷⁵ Thomas Chalmers agreed: the people would not see princes 'as the inhabitants of a familiar home—as the members of an affectionate family' unless they were stripped of their 'spendid notoriety'.⁷⁶ They could only inspire loyalty, affection and respect, by demonstrating the same values, interests and feelings as their people. In other words, princes had to demonstrate 'those virtues which adorned the character of our lamented Princess, and which are necessary to respectability in the *ordinary walks of life*'.⁷⁷

The generic term 'prince' is used in these passages, but of course, the regent is the implied target. These are some of the surprisingly few places he is mentioned,

⁷² 'Sermon preached by the Rev. T. Jervis, Mill-Hill Chapel, Leeds,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 126.

⁷³ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ John Philip, *A Sermon Delivered in the Congregational Chapel, George Street, Aberdeen, on Wednesday, November 19, 1817, the Day of the Funeral of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales* (Aberdeen: D. Chalmers, 1817), p. 35.

⁷⁶ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered at the Tron Church*, p. 16.

⁷⁷ John Philip, p. 35, italics mine.

implicitly or explicitly in connection with his only child's death; most often, he is conspicuous by his absence. Writers treated him as a sort of nasty anomaly on the family tree and in their elegies, simply dropped him from the monarchical succession, tracing instead a continuous chain of inheritance and mutual sympathy between their beloved king and his true successor, his beloved grandchild. As the Rev. Edward Craig simply stated, 'she was heir to the throne of her grandfather'.⁷⁸ Looking back on Charlotte's life, propagandists described how the nation had waited expectantly for her birth with George III himself. In his 1796 *Grandpappa in his Glory!!!* Isaac Cruikshank had depicted George III as a domesticated, night-capped grandfather, whose royal status fits comfortably with such homespun objects as a dozing cat and drying baby linens. With every spoon of pap he fed her, the baby Charlotte imbibed his personal values, anticipating continuity between the two reigns. Then, as Charlotte matured, the nation-family had joined together with the grandparent and had 'watched with affectionate hope those immortal tints kindling into greater brilliancy around his grandchild'.⁷⁹ Then when the king was sadly beset by illness, the nation had 'gazed on her as the new-born phoenix, ready in due time to spread her protecting wing over the people which he had left'.⁸⁰ Charlotte's demonstration of 'the numerous virtues of domestic life,' the Rev. James Rudge declared, had enabled the people to 'trace a faithful likeness between the conduct of our beloved Princess and that of our good and afflicted King'.⁸¹ In her tragically short life, she had proven that she had 'inherited the

⁷⁸ 'Sermon by the Rev. Edward Craig, B. A. Chapham,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 109.

⁷⁹ Craig, in *Sacred Memorial*, pp. 109-10.

⁸⁰ Craig, in *Sacred Memorial*, pp. 109-10.

⁸¹ Rudge, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 17.

virtues of her grandsire'; had she lived, 'she would have received the same tokens of loyalty and affection' as the 'beloved and venerable' old king.⁸²

By excluding George IV from their tributes and focusing instead on Charlotte and George III, memorialists could argue much more convincingly that anti-monarchical sentiment had no place in a unified, patriotic nation. In Durham, the Rev. H. Phillpotts was proud to observe how the united expressions of 'heartfelt sympathy' for both the princess and the afflicted George III flew in the face 'of that false philosophy which has dared to deny the possibility of a nation loving its rulers'.⁸³ In Aberdeen, the Rev. John Philip also equated the love the nation felt for Charlotte with their affection for George III, praising his audience for their unaffected sensibility, a particularly British quality. The regard shown the two royal personages demonstrated how 'the inhabitants of these lands ... may differ in opinion respecting the measures of administration; but there is no prejudice against royalty in this country, no want of reverence and affection to the house of Brunswick'.⁸⁴ Collective mourning, they contended, distinguished the dependable, generous spirit of British patriotism from the treacherous disloyalty of other nations (specifically, of course, France). Philip observed proudly that Britain had proved to other nations that it was 'the most enlightened nation in the world' and it demonstrated 'to surrounding states, an edifying example of its loyalty'.⁸⁵ Such a heartfelt and a *voluntary* display of sensibility toward deserving rulers was a source of collective pride for Britons who did not need to resort to jails

⁸² Rudge, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 17.

⁸³ 'Sermon by the Rev. H. Phillpotts, M. A., St. Margaret's, Durham,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 125, italics mine

⁸⁴ John Philip, p. 34.

⁸⁵ John Philip, p. 34.

and gibbets—or other forms of inherently ineffectual social control—in order to maintain domestic harmony.

The sense of unity inspired by the process of mourning had demonstrated to many observers the need to combat the social jealousy and widespread resentment that had developed between the ranks in recent years. Clergyman urged members of the aristocracy to fulfil their prescribed social roles by patronizing the more humble members of their communities and by incorporating them into their families. Propagandists described, often in very precise terms, how Charlotte and Leopold had cultivated a sense of kinship in their communities and had fostered a ‘mutual state of sentiment ... between the different orders of the community’.⁸⁶ ‘In many country towns and villages, there are respectable and industrious shopkeepers, who do not receive the patronage of the neighbouring nobility and gentry, by supplying their households with articles for domestic use,’ the author of *The Nation in Tears* admonished, but Charlotte and Leopold had gained the love and loyalty of their neighbours by employing them—and by making ‘regular payment of their bills monthly and quarterly’.⁸⁷ The lower orders needed to feel not only financially, but also emotionally bound to their social superiors. The royal couple had inspired emotions that were as ‘soft and tender as womanhood’ in their domestic servants and farm labourers’.⁸⁸ There was a lesson to be learned from the fact that every ‘peasant in our land,’ was grieving with Leopold.⁸⁹ When in any village of any corner of the nation, a respected member of a community died, ‘the report of his weeping children, or of his

⁸⁶ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ *The Nation in Tears*, p. 27-8.

⁸⁸ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, pp. 18, 15.

distracted widow' should 'be sent through the neighbourhood'.⁹⁰ Likewise, if 'an infant of his family be in suffering' then 'the mothers of the humble vicinity' should be sought out 'for counsel and assistance'.⁹¹ These little acts of inclusion would bring the community together, so that everyone from the lowest to the highest would be united in grief, in worry, in hope and in happiness.

VI

Sermonizers and elegists did not limit themselves to targeting the vices of the regent, the factionalism of political parties or the irresponsibility of the upper orders, but turned their moralizing gaze on the entire vice-ridden nation. The fact that someone so beloved, so unblemished, and with such potential for greatness had been snatched from the people, they argued, was a sure sign of God's displeasure. Anyone who did not recognize that God was 'pleading a controversy' with the nation, Robert Culbertson told his Leith audience, must be 'hardened against reproof'.⁹² For the author of *The Real or Moral Cause of the Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte's Death*, this national tragedy, along with the recent 'desolating wars,' 'unproductive seasons,' and political 'discontent and sedition' verified that there existed an 'inseparable connection ... between national guilt and national punishment'.⁹³ In fact, the author claimed that Britons had become so 'universally and incorrigibly corrupt' that their 'continuance as a nation' appeared rather 'doubtful'.⁹⁴ The Rev. John Naune of Ashford took a slightly different tack, but he condemned the nation in equally strong terms. God had taken

⁹⁰ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, pp. 18, 15.

⁹¹ Thomas Chalmers, *Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church*, p. 15.

⁹² Culbertson, p. 38.

⁹³ *The Real or Moral Cause of her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte's Death, with Authentic and Interesting Particulars of that Tragic Event*, second ed. (London: R. Clay, 1817), pp. 18, 30.

⁹⁴ *Real or Moral Causes*, pp. 18, 14.

Charlotte not so much to punish the nation, he pronounced, but rather to protect her from the calamity that would inevitably befall a nation teeming with sin.⁹⁵

Charlotte may have evoked a more virtuous, more chivalrous, more culturally pure era in British history, but the nation as a whole hearkened back to a *much less* heroic past. Britain was compared variously to Sodom and Gomorrah and to those formerly great societies that, once descended into profligacy, had been destroyed by divine retribution: Jerusalem, Babylon, Constantinople, Rome. In the opinion of the Reverend Henry Lacey, Charlotte's death was God's punishment for a people who had created a modern-day Sodom of the metropolis. There was no question, he argued, as to why the people's 'evil passions' had been dealt such 'sudden and powerful a restraint,' for among the 'fashionable *and* unfashionable quarters' of society, he thundered, 'immorality and vice' had become so rampant and 'transgressions' so numerous, that 'every one must be convinced' that the nation warranted an even 'heavier loss'.⁹⁶ Britons, another clergyman warned, were 'as much wedded to carnal pursuits, as in the days of Noah, or of Lot' for they had reached such a 'heaven daring pitch of wickedness' that the 'very air of Britain' had become 'tainted with vice'.⁹⁷

Britain was also following the frightening example of more modern precedents. From her 'own shores' she had seen how 'the prevalence and toleration of infidelity and licentiousness' had caused France's downfall.⁹⁸ Yet apathetic Britons refused to pay heed to such an immediate and alarming example, and instead stood nonchalantly by whilst their once-virtuous nation was contaminated by foreign depravity. Britons,

⁹⁵ 'Sermon preached by the Rev. John Naune, D. D., Ashford,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 116.

⁹⁶ *Real or Moral Cause*, p. 70, italics mine.

⁹⁷ *Nation in Tears*, pp. 14, 23.

⁹⁸ *The Real of Moral Cause*, p. 18.

John Naune declared, 'were daily implanting' the vices of their 'infidel neighbours'.⁹⁹ With such a pronouncement, the conservative author of *The Real or Moral Cause of her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte's Death* could not agree more. He warned Britons to avoid any ideas and principles that had even the taint of French Jacobinism about them. 'We have to deplore the contagion of [France's] vices' he warned for past 'intercourse with foreign nations has lowered our moral tone'.¹⁰⁰ In the last two and a half decades—since the fall of the Bastille—the face of Britain had been altered insidiously. Now, moralists claimed, Charlotte's death forced the nation to assess the damage, to take stock of the long list of the nation's burgeoning crimes. 'Licentiousness, luxury, prodigality, selfishness, and avarice' had made 'rapid and portentous strides'; tradesmen were 'destitute of the principles of honour and integrity'; people were enamoured of 'waltzes and similar dances'; cities overflowed with 'lotteries, gin-shops', 'Parks and Tea-gardens' (the 'outlet[s] of our degenerate metropolis'); in other words, Britons had abandoned 'those moral ties which should bind mankind to each other in love and reciprocal acts of kindness'.¹⁰¹

As Donna Andrew has recently observed, adultery had become identified increasingly in this era as a vice that destroyed communities, threatened property, plunged families into despair and caused political upheaval. For the author of *A Real or Moral Cause*, there was no worse crime than adultery, indeed, there was hardly a 'language sufficiently powerful and appropriate' to describe its baneful influence'.¹⁰² It was a 'national and deepening stain' that had 'very deeply affected our character,

⁹⁹ Naune, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ *The Real and Moral Cause* p. 25.

¹⁰¹ *The Real and Moral Cause*, pp. 19, 23, 24, 20; *Nation in Tears*, p. 11.

¹⁰² *Real or Moral Cause*, p. 21.

existence, and prosperity as a nation'.¹⁰³ The handmaiden of adultery was Prostitution, 'a demoralizing vice' that had reached unparalleled proportions, so that 'not less than one hundred thousand courtezans'—'a host of female demons'—infested the nation (half of whom inhabited the 'dissolute metropolis').¹⁰⁴ People had become so accustomed to seeing prostitutes and reading about the scandalous details of adulterous affairs in newspapers and other scandalous literature that they had come to view adultery as a 'fashionable' pastime—a pastime which previously carried a sentence of death for perpetrators.¹⁰⁵ To publicize marital infidelity, the author proposed, was to sanction it. To sanction adultery was to not only destroy individual families, but also to destroy any chance the nation had of uniting as a family.

VII

The sermons and pamphlets that *diagnosed* society's ills also *prescribed* its remedy. It was one thing to acknowledge transgressions, but another thing altogether to stamp it out. The sense was that nothing less than a 'national and radical reformation' of manners and morals could prevent a further decline in the nation's fortunes.¹⁰⁶ Since, as one clergyman put it, 'a nation is but a larger family, a more numerous and extensive household,' this revolution in morals could only be accomplished with participation from every member of every household, from Carlton House to John Bull's cottage.¹⁰⁷ This statement captured the view of a veritable phalanx of modern-day moralists who wished to add their names to a long list of 'patriarchs, prophets and apostles, pastors and teachers, and moralists together with experienced and reflecting men' who had

¹⁰³ *Real or Moral Cause*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Real or Moral Cause*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Real or Moral Cause* p. 22.

¹⁰⁶ *Real or Moral Cause*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ 'Sermon preached by J. East, A. B., Campden [sic?]' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 107.

risen up throughout history to act heroically against vice when it threatened civilization.¹⁰⁸ This contingent of moral improvers assembled behind Charlotte, the figurehead of their campaign. Without question, moralists argued, reform must begin with the ‘sons and daughters of fashion and dissipation’; that is, those who were ‘transported with pleasure, inflated by renown, or giddy with vanity’; ‘those who in high *life are living in pleasure and dead while they live*’.¹⁰⁹ If aristocrats were at the head of this reform project, then the issue of aristocratic adultery was at the heart of it. Adultery was condemned as the *natural* result of aristocratic marriages formed for the purposes of economic or political gain. The belief was, as Thomas Erskine stated in one adultery case, that neither “‘wars [n]or treaties ... nor all the tricks and artifices of the State” could stabilize the nation if the upper orders continued to live “‘in cold and alienated embraces, amidst the enervating rounds of shallow dissipations”’.¹¹⁰

Historically, English princesses had been forced, in the name of political expediency, to enter into unwelcome unions in order to cement diplomatic ties. Such marriages, Thomas Toller preached at Kettering, which obliged a princess ‘to give her hand and retain her heart,’ rendered the ‘palace an house of sorrow’ and transformed the ‘robes of state into fetters’.¹¹¹ These political or economic unions did not so much improve international relations as threaten domestic peace. Charlotte, however, had bravely rejected this model of royal matrimony and had insisted on ‘the union of hearts as well as the junction of hands’.¹¹² In fact, Charlotte’s decision was construed as such an assertion of autonomy that it was characterized as a *subversive* act, a revolt against the

¹⁰⁸ ‘Two Sermons by Thos. N. Toller, preached at Kettering,’ *Sacred Memorial*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Sermon preached by the Rev. Weedon Butler, Pimlico’ *Sacred Memorial*, p. 114; ‘Sermon by the Rev. Bryant Burgess, A. M., preached at the Church of St. Mary-le-bone,’ *Sacred Memorial*, p. 16; Joseph Ivimey, p. 28.

¹¹⁰ in Clark, *Scandal*, p. 120.

¹¹¹ Toller, in *Sacred Memorial*, pp. 31-33, p. 33.

¹¹² Toller, in *Sacred Memorial*, pp. 31-33, p. 33.

hollowness and fraudulence of customary aristocratic marriages. An affectionate marriage was a boon not a disadvantage, for it set an important example for the nation. 'In the place of powerful and wealthy dominions,' Leopold had 'brought as his portion, an honest and upright heart; warm, unvarying affections; and love unfeigned and faithful'—things that were 'of far more consequence to connubial felicity, than empires, with forced and alienated hearts'.¹¹³ These comments contrast sharply with the representations we saw earlier, of Leopold as a financial burden. A year into their marriage and such thorny concerns were long forgotten, overridden by the campaign to reform aristocratic marriages. Leopold, it seems, was now judged according to a different set of criteria, as was their marriage in general.

There was also, in this memorial literature, a reconsideration of the criteria which determined social value. 'The *thinking part of the community*' would no longer be in awe of 'the eminence of ... rank, or wealth, or office,' Joseph Ivimey declared, rather 'moral worth' and not simply social rank would decide pre-eminence.¹¹⁴ Since adultery was the greatest of immoralities, then marital fidelity and conjugal felicity were among the greatest criteria of moral worth. Therefore, those individuals who refused to tolerate, or to accept silently, the immoral behaviour of their social betters were the community's true leaders. Using a remarkably similar language as Ivimey, the clergyman Henry George Watkins declared that 'the *religious and moral part of the community*' were hopeful that fashionable society might reform themselves according to the royal couple's example.¹¹⁵ This realignment of social value was calculated to alarm the aristocracy into moral reform by making them feel the relative tenuousness of their

¹¹³ 'Sermon by the Rev. B. Kennicott, A. B., preached at Monkwearmouth,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 37.

¹¹⁴ Ivimey, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ 'Sermon by Henry George Watkins, M. A., preached in the Church of St. Swithin and St. Mary Bothaw,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 48; italics mine.

position. Relocating the moral part of the community from the aristocracy to the middle ranks reflects the growing tendency to view the emerging middle class as the voice of moral virtue and dependability. Such a relocation is also a sign of the concomitant withdrawal of support for an aristocracy whose licentiousness endangered the social order.

This is not to say, however, that the middling and lower orders escaped the improving gaze of moralists. Since there were many 'insecurities' in the families of those 'in the highest walks of society, it was more than ever imperative 'to deepen the foundation of ... the moral education of its people'.¹¹⁶ Across the nation, Britons from the middling and lower ranks were consistently urged to model their private lives on their beloved princess. At Leeds, the Westleyan David McNicholl emphasized how powerfully 'the public mind is moved' to virtuous acts when the lesson is administered through 'the medium of ... deep and solemn feeling'.¹¹⁷ Charlotte's death should be mourned as 'a national calamity' and 'a chastisement from the Most High,' William Marsh preached at Colchester, but more importantly, the people must 'profit by the example of the lamented individual herself, and that of her beloved consort'.¹¹⁸ Henry G. White made this same point in even more concise terms at Barking: the princess was 'the people's idol' and now she would be 'made the people's rod'.¹¹⁹

One of the most consistently used rhetorical strategies was to represent Charlotte as a ghost returned from the grave to rouse an entire nation to expose and to destroy what was rotten about Britain. At a meeting at Salter's Hall in London, the

¹¹⁶ Thomas Chalmers, p. 20.

¹¹⁷ 'Sermon by David McNicoll, preached in Wesley Chapel, Meadow-Lane, Leeds,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 76.

¹¹⁸ 'Sermon by William Marsh, A. M., preached at Colchester,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ 'Sermon by Henry G. White, M. A., preached at the Church of Allhallows, Barking, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 8.

hymnologist and charismatic minister of the Independent Church in Peckham, William Bengo Collyer, warned 'all ranks' to heed 'the voice which arises from the tomb ... for it speaks to all'.¹²⁰ This same rhetoric was used by the author of *A Nation in Tears*, who described Charlotte as 'a voice which bursts from the tomb of the royal dead' to command all Britons to "GO THOU AND DO LIKEWISE."¹²¹ In Leeds, David McNicoll used rather more dramatic flair when he preached that neither an 'imp of hell' nor 'the din of mortality' could prevent Britons from heeding 'that voice ... which now, from heaven ... says, Follow me'.¹²² 'Where,' he asked, 'is the Briton, who will rebelliously object to obey the command of *such* a voice?'¹²³ The representation of Charlotte as the seraphical voice urging conjugal fidelity and moral probity from all the ranks reflects and promotes a cultural development that Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have identified as the 'democratization of domesticity'.¹²⁴ The pleasures of motherhood, family and the home, though largely promulgated by the middling sort, were available to all, from rural to urban dwellers, from farmers to professionals.

Charlotte was not just speaking from the grave, moralists warned, she was also watching. Indeed, the memorial literature is infused with a discourse of surveillance and judgement. Commentators warned not only of a watching God but of scrutinizing compatriots who were equally attentive to the crimes of vice. It was expected, one clergyman asserted, that Britons would live by two particularly apropos scriptural messages, that:

¹²⁰ 'Sermon by William Bengo' Collyer, D. D. F. A. S., Honorary Member, and one of the Vice-Presidents of the Philosophical Society of London, &c., preached at Hanover Chapel, Peckham, and at Salters' Hall, London,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 47.

¹²¹ *Nation in Tears*, p. 27.

¹²² 'Sermon by David McNicoll, preached in Wesley Chapel, Meadow-Lane, Leeds,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 76.

¹²³ 'Sermon by David McNicoll, preached in Wesley Chapel, Meadow-Lane, Leeds,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 76.

¹²⁴ Davidoff and Hall, p. 184.

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

and,

“I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.”¹²⁵

In the first verse God is the judge of whoremongers and adulterers, but in the second verse, it is the eyes of foreigners, and by implication, members of the community, that penetrate even into the interior of private homes. In his exegesis of these verses, the author of a *Nation in Tears* places the onus firmly on individuals themselves to judge adultery and to condemn domestic negligence.

VIII

As the biblical references above indicate, religious moralists emphasized that woman's domestic and childbearing role was intimately bound to the nation's relative strength and prosperity. As we have seen thus far, the improving gaze was a sweeping one, which took in the entire social strata, from the regent to government, from the aristocracy to the lower and middling orders. Charlotte was also recruited to define and to promote a gendered code of moral behaviour. The loss of her 'whose example might have reformed the nation, is a just cause of regret to every one who bears the name of wife, of mother, or of daughter,' the Rev. Isaac Purkis reasoned, for her 'example might have tended to check dissipation and riot, a disregard to home and a love of public amusements'.¹²⁶ 'FEMALE example possesses an influence that few can appreciate,' the Rev. Richard Winter Hamilton preached in Leeds, for when, as in Charlotte, 'it is piety in an angel's form' it has the power to counter vice and revitalize

¹²⁵ Heb. xiii. 4; 1 Tim. V. 14, in *Nation in Tears*, p. 29.

¹²⁶ 'Sermon by the Rev. Isaac Purkis, preached at Bethel Chapel, Deptford,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 34.

society.¹²⁷ Comments like these—and there were many—promoted the idea that women's influence was located, as was the princess's, in purity, maternal softness and conjugal devotion. The aim of such rhetoric was to assure women that they could accrue a type of 'authority' whilst reminding them that their source of 'authority' must remain securely grounded in the domestic sphere.

For these propagandists, Charlotte had provided the perfect template of a life based on this principle. Her ambition, the Rev. Isaac Purkis directed his audience to note, was most certainly not 'to *appear* in the drawing-room, to be *admired* in the assembly, ... [to] indulge avarice or prodigality at the card-table; to be *gazed* at in the theatre, to *dazzle* in public places'.¹²⁸ There is a clear provision against being seen here: there is something deeply immoral or dangerous about women who 'appear' or who are 'gazed at'. Rather, British women are instructed to avoid public spaces and to choose instead, as Charlotte had, 'to shine in the bosom of [their] family, to exemplify the virtues, and possess the enjoyments, of domestic life'.¹²⁹ Woman's own gaze—and her priorities, desires and aspirations—must be focused on the home. These prescriptions were directed at all women, regardless of rank, and by a contingent of religious men that included Dissenting ministers, Catholic priests, Jewish rabbis and Anglican vicars. These men, brought together from the middle of the metropolis and from in the farthest corner of Scotland, in collections of sermons, enforced the notion that woman's 'grand object' in life must be 'the society and comfort' of her husband,

¹²⁷ 'Sermon preached by the Rev. Rich. Winter Hamilton, Leeds,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 126.

¹²⁸ Purkis, p. 34.

¹²⁹ Purkis, p. 34.

the care of her children and the contentment of her domestics.¹³⁰ Woman's 'amplest gratification' was found, as Charlotte's was, 'in the sanctuary of the home'.¹³¹

Besides providing a sense of personal contentment, moralists argued, a domestic life allowed women to contribute to the productiveness and good order of their communities and to the stability of their nation. Charlotte had demonstrated how women could act appropriately in a public capacity when they transferred the *same* devotion and modesty that they displayed in the home to their neighbourhoods. Clergymen shared anecdotes about the princess that clearly specified what appropriate activities were for women: William Marsh recounted how a man had asked the princess if he could attach her name to a moral reform society. This man had thought to apologize for his humble charity, directed at the lowest members of society, but she had stopped him, 'by saying, "Sir, we are all sinners"' before generously giving her consent.¹³² At a Baptist Meeting-House in Middlesex, William Newman described how on one of her trips to the cottages of the poor in her community, Charlotte had graciously given a gift of a large print bible to an old woman who had difficulty reading the small print of her own tattered one.¹³³ In these ways, Charlotte had not confined her virtues 'to the private circle, or the domestic hearth *only*,' James Rudge advised; instead, the 'pattern of all that was good and lovely to look upon in the endearing relation of a wife' was transferred into charitable service.¹³⁴ By insisting that woman's public function could only derive from the domestic realm, moralists *circumscribed*

¹³⁰ Purkis, p. 34.

¹³¹ 'Sermon by John Kentish, perached at the New Meeting-House, Birmingham,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 66.

¹³² Marsh, pp. 28-9.

¹³³ 'Sermon by William Newman, D. D., preached in the Baptist Meeting-House, at Bow, Middlesex,' in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 60.

¹³⁴ Rudge, p. 18.

women's socio-political role and *redefined* 'public duties' to mean communal acts of charity (and not, say, political or commercial activity).

The fashioning of Charlotte's life and the use of it for these types of propagandistic purposes support Stephen Behrendt's conceptualization of her as 'one of the key figures in the formulation of the Victorian concept of woman'.¹³⁵ Indeed, the mourning literature presented here demonstrates plainly how this concept was forged some years before Victoria took the throne. In the next generations, this concept of woman, as Behrendt rightly observes, will 'transform Victoria, Queen and Empress of the greatest empire ever assembled, into a figure whose iconography becomes increasingly focused upon her roles as mother (significantly, of a great many children) and as wife (again significantly, grieving endlessly and inconsolably for an irreplaceable husband)'.¹³⁶ Yet, it is also important to recognize that Charlotte was used not only as a domestic exemplar for future generations of females, but for males also.

Moralists made it a point to direct their addresses at both male and female audience members, emphasizing that the home was not solely a female preserve. This is not to suggest that gender roles were conflated, for the texts presented here unquestionably advanced gender-specific expectations. Yet, the point remains that both Charlotte and Leopold had demonstrated how mutually satisfying was a faithful, harmonious marriage and a quiet domestic life. This point was emphasized by the tendency to attribute similar desires and personal qualities to both of them, so that at times they seemed almost indistinguishable. 'They were never seen apart,' one observer wrote, and at Claremont:

¹³⁵ Behrendt, p. 59.

¹³⁶ Behrendt, p. 59.

There the same sofa, in the same window, would contain both! Who ever saw their carriage travelling with one alone? No: if the Prince was there, the Princess might be always seen at his side. Their walks in their grounds always witnessed them together; nor would they take their daily walks into the gardens, the one without the other. Of these the Princess was very fond; but whatever attractions she found in the plants, the Prince was always with her, participating in her recreations. Happy will it be for the nation, if such *mutual* affection should shed its fragrance around.¹³⁷

As prelapsarian as this portrait is intended to be, there is, in this rather suffocating description of complete union and shared interests, almost no room for difference. This passage is fairly choked with the repetition of words such as 'same,' 'both,' 'always,' 'together,' and 'mutual'. Such linguistic turns are instructive: as fellow clergyman Robert Culbertson put it, the royal marriage had demonstrated how both women and men must 'prove by their dutiful attentions to one another, that each occupies that room in the affections of the other, which a husband or a wife is entitled to feel'.¹³⁸

From the royal marriage, moralists extracted a manly, but domestic model of British masculinity. Charlotte may have been a model of wifely devotion to Leopold, but it was as equally important that he, as a devoted and affectionate husband, 'deserved it all'.¹³⁹ Crucially, this new model of manliness was held up against foppishness or gallantry—qualities that, as Donna Andrew points out, were intimately associated with 'upper-class promiscuous sexuality, but most especially adultery'.¹⁴⁰ Within marriage, Leopold had exemplified an emerging definition of masculine identity that countered the old swaggering image of masculinity. As a husband, Culbertson argued, Leopold demonstrated how mutual affection had 'a tendency to put gallantry

¹³⁷ *Nation in Tears*, pp. 28-9; italics mine.

¹³⁸ Culbertson, p. 12.

¹³⁹ *The Real and Moral Causes*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁰ Andrew, p. 13.

out of fashion,' for 'no demon of mischief' would be allowed to 'stir up contention between them'.¹⁴¹ And with the usual eye to reform, Culbertson was proud to visualize how a gallant with 'a star or a garter' who led an 'unclean manner of life' would 'tremble and blush to lift up his head' in the presence of Leopold's integrity.¹⁴² He was a domesticated man, but that did not mean that he was a feminized man; rather, he had adopted a manliness that was honourable, faithful and restrained.

Leopold was also celebrated for prioritizing marital love over political ambition. In Margaret Sarah Croker's *Monody*, a heartbroken Leopold ruminates: in the face of his beloved wife's death, he asks 'what are dreams of ambition and pride,/What is pow'r, or the love of control?'¹⁴³ Such an entreaty, from Leopold's own mouth, sinks the value of unbridled political and economic ambition: it was not enough that men be victorious in the battles of public life, they must also be affectionate husbands and fathers. Domesticity tempered male ambition with sympathy, thus the home was a sort of training ground for male participation in the public sphere. 'There is,' John Keyden proclaimed,

at the bottom of the tree, the father of a family; he is installed in the patriarchal arm-chair of fireside justice; his offspring and servants are his subjects; he says to one, go, and he goeth—to another come, and he cometh—and he exerts his lawful prerogative, in overawing the vicious, and encouraging the good.¹⁴⁴

Keyden's use of a biblical language casts this father in a typically authoritative, patriarchal mould, and yet crucially, whilst he is an intensely masculine figure, he is at

¹⁴¹ Culbertson, p. 12.

¹⁴² Culbertson, p. 12.

¹⁴³ Margaret Sarah Croker, *A Monody on the Lamented Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte-Augusta of Wales and of Saxe Cobourg Saalfeld* [sic] (London: Edmund Lloyd and J. Booth, 1817), BL 11641.f.67 (3), ll. 43-4.

¹⁴⁴ John Keyden, *Thoughts on Royalty: a Sermon, Suggested by the Lamented Death of Her Majesty the Queen, preached in the Church of Dunbog, Fifeshire*, November 29, 1818 (Edinburgh: Waugh et al., 1818), p. 15.

the same time a powerfully domestic figure. This father dispenses justice from his fireside, indicating that legitimate authority originated from the domestic sphere.

Keyden's virtuous father is also a virtuous king. Not just familial but political authority must originate in the domestic sphere. To many observers, the type of masculinity that Leopold demonstrated—the masculinity that encouraged the good, as Keyden put it—had been introduced to court culture by George III. One elegist observed how, like Keyden's dispenser of fireside justice, George III had been 'guardian of all [the nation's] infants, and of course more particularly of his granddaughter'.¹⁴⁵ In fact, Charlotte's death was a double tragedy: for he was now an ailing king who, bereft of his senses and bereft of his ability to *feel*, could not mourn her loss. For this reason, the nation also mourned for George III. 'We weep a princess, and lament a King!' Margaret Sarah Croker declared in her *Monody*, for though 'round him oblivion's shade has long been spread ... in his subject's hearts he is not dead'.¹⁴⁶ The tragedy for the nation was that illness had forced George III to be coldly unfeeling, whilst his son, the reigning king had consciously chosen to be.

In 1817, the nation came together to mourn the loss of its beloved father and its cherished daughter, the two 'recognizable heroes' of modern monarchy, to borrow Marilyn Morris's characterization.¹⁴⁷ The death of Charlotte was the death of the dream of political and moral redemption under her reign. Yet the occasion of mourning was also an occasion for national reassessment and for giving lessons of moral improvement. A grieving nation was an attentive, vulnerable audience, and moralists took the opportunity to urge their audiences to measure their lives against the

¹⁴⁵ Keyden, in *Sacred Memorial*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁶ Croker, ll. 100-02.

¹⁴⁷ Morris, *British Monarchy*, p. 192.

near perfect life of the departed. Moralists had assembled Charlotte and Leopold into royal heroes so that they could be used as models for emulation and as scourges of reproach.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with two family tragedies of the 1790s—the violation, persecution and subsequent deaths of Lydia Hardy, the wife of the radical Thomas Hardy, and Marie-Antoinette, the consort of the King of France. This thesis, rather appropriately, will end with the story of another family tragedy that gripped the public imagination some twenty years later.

In the summer of 1815, the twenty-year-old cook Eliza Fenning, last survivor of her parent's ten children, was accused and convicted of attempting to murder her employers with poisoned dumplings. After witnessing the horrifying spectacle of her public hanging, the radical journalist and publisher William Hone was inspired to investigate her case. He quickly discovered that Fenning had been the victim of staggering political corruption and an extensive legal conspiracy. He uncovered how her defence attorney had been less than substandard; the Sessions Report had been 'mutliated, garbled, and dispossessed of the most material parts of the evidence *favourable to the prisoner*'; and the notorious presiding judge, Sir John 'Black Jack' Silvester (known for his ruthless treatment of female defendants and alleged willingness to trade lighter sentences for sexual favours) had tampered with witnesses, swayed the jury and expurgated the official record.¹ In addition, the regent and the Home Office had mercilessly refused to examine the true Sessions Report as they were more interested in ensuring the autonomy and the reputation of the court.

¹ Ben Wilson, *The Laughter of Triumph: William Hone and the Fight for the Free Press* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. 102-3.

In *The Important Results of an Elaborate Investigation into the Mysterious Case of Eliza Fenning*, Hone reported that the government had preyed on residual fears that Jacobinical conspirators lurked among the labouring classes. They had exploited the morally censorious atmosphere of the early nineteenth century in order to drive a wider wedge between the upper orders and those who served them. 'All the *masters and mistresses* of families, whose credulity or idleness rendered them proper subjects for *alarums*,' Hone wrote, 'were incessantly devoted to the vociferous execration of the wickedness of *servants*, who *poison* those who give them bread and work'.² Hone's description of a home fraught by mutual distrust is a far cry from the view of servants as kin, that is, as loyal and cherished members of the extended family. The government had used the life of Eliza Fenning to warn the lower orders that if they stepped out of place they too might be suspected, tried and found guilty of vicious intentions.

Hone portrayed the regent, the government and the courts as co-conspirators in an elaborate attack on a poor, humble family and on vulnerable female innocence. In the description of Fenning and the accompanying portrait of her, she appears in a white muslin gown. That she had previously chosen this gown with the hopes of someday wearing it as a wedding dress highlighted the cruelty of a court, a government and a regent who had cruelly preyed upon her innocent vulnerability and female purity. Hone gives the following account of Fenning's last interview with her family:

On *Tuesday* morning she took her last farewell of her Father, who exhorted her to meet death with fortitude; and by the firmness of his manners, under the dreadful circumstances of their separation, he exemplified the courage which he wished his child to sustain upon the scaffold. The parting scene with her

² *The Important Results of an Elaborate Investigation into the Mysterious Case of Elizabeth Fenning: being a Detail of Extraordinary Facts Discovered since her Execution, including, The Official Report of her Singular Trial, Now First Published, and Copious Notes thereon ... with Thirty Letters, Written by the Unfortunate Girl while in Prison: an Appendix, and an Appropriate Dedication.* London: W. Hone, 1815, qtd. in Wilson, pp. 113-14.

mother was heart rending. They were separated from each other in a state of dreadful agony.³

Using a language of sensibility, Hone fashioned Fenning into a child who, in her simple innocence can be nothing else but courageous and bewildered. He goes on to recount how Fenning was too dazed even to articulate her prayers: though ‘I cannot *speak*,’ she had stated, ‘I pray from my *heart*’.⁴ Hone’s language—describing the heartrending agony and dignified carriage of an innocent family—recalls the sympathetic accounts of Louis XVI’s last interview with his own family twenty-two years earlier. Like Louis, Fenning forgave the nation that had seemed so willing to sacrifice her, proclaiming that though she might die ‘in charity with all the world,’ she would not ‘forget [her] injured innocence’.⁵ Her alleged final words, uttered clearly and without hesitation, also echoed those of the French king: ‘I AM INNOCENT’.⁶

Though he was too late to save Fenning, William Hone’s journalistic intervention turned public support from the side of the government to the side of its victim, and she became one of the most popular heroines of the nineteenth century. Hone’s efforts to publicly fashion Fenning into a spotless martyr gave ‘popular culture a viable personality to latch on to’ so that Fenning’s name could be ‘twinned with the idea that governments could arbitrarily kill the weak to satisfy their need for blood’.⁷ Hone described how the state had effectively snatched the last remaining child from a poor, defenceless couple and then presented them with a bill for fourteen shillings, payable before they could retrieve her body. Mr Fenning had been unable to protect and defend his daughter when she was alive, but he had to beg and borrow before he

³ Hone, *Important Results*, qtd in Wilson p. 116.

⁴ Hone, *Important Results*, qtd in Wilson, p. 116.

⁵ Hone, *Important Results*, qtd in Wilson, p. 116.

⁶ Hone, *Important Results*, qtd in Wilson, p. 117.

⁷ Wilson, p. 122.

could retrieve her body. In this respect, the government had acted as it had twenty years earlier when, as we saw in the Introduction, the Home Office had added insult to grievous injury when it drove Thomas Hardy into poverty by illegally retaining his belongings after his acquittal.

Crucially, the British public could only take up the cause of Eliza Fenning because she was presented to them as a morally spotless figure. Hone could share details of her private life, embellishing as needs be, because there were no great scandals in her past. The extent of government corruption could only be fully presented to the public against the foil of moral purity that Fenning provided. For the sake of the reform cause and his own reputation, he had to be careful about the private lives of those he chose to champion, for the personal lives and by extension, the writings and political activities of radicals, revolutionaries and reformers were sites of public speculation, observation and censure. He was, for instance, much more circumspect about utilizing Byron for the cause of liberty. In 1816, Hone was cautiously willing to exploit the public mania for any information about Byron's scandalous affairs and failed marriage for the anti-war cause. Trading on Byron's popularity, Hone pirated the poet's pro-Napoleonic poems in an 1816 collection entitled *Poems on His Domestic Circumstances*. Yet Hone almost immediately released a collection of his own verses in *A Sketch from Public Life: A Poem Founded Upon Recent Domestic Circumstances*, which not only criticized Napoleon for having betrayed female devotion, but censured Byron for setting an example 'dangerous to public morals'; thereby rendering adultery 'so fashionable a vice'.⁸ Although Hone admired the politics of these two figures, the nature of their private lives meant that he could never align

⁸ 'Tyro,' *A Sketch From Public Life: A Poem Founded Upon Recent Domestic Circumstances* (London: J. Hatchard, 1816), qtd. in Wilson, p. 148.

himself completely with them. Indeed, Byron's private life had much more in common with the licentious lives of those Tory aristocrats that Hone deplored, than with the warm domesticity and moral probity of middle class reformers like himself.

Nineteenth century reformers had to be prudent about both their personal and private associations. The thoroughly scandalized names of Tom Paine and William Godwin continued to darken the political prospects and personal reputations of a new generation of radicals which included Leigh Hunt, Richard Carlile, Henry 'Orator' Hunt and the 're-formed' William Cobbett. The gossip-mongering *Bon Ton*, for instance, informed readers that as a follower of Paine, Leigh Hunt would think nothing 'of wronging a virgin, or getting dead drunk'.⁹ Radicals were under attack and on the defensive. Hunt defended himself as much as his friends when he corrected the *Morning Chronicle's* characterization of Mary Shelley as the Lady who lived with Shelley: 'The Lady' in question 'is his wife,' Hunt declared in the *Examiner*.¹⁰ It was imperative that the Shelleys be represented as a conventional couple, for Hunt's political reputation rested upon a personal image that contrasted sharply with the faithless debauchery of court and aristocratic circles. When in 1812, he was charged with defaming the regent—who he had labelled a 'despiser of domestic ties'—Hunt's defence was that he was defending public morals.¹¹ In his closing arguments, Hunt's legal counsel, Henry Brougham had emphasized the personal contrast between the regent and his critic. Brougham insisted that Hunt had acted with manliness and patriotic devotion when he had dutifully exposed such 'NOTORIOUS VICES IN

⁹ *Bon Ton*, 1 February 1820, p. 207.

¹⁰ *Examiner*, 31 August 1817, p. 552.

¹¹ *Examiner*, 12 March 1812, p. 179, see pp. 177-80.

PUBLIC MEN—of OSTENTATIOUS IMMORALITY IN THE HIGHEST STATIONS.’¹²

In other cases, radicals with less than perfect marriages found themselves the target, not of political enemies, but of ‘fellow’ radicals who most often emphasized their own probity. The brothers Leigh and John Hunt had always emphasized that they were not related to that fiery advocate of working class radicalism, Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt, but William Cobbett broke with the radical, and his questionable personal life, after a productive friendship.¹³ In a famous 1821 letter, Cobbett derided Henry who, after an amicable separation from his wife in 1802 remained the devoted companion to his mistress, Mrs. Vince, for the remainder of his life. Cobbett accused Hunt of riding ‘about the country with a whore, the wife of another man, having deserted his own’.¹⁴ In response, Henry directed his reprisal at Cobbett’s wife (who had been very disapproving of his relationship with Mrs. Vince), by accusing her of lacking domestic skills.¹⁵ In 1788, it was acceptable for politicians and even princes to live with their mistresses, but the rules had changed by 1821. In the nineteenth century, sexual relations outside of marriage were construed as licentious, immoral and politically dangerous. Henry Hunt’s affair—no matter how committed and lasting—was recycled in propaganda as an example of the baneful result of revolution, a sign of the corrupting influence of French principles, and a reason to be barred from politics.

¹² *Examiner*, 20 December 1812, qtd. in Nicholas Roe, *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt* (London: Pimlico, 2005), p. 178.

¹³ On Leigh and John Hunt’s aversion to Henry Hunt, who they denounced as a vulgar, turbulent person who used the ‘revolutionary language of a French mob’, see Roe, pp. 149-150, 276.

¹⁴ Qtd. in John Belchem, *‘Orator’ Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 161; see Henry Hunt, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt, Esq. Written by himself in his Majesty’s Jail at Ilchester*, 3

vols. London: n. pub., 1820-22, vol. 3, pp. 21, 30.

¹⁵ Belchem, p. 161; see Hunt, *Memoirs*, vol. 3, pp. 21, 30.

Domestic virtues had become *the* qualifying test of public life, and a demonstrable lack of such virtues (whether in reality or not) barred one from political membership.

What is particularly noteworthy about these defamatory exchanges, whether between radicals or between radicals and their opponents, is how alike are the accusations. This interchangeability is rather startling, for instance, in an assault by one loyalist on the '*flash chaps*' of the Radical Club.¹⁶ The Birmingham composer of *The Radical Dandy* does not bother to specify which 'Hunt' is under attack—Leigh, John or Henry—in his ditty. All that matters is that he, a firm believer in the principle that 'a man's best blessing is an affectionate wife!' is everything the radicals are not, as his song makes clear:

OLD ENGLAND is famous for excellent wives,
Whose kisses are sweeter than candy;
But each lass so gay, would be swopp'd away,
If she married a RADICAL DANDY,
 The dissolute Radical Dandy,
 The impudent Radical Dandy;
 "*Mister HUNT*, where's your wife"—
 O, the joy of his life,
Is swopp'd with a Radical Dandy.

OLD ENGLAND is famous for LOVING HER KING,
And her CONSTITUTION so handy;
And her sons they'll stand, by their forefather's land,
In spite of the RADICAL DANDY,
 The republican Radical Dandy,
 The riotous Radical Dandy,
 So loud let us sing,
 MAY GOD SAVE THE KING,
And down with the Radical Dandy.¹⁷

As this song demonstrates, so much of the language of loyalism is transposable: republicanism, rioting, dissolution and unmanliness are practically synonymous terms.

¹⁶ 'Joe Shrewd,' *A Few Words to my Neighbours, by Joe Shrewd, Die-sinker; with a new song, called the Radical Dandy*, second ed. ([Birmingham]: T. Knott, 1819, p. 6.

¹⁷ 'Joe Shrewd,' pp. 7-8.

At the same time, manliness and patriotism are inseparable from loving the king, being loyal to the constitution and being faithful to one's excellent wife. Although the 'Mr. Hunt' referred to here is almost certainly Henry, the important point is that it could theoretically be any of them. Radicals were regularly accused of such things as 'swopping' their wives.¹⁸ The labels 'adulterer' and 'dandy' were severely damaging: the one a crime that corroded family, society and nation, the other a crime of effeminacy, of dissoluteness, of a failure to fulfil the first duty of all men. To be an adulterer or a dandy, according to such conceptualizations, was to be a dangerous *political* threat to the nation.

To many early nineteenth century observers, the pursuit of decency had in many ways eclipsed politics. The anonymous author of *The Mohawks* was scathingly critical of government repression of the press *and* of the ruthless spying of scandalmongers whose 'outrageous ambition of doing all possible hurt to their fellow creatures' ranked them with the 'Mohawk-Club' of India, ostensibly a group of cannibals who devoured everything in sight.¹⁹ In the hypocritical, suspicious atmosphere of early nineteenth century England, individuals were so consumed with scrutinizing their neighbours' lives that the ignored Constitution had 'grown the worse for wear'.²⁰ Individuals 'of ev'ry possible description' had been recruited 'to hector, drill, control, and Mentor' in a 'reform' movement that had everything to do with morals and very little to do with politics per se.²¹ 'Squires, Bishops, Bankrupts, maid and married fusties' had all become 'loyal, pious foll'wers of Procrustes!'²² Just as the

¹⁸ Roe, p. 150.

¹⁹ (n.a.), *The Mohawks; a Satirical Poem with Notes* (London: Henry Colburn, 1822), preliminary page.

²⁰ *Mohawk*, p. 63.

²¹ *Mohawk* p. 62.

²² *Mohawk* p. 62.

mythical innkeeper Procrustes had stretched his undersized visitors on a rack and chopped off the legs of tall travellers to fit his special bed—Britons were similarly intent on shaping the minds and bodies of their compatriots to fit one model of domestic virtue.

The compulsion to shape oneself to this model of virtuous domesticity and to observe that one's family, one's neighbours, one's political representatives and one's king and queen also lived according to the established moral parameters would continue long into the nineteenth century. This compulsion substantiates the description of the first decades of the nineteenth century as a 'prelude to Victorianism,' as Maurice Quinlan characterized it some years ago.²³ By the time Victoria took the throne in 1837, as Herbert Schlossberg has observed in a more recent study, the cultural features we associate with the Victorian period—sexual restraint, respectability, an emphasis on family values—were already 'set deeply within the English psyche'.²⁴ As this thesis has shown, those features were largely established by a moral revolution that began life as a debate on political principles inspired by the French Revolution. Indeed, the political contest between on the one hand, a diverse body of revolutionary sympathizers and on the other, an equally diverse body of anti-revolutionaries had become converted into a competition over domestic virtue that recruited participants from all walks of life. Not just radicals, reformers, loyalists and evangelicals but also 'maids and married fusties' participated in a cultural transformation that established marriage as the stable core of society, and defined marital fidelity, domestic virtue and familial harmony as essential British values. To be a patriot, was to be a loving

²³ Maurice J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners, 1700-1830* (Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1965).

²⁴ Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2000).

husband and a devoted father; to be a model female was to be a loving wife and a devoted mother: arguably, these things became non-negotiable. 'A family of love may be a heaven in itself,' Leigh Hunt wrote, and it could contain 'all the spirit to do the best and kindest for society.'²⁵

²⁵ Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, edited by his Eldest Son*, 2 vols. (London, 1862), vol 1, p. 230, in Roe, p. 354.

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