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SCANDAL:  
GENDER, PUBLICITY, POLITICS  
1789-1850

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## Abstract

This thesis, an exercise in cultural history, puts forwards two main lines of argument.

Firstly, I explore the way in which scandal was used by early nineteenth century reformers to argue for the inclusion of a wider range of individuals in political debate. I contrast the approaches of Rousseau and Bentham to publicity, exploring the manner in which the latter became especially useful to radicals after the 1790s, as the former became associated with dangerous Jacobinism. Chapters three and four discuss the interplay between these two ways of thinking about scandal in the Mary Ann Clarke affair (1809) and the Queen Caroline affair (1820-1). I show that while scandal allowed the case for reform to be dramatized in an especially vivid way, encouraging ordinary people to get involved in politics, its attention to particular details could also damage the radical cause by distracting attention away from abstract arguments for reform.

The second strand of argument deals with the relationship between publicity and feminism. Scandal did not just entrench the sexual double standard; rather, debates about publicity provided a way for early feminists to demand recognition of woman's legal and political identity. However, attitudes amongst women towards the balance to be struck between individual self-determination and social convention varied widely. Germaine de Staël and Geraldine Jewsbury reworked the ideas of Rousseau to argue that a woman's ability to follow her feelings rather than moral conventions signalled her suitability for citizenship, and in the Caroline affair, many ordinary women claimed a right to engage in political debate on the grounds of their feelings of sympathy for the Queen. On the other hand, Maria Edgeworth argued for a rapprochement between reason and social duty, while Rosina Bulwer-Lytton used scandal against her husband in order to press for recognition of woman's separate legal identity.

## Table of Contents

Title page	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
List of Illustrations	4
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	7
<b><u>PART ONE</u></b>	<b>25</b>
Chapter One: ‘Breaking The Irons of Opinion’: Social Transparency and Scandal in the Works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Germaine De Staël	
Chapter Two: ‘Why should we hide ourselves if we do not dread being seen?’: Publicity, Public Opinion and the Problem Of Scandal in Bentham And Edgeworth	79
<b><u>PART TWO</u></b>	
Chapter Three: ‘A Bumper of Sedition’: Radicalism, Jacobinism And Gender Ambivalence in the Mary Ann Clarke Scandal	128
Chapter Four: ‘A Plot Improbable And Without Unity’: Publicity, Politics and Narrative in The Queen Caroline Scandal	184
Chapter Five: ‘Publicity is the Soul of Justice’: Scandal, Entertainment and Feminism in the early Victorian era	234
Conclusion	287
Appendices	291
Bibliography	309

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Jacques Louis David,  
*The Intervention of the Sabine Women (1799)*.  
Oil on canvas, 385 x 522 cm.  
Musee du Louvre, Paris.  
Reproduced from National University of Singapore,  
'USE 2206 Emerging Global Politics',  
<<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/sep/use2206/index.php>>.  
Accessed 15 July 2004.

Figure 2. George Cruikshank,  
*Frontispiece To A Frown From the Crown (1820)*.  
Engraving, 12 cm x 21 cm.  
The British Library.

Figure 3. 'A.S.H.'  
*Interior View of The Judge and Jury Society  
in the Garrick's Head Tavern, Bow Street (1841)*.  
Lithograph.  
Guildhall Library Print Room, Wakefield Collection,  
W.W.W2./BOW, no p5422585.

Figure 4. Anonymous.  
*Frontispiece to Extraordinary Narrative of An  
Outrageous Violation of Liberty and Law in the Forcible  
Seizure and Incarceration of Lady Lytton Bulwer in  
the Gloomy Cell of a Madhouse!!!*  
London: W James and Co, 1858. Woodcut.  
Reproduced from David Lytton Cobbold, *A Blighted Marriage:  
The Life of Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, Irish Beauty, Satirist and  
Tormented Wife*. Knebworth: Knebworth House Education Trust  
1999, p. 14.

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Introduction:

Publicity, Gender and Politics

## I *Scandal and Representation*

A James Hammerton begins his study of marriage and domestic violence in the nineteenth century with a lament that historical understanding of the subject ‘has been clouded until recently by anecdotal histories of divorce obsessed with the sensational adulteries of the well-to-do’.<sup>1</sup> This comment epitomizes one way of thinking about sex scandal. A traditional social historian, interested in sexuality as deed rather than a discourse, Hammerton sees sensational representations of sex as a mist fogging the eyes of the academic, focusing attention on the superficial and trivial glamour of upper class misdemeanours at the expense of the private experiences of ordinary people. Paying attention to scandal not only prevents the researcher from reaching the ‘truth’, it is also suspiciously undemocratic, because it privileges the misdeeds of the wealthy and famous over those of everyday individuals.

Compare Hammerton’s comments to the attitude of Charles Piggott, a radical writing in 1792:

Truth ought not to be less powerful from the necessity that demands this secrecy, and as we have before observed, our purpose will be in a great deal accomplished, if we can succeed, by taking dust out of the eyes of the multitude, in lessening that aristocratic influence which so much pains are now taking to perpetuate; and to that end, what method so profitable, as by exhibiting to public view, the corruption and profligacy of those, who are thus wickedly attempting to establish an eternal and destructive authority over them.<sup>2</sup>

Like Hammerton, Piggott believes that upper class sexual scandal is unrepresentative of the manners and mores of the multitude. However, whereas for the twentieth-century social historian scandal provides an unrealistic portrait of upper class sexuality that is an unwelcome distraction from the project of recovering real popular behaviour, for the eighteenth-century radical campaigning against the corrupt state of the public sphere, scandal disclosed an all too real picture of aristocratic behaviour, which could be used to open the eyes of the

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<sup>1</sup> J A Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Piggott, *The Jockey Club, Or A Sketch Of The Manners Of The Age*. Fifth Edition. London: H D Symonds, Paternoster Row, 1792, pp. 3-4.

people to the transgressions of their rulers, holding ‘the mirror up to Nature, to shew Vice in its own image’.<sup>3</sup> In Piggott’s eyes, then, the insight that scandal provided was actually democratic in its tendency: by exposing aristocratic transgressions, pamphleteers could ground an argument for taking power out of the hands of the upper class few. Matching his practice to his theory, Piggott wrote *The Jockey Club, Or Sketches Of The Manners of the Age* (1792), a series of scandalous portraits which linked the sexual misdemeanours of leading political figures to their economic corruption to argue the need for ‘a revolution in government’ which would bring about ‘a revolution in morals’.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas sex scandal clouds the eyes of the historian in Hammerton’s opinion, obstructing good research, for Piggott, it actually removes impediments which prevent the people from seeing the moral unsuitability of their rulers. The latter’s sense that scandal offers a privileged insight into the real doings of the great and the not-so-good is still strong today: J B Thompson in his recent study, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (2000), argues that sensational exposure actually provides us with a glimpse into a private world that is normally hidden from public view. In his opinion, scandals are ‘windows onto a world which lies behind the carefully managed self-presentation of political leaders and others who may be in the public eye’, a metaphor that suggests both scandal’s ability to look beyond the surface and its promise of a voyeuristic peep into a private realm normally kept hidden from view.<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that Thompson spends most of his book arguing that modern culture is distinguished by the extent to which images are continually manipulated by the media, he is unwilling to relinquish the idea that, at base, scandal provides a rare moment of insight into private behaviour, a therapeutic reconnection with the real in a postmodern world.

Does scandal form a sensationalist obstruction to real history, or does it offer an observer a privileged insight into the real behaviour which lies behind public masks? This thesis suggests that the fundamental assumption behind this

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

question is problematic. It has now become a commonplace, if not an entirely uncontroversial dictum of academic thought that there is no experience of reality that is prior to representation. Therefore, I work from the basic premise that nothing is scandalous *a priori*, outside of a social context. While it may seem that scandal gestures towards a hidden reality of secret transgression, the misdemeanours it describes are always already represented. Thus, though newspapers may frequently argue that sensational publicity allows us an insight into a private world hidden from the public gaze, I shall argue that scandals are fundamentally public events, unveiling transgressive acts via the mediating influence of the press to an audience, in order to elicit, engineer, or imagine, a public reaction.

This is reflected in the etymological history of the word ‘scandal’. It derives from the Greek ‘*Skandalon*’ (σκάνδαλον), which means a stumbling block, an obstacle in the path. In the New Testament, ‘σκάνδαλον’ translates as both ‘temptation to sin’ and ‘offence’ or ‘fault’, a duality of meaning which appears to make the actual commission of the wrongdoing relatively insignificant.<sup>6</sup> Scandalous behaviour causes grave concern not because it imperils the soul of the individual, but because, by offering a representation of wrongdoing to society, it may call the faith of a community of believers into question, leading to factional division and, ultimately, apostasy.<sup>7</sup> As I hope to show, in the early nineteenth century, scandals were seldom used as platforms for pure ethical discourses moralizing about the significance of an individual’s behaviour; instead, they tended to raise wider questions about the social and political effects of publicity. Did exposure reveal or obscure truth? Did publicity act as a debased form of popular entertainment, or could it become a serious way of drawing attention to real grievances? Was it an inherently revolutionary political force, an

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<sup>5</sup> J B Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2000, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> F W Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Based on Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der Frühchristlichen Literatur*. Third edition. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1957 repr. 2000, p. 926. See also J H Moulton and G Milligan *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930

<sup>7</sup> Hence Romans 16:17: ‘..mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them’.

element in a more gradual strategy of reform, or did it even favour a reactionary political agenda, ensuring the survival of inegalitarian political arrangements?

My approach, treating scandal as a public event, is very different from that of most critics who have focused their attention on scandal. A far more common tactic has been to explore the way in which exposure affects the private sphere of intimate relations, often following Foucault's argument that the public proliferation of discourses on the subject of sexuality in the nineteenth century enabled the control and regulation of private behaviour.<sup>8</sup> For example William Cohen's *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (1996), which deals with a slightly later period than that under discussion here, argues that Victorian society's obsession with scandal is an example of the compulsion 'to generate and to prohibit discussion of sexuality'.<sup>9</sup> In his eyes, scandal tends to serve politically conservative ends, delimiting the 'realm of the unspeakable' in a given society, and censoring transgression to shore up a morally reactionary social vision. Yet for Cohen, precisely because it does generate restrictions, making sex appear to be something transgressive, scandal is a precondition of eroticism:

Recognizing that an incapacity to shape our lips around certain words might open our mouths to other sorts of incursions is hardly to capitulate to a regime of sexual normalization. It is rather to suggest that risking the sticky mess of a scandal might just make it worth clasping the arms in whose embrace we find ourselves locked.<sup>10</sup>

In Cohen's eyes, there is a payoff in accepting repression, since it heightens sexual experience: rather troublingly, he argues that the condition for the expression of so-called 'deviant' sexualities is their public prohibition. Paradoxically, it is the closeting of certain types of non-normative sexual behaviour by displaying them in public as scandalous that lends individual pleasure in 'abnormal' sexual actions a subversive edge. The type of resistance which scandal cultivates thus becomes a matter of half-articulated or even unspoken phrases, piecemeal ambiguities, and literary indeterminacies.

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<sup>8</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*. Trans. R Hurley. London: Penguin, 1978 repr. 1990

<sup>9</sup> William Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, p. 1

By contrast, my argument and methodology in this thesis are almost diametrically opposed to Cohen's. In my view, during the early nineteenth century, scandals did not just represent transgression for an audience; they were also all about 'representation', in the political sense of the term. Where he focuses on scandal's relationship to private sexuality, I focus on its connection with public politics. Where he claims that scandal is the vehicle for regulatory state control, I argue that it is an essentially dynamic phenomenon, providing flashpoints in which a range of moral, social and political views come into sharp conflict. Where he regards scandal as creating space only for covert, stealthy strategies of resistance which operate at a physiological, sensory level, I argue that debates about publicity became a site for open and explicit resistance to the political status quo, paying particular attention to the way in which scandals were capable of carrying a radical political charge.

Scandals frequently dramatized situations in which the personal interests of the powerful were at variance with the general interest of the majority. They also provided examples of the way in which publicity could be used to correct the abuse of private position by exposing wrongdoing to public opprobrium. This meant that the revelation of the particular details of one misdeed often became an occasion for more general arguments about the role of public opinion as a regulative force. In this thesis, I focus on the way in which two groups used scandals to campaign for an extension of rights to the disenfranchised. Firstly I explore the manner in which 'respectable' radicals, who campaigned in and out of Parliament for an extension of the franchise, used publicity to demonstrate why the system had to be reformed and to imagine how alternative forms of government might work. Secondly, I investigate the manner in which early feminists used scandals as opportunities to push for wider opportunities for women in public life, and for the legal recognition of women as separate individuals.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 239.

## II

### *Scandal and Reform of the Franchise*

Numerous historians have noted the relationship between scandal and political radicalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but too many have assumed that sensational publicity worked merely as a destructive weapon in radical hands. Scandal, the argument goes, allowed reformers to destroy the reverence of the people for public dignitaries, creating space for radical sympathies to develop. As I hope to show, the relationship between publicity and radicalism was far more complex than this view suggests. While, as Lynn Hunt has demonstrated, scandalous representations of powerful individuals could carry a destructive, even revolutionary charge, publicity also played a more positive, utopian role within radicalism. Upper class sex scandal was not just an occasion for exploring corruption, but for imagining the positive virtues of an alternative system, which would encourage the pursuit of the general good by rendering politicians more dependent on the people.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the arguments about publicity that were occasioned by scandals allowed individuals who were excluded from the official political process to imagine and to articulate new forms of political selfhood, the roots of which lay outside of the parliamentary system.

In the late eighteenth century, public opinion, as Habermas has demonstrated, was increasingly seen as a rational and enlightened political force, reflecting the considered views of a wide range of people who were not entitled to vote.<sup>12</sup> For those who regarded it as a benign or beneficial influence, one of its

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<sup>11</sup> See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1992, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation Of The Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into A Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1962 repr. 1989. While the extent to which the positions of particular groups can be spoken of as representing a unified, political viewpoint is still the subject of considerable historical debate, at a rhetorical level, there is little doubt that, in both France and England, appeals to a collective viewpoint were increasingly used to lend legitimacy to a particular course of action. Like Habermas, Mona Ozouf contends that public opinion was a quantifiable entity in late eighteenth century France. See '“Public Opinion” At The End Of The Old Regime', *Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 60, September 1988, pp. S1-S21. However, Baker argues that it is more profitable to analyze public opinion as a discursive construct, which influenced public perceptions of the political sphere, see Keith Michael Baker, 'Public Opinion as Political Intervention' in *Inventing the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 167-99. His views are followed by Jon Cowans in *To Speak For The People: Public Opinion And The Problem*



chief virtues was that it represented the views of all, making it difficult a particular faction to sway it to accord with their own interests, since it was believed to be impossible to manipulate, bribe or coerce thousands of people at once. As Gunn has shown, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the intrusion of the private concerns of the ruling classes into the process of political decision-making was increasingly regarded as problematic, if not downright corrupt. As the paternalist view that the interests of the upper ranks were the interests of all was increasingly called into question, the need to find a mechanism which would allow the government to be surveyed and judged in a fair and objective manner became more pressing.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, political theorists began to turn to publicity as a tool which could ensure that the voice of public opinion was heard, thus checking the corruption that was endemic in the patronage system by guaranteeing that decisions were made in the general interest. Sex scandals involving members of the ruling classes were an example of the way in which exposure could work as a surveillance mechanism, uncovering the hidden wrongdoing of powerful individuals.

By presenting the views of the disenfranchised as opinions that counted, arguments in favour of publicity prepared the way for radical arguments in favour of extending the political franchise. If including the views of all in political discussion was beneficial, ensuring that the system was run in the interests of all, why not simply include everyone in the official voting process? As I shall show, sex scandals which involved figures from the ruling elite allowed radicals to make this argument in a concise, cogent and compelling manner, developing what seemed a natural connection between three things: the public reaction provoked by the exposure of a particular aristocratic misdemeanour, a more general argument about the utility of publicity as a tool to control the unbridled desires of the upper classes, and the still broader and more abstract claim that there was a pressing need to overhaul the franchise.

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*Of Legitimacy In The French Revolution*. New York and London: Routledge, 2001, whose introduction gives a much fuller account of the debate than it is possible to provide here.

<sup>13</sup> J A W Gunn, 'Influence, Parties, and the Constitution: Changing Attitudes, 1783-1832'. *The Historical Journal*. Vol. 17: No 2, June 1974, pp. 301-328

What is more, the first three decades of the nineteenth century brought a powerful surge of optimism among radicals about the positive pedagogic force of publicity. Not only would it stimulate reform of the franchise, it would also prepare the disenfranchised for their new responsibility as voters. The exponential growth in the number, the power and the independence of the English newspaper press during this period encouraged a good deal of confidence about the educative effect to be produced by the wider distribution of knowledge. Technological advances (the development of improved paper-making machines, and faster, steam driven presses) allowed apparently endless, precise reproductions of a story to appear at once, while reductions in the cost of paper combined with growing literacy rates to boost the sale of news to an anonymous and socially diverse readership. Improved distribution networks enabled newspapers to be delivered with increasing rapidity, so that it became more possible to think about a story as unfolding in a particular cultural moment. As newspapers became increasingly financially independent, no longer relying on government subsidies to survive, belief grew in their potential to become a crucial mediating force between official culture and a public distanced from political life, powering a 'march of mind'.

At roughly the same time that this change in press culture was occurring, it is possible to trace a shift in the etymological history of the word 'scandal'. In the mid eighteenth century, scandal and slander were regarded as interrelated phenomena: a slander, spreading slowly through would lead gradually to a scandal. However, in the early to mid nineteenth century, the meaning of the two words began to diverge slightly, as 'scandal' came to denote a recognizable cultural event with a different structure to that of rumour or gossip. The word underwent a corresponding grammatical shift: in the eighteenth century, scandal was predominantly used as a verb, meaning 'to charge falsely with faults'; to 'scandalize' someone could mean to talk scandal about them. In the nineteenth century, however, 'scandal' became almost exclusively a noun, denoting 'an offence given by the faults of others. A reproachful and infamous aspersion; infamy'.<sup>14</sup> It increasingly denoted a story which was relayed simultaneously to each member of a distanced, faceless audience, via the newspaper, as the

*crescendo* of gossip, which depended on information being distributed slowly, through an interpersonal network of acquaintances, began to be replaced by the more abrupt shock of mediated revelation which would eventually come to characterize the exposé of New Journalism. ‘A scandal’ had become a cultural event, a drama of concealment and exposure, suppression and revelation.

However, as the press increasingly catered to a faceless, mass audience, it became more and more difficult to distinguish between the regulative use of publicity to enable an anonymous public to police the activities of the ruling classes, and its potential to provide a mass public with a degraded, titillating form of public amusement. The flipside of the radical notion that the press would construct a politically knowledgeable public was the fear that newspapers would simply cultivate a taste for licentious material amongst a crowd of disturbingly faceless, appetitive consumers. Rather than acting as a truth-determining force, sex scandals had the potential to inundate the public sphere with unwholesome material, feeding a salacious public appetite for lewd publications. As a result, anxieties about the possibly deleterious effects that could be produced were the public to develop an addiction to scandal haunted the arguments of reformers, becoming particularly intense where the audience for such publicity was imagined as partly or exclusively female.

### III

#### *Scandal and Feminism*

Recent historians have drawn attention to the way in which the concept of separate sphere ideology, with its notion of a clear division between a feminine ‘private sphere’ and a masculine ‘public realm’, is inadequate to representing the full diversity of women’s experience from 1780 to 1850.<sup>15</sup> Not only has social historical research revealed that many women from the upper and working classes lived in a manner which did not respect a rigid separation of spheres, but cultural historians have shifted attention towards the complex relationship between

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<sup>14</sup> J. Barclay, *A Complete and Universal English Dictionary*. Liverpool: Nuttall, Fisher and Co, 1836

discursive representations of proper behaviour and real experience. As Amanda Vickery has pointed out in her admirably thorough review of literature on this subject to 1993, the result is that ‘separate spheres’, once a central organizing concept of women’s history, has begun to fragment under an unprecedented amount of pressure, to the point that there is now ‘little unanimity among historians as to what public and private should be held to mean’.<sup>16</sup> This issue is rendered more complex by the fact that a second, slightly different set of definitions for the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ has developed to describe the movement from an aristocratic, court-based political system to a more inclusive ‘public’ sphere in which ‘public’ opinion could play an increasingly important role. Here, ‘public’ and ‘private’ are used in a still more confusing and contradictory fashion. While some historians use ‘public’ to refer to anything that is not the realm of the domestic, others, following Habermas, use the term more exclusively, to refer to the world of court politics, describing the growth of extra-parliamentary politics as a movement with its roots in the ‘private’, but distinctly masculine and anti-domestic world of coffeehouses and debating clubs.

However, this confusion is not specific to modern historians. Discussions about publicity in the early nineteenth century dramatized conflicts between different ways of conceptualising the relationship of public and private realms. Because sex scandals were often used by radicals as examples of wider financial and political corruption, it was not clear whether the intimate details that they revealed were essentially public or private in nature. Was publicity necessary to policing the public sphere, ensuring that private (secret) misdemeanours did not go unchecked? Or did it pose a danger to the private (domestic) sphere, which could be denatured by exposure to the public gaze? For example, Mary Ann Clarke not only accepted substantial sums of money to secure military promotions, but actually pinned the list of those whom she wished to see promoted to the head of the bed that she shared with the Duke of York, blurring the boundaries between ‘private’ sexual exchange and ‘public’ commercial

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<sup>15</sup> For a superb outline of the debate see the introduction to Harriet Guest’s *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001

<sup>16</sup> Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *The Historical Journal*. Vol. 36: No. 2, 1993, pp. 383-414, this citation p. 412

financial transactions. Similarly, when Clarke appeared to testify against the Duke in Parliament, some of his supporters insisted that the relationship between the pair was strictly ‘private’, arguing that as the courtesan was virtually his wife, she should be bound by the law of ‘couverture’, which would prevent her from giving evidence against her ‘husband’ on the grounds that the interests of a married pair were identical. Radicals, on the other hand, pointed to the ‘public’ significance of trafficking in military commissions at a time of war, arguing that the sexual relationship between the Duke and Clarke was a matter of international concern.

Thus, the issues surrounding the need to control the abuse of private interest, and the issues surrounding the concept of a gendered division between two different spheres of activity overlapped in early nineteenth century debates about scandal. Because of this, many women were able to use their expertise in writing about the domestic sphere to contribute to overtly political debates about corruption. In every chapter of this thesis, I analyze significant contributions made by female novelists, pamphleteers and memoirists to both abstract theoretical discussions about the social utility of publicity and more specific discussions about the political values which a particular scandal might call into question. Far from being simply a patriarchal tool that was used to oppress passive and victimized females, scandal allowed women to air a wide range of views about the social and political role played by exposure, and to argue about the balance to be struck between female self-determination or reason and the demands of social convention. Furthermore, just as radicals were able to use arguments about publicity to demand the right of disenfranchised men to participate in the political sphere, women frequently used the overlap between rhetoric of private interests and the private sphere to talk about the lack of attention that was paid to female concerns, and to demand the recognition of women as autonomous political and legal beings. Thus, Germaine de Staël and, later, Geraldine Jewsbury, developed what might be termed a ‘scandalous feminism’, using the ability of women to flout moral conventions as a signal that they were capable of an authenticity which fitted them for inclusion in the public, political realm. However, it must not be assumed that those who advocated a rather more respectful approach to social standards were necessarily reactionary

figures. Maria Edgeworth, for example, rejected Staël's arguments, instead grounding her liberal feminism upon a sense of women's superior ability to balance the dictates of individual reason with the need to find a moral system which could be universalised without creating social chaos.

#### IV

#### *Scandal's Problematic Particularity*

However, if scandal formed an important instrument in the arsenal of radicals and feminists who sought to alter the status quo, it was also a very slippery, double-edged weapon, its effects piecemeal and difficult to predict. At the most basic level, it had a troubling tendency to recoil on those who tried to employ it: while scandals could provide reformers with a convenient peg upon which to hang a broad range of political commitments, exposure could equally be used against their cause, to expose the misdemeanours of leading radicals, associating their stance with disreputable sexual behaviour. For example, during the Mary Ann Clarke affair of 1809 the initial success of the parliamentary radicals in bringing charges against the Duke of York was compromised when counter-allegations began to surface about their own private peccadilloes. The result was that the reformers not only began to look as morally corrupt as those they criticized, but their cause was tainted with the stigma of hypocrisy.

But scandal could also taint the cause of those who tried to employ it by associating them with dubious methods of gathering and sorting information. As Marlon B Ross has noted, in the Regency it became difficult to distinguish between 'a scandal-mongering opportunist, who engages in scandal as a means of self-promotion and a scandal-breaking reformer, who exposes misconduct for the benefit of social progress'.<sup>17</sup> For example, George IV's supporters, who endeavoured to bring charges against Queen Caroline were accused of muckraking and mendacity by her supporters. Conversely, on the radical side, during the Clarke affair, Wardle's public reputation suffered terribly from allegations that the information grounding his accusations against the Duke of

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<sup>17</sup> Marlon B Ross 'Scandalous Reading: The Political Uses of Scandal in and around Regency Britain', *The Wordsworth Circle*. Vol. 27: No. 2, Spring 1996, pp. 103-112, this citation p. 103

York was gathered with the assistance of unscrupulous ultra-radical pressmen. Where women endeavoured to wield scandal against individual men to demand legal and social reforms, their conduct almost inevitably aroused a backlash which saw them castigated as indecorous and unfeminine. Thus, Rosina Bulwer-Lytton's attempt to expose her maltreatment at her husband's hands, in order to ground a wider argument against the lack of legal status granted to married women, led directly to accusations that she was not only indecorously bitter and angry, but actually insane.

However, there were also deeper problems with employing publicity as a tool for promoting reform. The actions and events which were exposed in a scandal were often highly specific, their political valence mobile and unstable. If, on the one hand, scandals could galvanize a wider public into supporting a radical cause for a brief period, dramatizing the political issues at stake in a vivid manner which encouraged ordinary people to become involved in politics, on the other, it proved difficult to sustain this momentum over the long term and to encourage those people to transubstantiate their commitment to one particular cause into a more general kind of support for the wider reforming agenda. For example, the Caroline scandal of 1820-1 witnessed huge popular mobilizations on behalf of the 'injured Queen', yet this popular backing evaporated swiftly as the affair collapsed, leaving the radical movement disorganized and disunited.

One of my major contentions in this thesis is that the problem that radicals and feminists faced in using exposure to promote their cause lay in the fact that it was inevitably particular. The fascination which scandal exerted over the nineteenth-century public was much the same that it exercises today: exposure provided dramatic narratives of wrongdoing which were full of private, personal minutiae, snippets of highly specific and detailed information which tended to capture the public imagination. These stories were not only described by contemporaries in terms which drew attention to their literary quality, often in rhetoric drawn from the theatre, but were often used as the basis for novels, broadsheets, poems (humorous, satirical or pathetic) and drama. But converting a strong sense of sympathy with one individual, or the moral repugnance created by the misdeeds of another, into a commitment to the wider political aims of radicals

or feminists was not always a straightforward or simple task. Despite the fact that radicals almost obsessively drew attention to the manner in which scandals drew attention to the problems surrounded an unreformed parliament, on repeated occasions, they failed to convince the public to convert their absorption in the particular, circumstantial details of a scandal into a more general, abstract and lasting dedication to the wider cause of reform. Thus, making the leap from engagement with the specifics of a revelation to a general commitment to reform, whether radical or feminist, proved a problematic task in both 1809 and 1820.

This particularity is the reason that this thesis does not give a linear account of scandal. It does not chart one single major change or alteration in debates about publicity over the early nineteenth century, nor does it provide a neat and clear narrative history linking various incidents of exposure together chronologically. To generalize about scandal, to try to impose a stable narrative on its history, would be to belie the true nature of the subject, to fail to capture everything that is most interesting about its treacherously slippery particularity. Instead, in each case study I have endeavoured to preserve a sense of the details of each incident, looking at the way in which a particular sensation connected with the highly specific political circumstances of its moment. This microcosmic approach allows me to explain the way in which scandal could both galvanize powerful popular support for the radical cause at one moment, and diffuse that upsurge of support for reform at the next, as I explore the tension between the particularity of scandalous narratives and the theoretical bent of early nineteenth century radical and feminist arguments.

## VI

### *Structure*

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part offers an introduction to the two main strands of thought about publicity that run throughout the whole. Chapter one looks at the attitude of Jean-Jacques Rousseau towards publicity, then explores the way in which his ideas are reworked in an explicitly feminist manner by Germaine de Staël in her 1802 novel *Delphine* in order to ground an ambitious and rather grandiose claim for the right of exceptional women to participate in the



public sphere. The second chapter looks at the very different approach to the subject of scandal offered by Jeremy Bentham, before offering a reading of Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora*, a novel which explicitly critiques Staël's scandalous feminism, instead advising a rapprochement between the claims of individual reason and the duty to uphold social conventions.

Together these two chapters are intended as a conceptual introduction to the two main ways of thinking about scandal, which are then explored in a practical context in the subsequent three chapters. As I hope to show, more than any other theorists of publicity, Rousseau and Bentham voiced incredibly pure, uncompromising, even utopian attitudes towards publicity which remained influential for many decades. At the same time, however, I hope that by paying attention to tensions and contradictions in both sets of arguments, I shall convey the fact that Rousseau and Bentham were not philosophers working in a social vacuum, but complex and often inconsistent thinkers who were voicing real historical anxieties about the interrelationship between publicity, gender and politics.

A word needs to be said about the reasoning behind my decision to begin an investigation of scandal in an English context with a chapter which is almost exclusively about French writers. This thesis is not an investigation into different types of scandalous publications; nor does it aim to explore the underworld culture of early nineteenth century scandalmongers, which the work of Iain McCalman has done so much to uncover.<sup>18</sup> Instead, I focus on debates about publicity in 'polite' or 'respectable' political culture, in a wide range of material, from parliamentary speeches to political pamphlets to novels. However, as a direct result, ultra-radicalism is a continually present absence in this thesis. By using chapter one to explore Rousseauvian ideas about publicity which became inextricably associated with the 'dangerous' revolutionary experiments of the Jacobins during the 1790s, I bring into the open a line of thought which had a massive negative influence on the shape of both radical and loyalist arguments about scandal in England during the early nineteenth century. My argument is

that the need of respectable radicals to avoid associating themselves with Jacobin revolutionary violence was so great that prominent reformers who sought to use scandal to make a political point avoided the Rousseauvian model of publicity with an assiduity bordering on the obsessive. Loyalists, on the other hand, were only too ready to argue that any radical attempt to use exposure to draw attention to abuses in the political system smacked of Jacobinism. For example, during the Mary Ann Clarke affair of 1809, Mr Yorke, speaking in Parliament, argued that the enquiry was nothing more than ‘a Conspiracy of the most atrocious and diabolical kind against his royal highness... founded on the Jacobinical spirit which appeared at the commencement of the French revolution’.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in 1820, when George IV and his ministry put Queen Caroline on trial for adultery, the *John Bull* argued that her adherents were using her as a ‘pole to hoist the revolutionary Cap of Liberty on’.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the odd combination of Rousseau’s attitude towards scandal with his massively influential, reactionary gender politics made him a figure to whom many early nineteenth-century feminists felt obliged to respond. While some, like Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth, criticized his exclusion of women from public life as irrational, others like Staël seized on the opportunities he opened up for women as particular creatures who could regulate the sympathies of those around them, reworking his arguments for an explicitly feminist agenda. Even as late as the 1840s, when Geraldine Jewsbury and Rosina Bulwer-Lytton tried to use scandal to highlight the way that separate sphere ideology and the sexual double standard were used to oppress women, they referred back to eighteenth-century French examples. As I shall show in chapter five, Rosina Bulwer attacked the ‘*false sensibility*’ of Rousseau as a force pernicious to female independence and true social transparency, while Jewsbury drew on arguments from Jean-Jacques, Staël, and the *philosophes* to argue that women should be given the opportunity to emancipate themselves from social conventions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries And Pornographers In London 1795-1840*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988 repr. 1988

<sup>19</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 12, January 27 1809, col. 190.

<sup>20</sup> *John Bull*. No. 2, December 24 1820, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Memoirs Of A Muscovite*. London: I C Newby, 1844, Vol. 1, pp. 158-9.

Part two of this thesis, comprising chapters three to five, offers three case studies which are designed to illustrate the way in which both Rousseauvian and Benthamite ideas were adopted and reworked by radicals and feminists over a forty year period. I have chosen to discuss these scandals because they seem to me to epitomize some major concerns about the relationship of radicalism, female political participation and scandal during this period. For example, though I do not deal Harriette Wilson's blackmailing memoirs, many of my remarks in chapter three could apply equally to her case. In that section, I explore the Mary Ann Clarke scandal of 1809, when allegations of corruption against the Duke of York and his mistress Mary Ann Clarke surfaced in the press. Chapter four deals with perhaps the most politically explosive scandal of the entire century, the Queen Caroline affair of 1820-1, which saw the mobilization of huge crowds in aid of the radical cause. Finally, chapter five takes my arguments into the context of the 1840s, exploring the way in which Rosina Bulwer-Lytton used the ideas of Bentham to mount a long-running scandalous campaign against her husband, the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, from the late 1830s to the 1850s.

PART ONE

## Chapter One

### 'Breaking The Irons of Opinion'

#### Social Transparency And Scandal In The Works Of

#### Jean-Jacques Rousseau And Germaine De Staël

*They* condemn you - *they* accuse you- *they* expect of you such a justification, such a sacrifice - *they* say such or such a thing of you... What, then, is this monarch THEY to whose sovereign authority such constant appeals are made?

He is a king without show, without pomp, without any visible throne, yet whom every one obeys, at whose voice every one trembles; a king singular in this, that he is equally master in great, as in little things. - *They* no longer talk politics, canvass the government, discuss social interests- at the instant every one avoids these topics of conversation - *They* no longer wear feathers in the head-dress, and from one end of Europe to the other every lady throws her feathers aside. *They*, most puissant monarch! How delightful it is to set you at defiance, and yet to do so we must live in perfect solitude.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Necker, 'They', *Miscellanies.*, No. XLV. Quoted in Germaine de Staël, *Memoirs of the Private Life of My Father*. London: Colburn, 1818, p. 224.

Debates about publicity and feminism in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may have been intense, but they were largely restricted to the sphere of prose debate. In revolutionary France, on the other hand, discussions of the social role played by publicity took a more concrete, practical form as radicals transformed society into a laboratory for testing theories about the way that social relations moulded public opinion. These experiments, which are the subject of this chapter, had a massive impact on English contemporaries who watched the dramatic results from across the channel. In particular, the association of Jacobin efforts to enforce a culture of total publicity through the violence of the Terror shaped debates about social transparency and public opinion in Britain for at least the next four decades. While loyalists fulminated against any attempt to use scandalous exposure against the upper classes, arguing that using publicity in this manner was dangerously revolutionary, few reformers outside of ultra-radical circles could afford to be seen as advocates of Jacobin openness. In response, the early nineteenth century saw many British radicals turned to models of publicity which distanced them from the Jacobin example, stressing the gradual emergence of truth over sudden enlightenment, a slow process of change in place of cataclysmic revolution, and the impossibility of transcending interests rather than alignment with the general good.

This chapter focuses on exploring one strand of French thought about publicity which had a particularly profound influence on English arguments. The first section looks at the philosophical observations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that total publicity, achieved by inculcating a culture of social transparency, provided a means of overcoming the scandalous inauthenticities and inequalities of aristocratic society, which led people to value appearances over realities, and encouraged individuals to pursue their private interests over the general good. I then move on to consider the manner in which Robespierist Jacobins endeavoured to realize this Rousseauvian culture of publicity in practice during the early 1790s, employing increasingly violent tactics as they tried to produce a benign form of public opinion which would include every citizen on an equal basis.

As I hope to show in this chapter and the next, debates about the political situation of women was intimately connected with discussions about publicity on both sides of the channel. For Rousseau, the figure of the salon hostess, a female powerbroker who uses her sexual allure to gain political influence with leading public men, epitomized the atomistic individualism of corrupt upper class culture. He argued that women were inevitably particular creatures, who were incapable of achieving the degree of independence from public opinion which was requisite in the citizen. Yet at the same time, in *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) Rousseau showed that their seductive qualities enabled them to play a crucial political role in producing the publicity that was so crucial to maintaining republican culture.

In the first few years of the 1790s, many French feminists used Rousseauian arguments to make a case for the inclusion of the voices of women in the overall social picture of opinion. However, as Jacobinism adopted an ever harder line on the need to exclude malign influences from public opinion, feminist arguments were increasingly drowned out by a misogynist reading of Rousseau, in which male radicals used his work to maintain that debarring women from the political sphere was a way of saving the republican project from failure. The final section of this chapter looks at one particular feminist response to this exclusion. In *Delphine* (1802), Germaine de Staël endeavours to rehabilitate Rousseauianism from the misogynist reading of the Jacobins, pointing to the Revolution's failure to produce a stable, egalitarian republic as evidence of the need to include women in the political realm. She uses Rousseau to critique the superficial forms of public opinion prevailing in *ancien regime* culture, but also to condemn the Jacobin emphasis on total publicity as damaging to true inner virtue. Staël argues that, far from being inevitably particular, some women were actually more capable than their male counterparts of resisting particularity and achieving autonomy, using her heroine as an example of a woman unafraid to flout social conventions and behave scandalously in order to pursue her own internal standards of right and wrong. Not only does Staël argue that such women ought to play a political role within society, but she endeavours to show that, without their softening and mediating influence, radicalism is

doomed to follow a violent course which is ultimately as false to inner virtue and an inimical to true republicanism as aristocratic prejudice.

## I

### *Scandal, Theatre and Authenticity*

In Chodelos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont have a talent for controlling publicity. Not only do they maintain tight control over their respective public images, so that they can sin with impunity in private, but they use scandal to manipulate those around them, as a tool of seduction to gain lovers, and as a weapon to destroy adversaries.<sup>2</sup> Merteuil orchestrates the public ruin of Cécile Volanges to revenge herself on the girl's future husband, while Valmont uses Madame de Tourvel's fear of scandal to force her into accepting his seductive letters. Indeed, both libertines are so adept at manipulating appearances that their bravura performances of respectability thoroughly undermine the opposition between theatre and reality. For example, when Valmont learns that Tourvel has instructed a servant to spy on him in order to gather information about his 'real' private character, he stage-manages an affecting drama in which he relieves a destitute family from want before that servant's eyes. Tourvel, convinced that he is unaware of her system of surveillance, believes him to be benevolent, utterly unconscious of the way in which the whole scene has been orchestrated to produce an effect upon her. Her mistake is to believe that, because she has observed Valmont outside of the artificial world of society, she has therefore been offered an insight into his authentic private character; she fails to recognize the extent to which the libertine's self-fashioning destabilizes the boundary

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<sup>2</sup> Roy Roussel 'The Project of Seduction and the Equality of the Sexes in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*', *MLN*. Vol. 19: No. 4, May 1981, pp. 725-45. I am also indebted to Carol Blum's argument, 'Styles of Cognition as Moral Options in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*', *PMLA*. Vol. 88: No. 2, March 1973, pp. 298-298. For a brilliant reading of libertinage, temporality and desire see Thomas Kavanagh. 'The Libertine Moment', *Yale French Studies*. No. 94, 1998, pp. 79-100. See also Jean-Marie Goulemot and Arthur Greenspan 'Towards a Definition of Libertine Fiction and Pornographic Novels', *Yale French Studies*. No. 94, 1998, pp. 133-145 and Anne Marie-Brinsmead, *Strategies of Resistance in Les Liaisons Dangereuses: Heroines in Search of "Author-ity"*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989. For a reading rather more critical of libertinage from a feminist perspective, see Nancy K Miller



between the authentic 'inner' life and artificial external appearances. Even at the deepest level of subjective experience, being and seeming become confused by Valmont's play-acting, and nowhere is this more evident than in the moment when his self-conscious performance of benevolence brings him a genuine surge of virtuous delight. 'I'm tempted to think that those so-called virtuous people don't deserve quite as much credit as we're invited to believe', he wryly comments, reading conventional morality as a system of hedonistic pleasures, which depend only upon the effects produced by the actions of the agent, and not on the internal disposition that motivates them.<sup>3</sup>

As this might suggest, Valmont's sense of selfhood is fundamentally theatrical. He transforms his lived experience into an emotional drama, in which he is both principal actor and audience. Instead of experiencing emotional responses as the result of empirical situations, he constructs empirical situations for the sake of the emotional reactions they provoke, savouring his feelings with an epicurean relish. The women that Valmont pursues are sought not for their own sake, but for the emotional frisson that the sexual chase provides. Any obstacle that assists him in delaying fulfilment becomes valuable as a means of heightening the interest and the pleasure of this suspended moment. Thus, Valmont criticizes Cecile Volange's technique for seducing Danceny, arguing that she has failed to put a sufficient amount of difficulties in his way: 'To spur our young man on, he would have needed to face more obstacles than he has done'.<sup>4</sup> The eroticism of his sexual encounters is profoundly unteleological: it is the moment between arousal and intercourse that is imbued with eroticism, as Valmont deliberately seeks to defer physiological satisfaction in order to protract the sensation of desire. Valmont, an artist who works with the raw material of experience, seeks to experience sex as a narrative, adding impediments and complications, so that sexual pleasure and pleasure in plot construction converge. Once again, artifice shapes emotional and physical reality, as much as reality

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'Libertinage and Feminism', *Yale French Studies*. No. 94, 1998, pp. 17-28.

<sup>3</sup> Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Trans. Douglas Parmée. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, Letter 21, p. 43. The original French for translated quotations is provided in Appendix I, for this quotation see 1.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter 57, p. 110. See Appendix 1.2.

imposes constraints on artifice. When he is not considering how to augment this sexual/textual pleasure at an empirical level, he is creating secondary accounts describing his plots, in letters narrating his experiences to Madame de Merteuil.

As I argued in my introduction, the word ‘scandal’ is etymologically connected to the concept of a stumbling block. In the Bible, ‘σκάνδαλον’ can refer not just to an event that has already happened which causes offence or revulsion, but also to a trap, an enticement to wrongdoing, which might lead the righteous from the path of virtue into the toils of sin. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the libertines’ highly theatrical behaviour seems to pick up on this meaning of the term, as they develop an erotic investment in obstruction, which is fed by their ability to manipulate a succession of social masks. Obstacles allow the narrativization of desire, but this creative act is dependent upon an ability to manipulate appearances, to construct artificial ‘roles’ and to manipulate social facades, in order to encourage other characters to stumble into sin. However, the continued social existence of Valmont and Merteuil also depends on their ability to combat ‘scandal’ in the more modern sense of the term: the revelation of a wrong that has already been committed. They must cautiously conceal their wrongdoings, creating barriers to conceal their vices from public view.

The ambivalence of Laclos’s scandalous novel, which both critiques the vices of aristocratic society, and revels in the energy and dynamism of libertine culture, can be read as an attempt to dramatize the concerns of Jean-Jacques Rousseau about the superficial nature of Parisian life, while drawing attention to the subversive ability of the aristocratic hedonists to confound the distinction between truth and falsehood, appearance and reality, upon which Rousseau’s philosophy is grounded. If Laclos’s libertines are relentless pleasure seekers, who exploit obstruction and opacity to heighten their erotic pleasure and to avoid the moral retribution which should result from public exposure of their actions, Rousseau’s political works aim to convince the reader that all of the impediments to social openness which foster such behaviour are inherently scandalous. In his eyes, a virtuous society would be entirely transparent, so that appearances and

realities mapped onto each other exactly. By removing opportunities for one-upmanship and deceit, social openness would encourage individuals to liberate themselves from their personal interests, and instead to identify with the interests of the people, aligning themselves with the ‘general will’, a type of consensual public opinion which was essentially egalitarian, since all citizens would set aside their private wishes together, ensuring that no individual or group would be subjugated to the wishes of any other.<sup>5</sup> Aristocratic society, by contrast, was opaque, and thus allowed a gap to develop between the way things were and the way they seemed. This encouraged individuals to hide their true selves from the public gaze, instead performing a social identity for an audience. As an inevitable result, these people began to indulge their ‘*amour-propre*’, a type of self-love that placed the individual in competition with others, reifying their personal interests so that they could no longer identify with the collective.<sup>6</sup> If

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<sup>5</sup> The general will is the result of a process of each thinking for all, not to be confused with the ‘will of all’, which, as Levine points out, is simply the aggregate of individual preferences. See Andrew Levine, *The General Will: Rousseau, Marx, Communism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, especially chapter 1. It should be noted that generalizing the will does not necessarily entail a loss of voluntarism. For a discussion of this, which includes a discussion of critical opinion on the matter see Patrick Riley, ‘Rousseau’s General Will: Freedom of a Particular Kind’ in *Rousseau and Liberty*. Ed. R Wokler. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, pp. 1-28. For an in-depth discussion of both the general will and the role of amour propre in Rousseau’s philosophy see N J H Dent, *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988. Because of the transparency of the general will, it becomes possible to institute a censor, whose role is to listen and to express public morality. The problem with the theatre is not that it would alter conduct, or displace this censor, as Marshall has alleged, rather it is that it has a tendency to create faction and division in consensual opinion by ridiculing proper public morality. See David Marshall, ‘Rousseau and the State of Theatre’, *Representations*. No. 13, Winter 1986, pp. 84-114.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, hereditary rights have to be established by a troublesome, convoluted process of research, while primitive equality is so easily substantiated, via a simple thought experiment, that it is self-evident. I am indebted here to Starobinski’s observation: ‘That appearance and reality are two different things and that a “veil” covers our true feelings – this is the initial scandal that Rousseau encounters, this is the unacceptable datum for which he will seek the explanation and cause, this is the misfortune from which he longs for deliverance’. See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971, repr. 1988, p. 5. This work contains an in-depth discussion of the significance of transparency and unveiling in Rousseau. For an alternative, heavily psychoanalytic approach to the issue of ‘truth’ in Rousseau’s work see Thomas M Kavanagh, *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1987. See also Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Burger and Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1962, repr. 1989; Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986 and Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. An obvious riposte to this argument would be that Rousseau asserts that people might have to be ‘forced to be free’, and that right-feeling is therefore coerced, and reflects not the true interests of the individual, but those imposed

social transparency created an egalitarian and democratic social structure, the opacity of aristocratic society, which created space for the exercise of self-seeking, individualistic desires, inevitably tended to emphasize inequality.

For Rousseau, one of the main reasons that this lack of openness within aristocratic society was so damaging was that it replaced authenticity with theatricality, transforming inner virtue into a matter of performance. One of the clearest expressions of this is the *Lettre a M. d'Alembert*, published in 1758, in which Rousseau explained his objections to opening a theatre in Geneva. One of the virtues of a republic, he argued, was that social interactions were always authentic because people could not pretend to be something they were not: 'individuals, always in the public eye, are born censors of one another'.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, in Paris, the lack of a single unitary public gaze meant that it was only possible to know other people by outward appearances which could be illusory: 'each, easily hiding his conduct from the public eye, shows himself only by his reputation'.<sup>8</sup> Bringing dramatic representations to Geneva would destroy its culture of openness, infecting the republic with metropolitan opacity. The stage would teach citizens to distinguish between the actor, who was worth watching, and the spectator, who was virtually invisible, thus creating an awareness of social inequality where none had previously existed. This equation of significance with visibility would awaken the *amour-propre* of the Genevans, encouraging them to begin to perform identity in competition with their peers, and creating a discernable hierarchy in what had formerly been an egalitarian society.<sup>9</sup> As conspicuous consumption became a valuable tool in this struggle for self-assertion, enervating luxury would be introduced into the republic, and 'natural' gender distinctions would be overturned, as women lost their modesty in the pursuit of self-display, while men became effeminate and superficial. The

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by others. However, if this 'force' operates in an indirect, social manner rather than as a direct exertion of one individual or institution's power over the self, then the philosophical, if not the moral aspect of this objection, is removed: Rousseau is anxious about the effect of critical debate but allows the legislator to use indirect methods of influence.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert On The Theatre*. Trans Allan Bloom. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960, repr. 1993, p. 58-59. See Appendix 1.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59. See Appendix 1.4.

<sup>9</sup> For a definition of '*amour-propre*' see N J H Dent, *A Rousseau Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

overall result of introducing a theatre would be that Genevans would trade genuine independence for slavery to public reputation. An individual who performed identity would become dependent on the presence of the very spectators from whom s/he sought distance.

As a republican society was gradually denatured by metropolitan theatricality, its attitude towards scandal would change. In Genevan society, the natural moral feelings of each individual harmonize easily into a collective consciousness or 'general will'. If an individual was found to be involved in scandalous sexual transgressions, the republic would respond directly to the substance of the wrongdoing through the mouthpiece of a public censor, whose views represented those of the entire community. In a society this transparent, scandal would act as the genuine expression of moral shock, and its influence would be remedial, upholding the rational moral consensus of the people against the threat of immorality. By contrast, in a metropolitan culture, scandal was a manifestation of the all-pervading problem of theatricality. When a supposedly upright individual's vices were exposed, the discrepancy between public and private behaviour which Rousseau regarded as symptomatic of Parisian life, was also revealed. But the outrage which scandalous revelations inspired also reflected the denatured state of public moral opinion in the city. As the unbridled exercise of *amour-propre* dissuaded individuals from identifying their own good with the collective, public opinion could not reflect the general will; instead it reflected the dependence of urban society on appearances. When the Parisian public pretended to be scandalized, they were not registering deep moral outrage; rather public scandal simply registered the fact that inner virtue had become a matter of theatre: what mattered was not *being* moral, but being *seen to be* moral, as getting caught became far more significant than actually doing wrong. Virtue was equated with an ability to keep transgressions out of sight, immorality with detectable offences, and secret vice had no place at all on the moral map, since it was invisible. Scandal thus both reflected and reinforced the inauthenticity of theatrical metropolitan society; epitomizing the division between inner truth and outer forms, but also becoming the occasion for a social drama of exposure, false shock and punishment, which made it appear as if society had mechanisms for

policing morality, without challenging its underlying hypocrisy.

Yet the hollowness of this spectacular morality was not without its uses to reformers. In an urban culture, the authentic behaviour suitable to a republic would become scandalous, drawing attention to the falsity of theatrical city life. This is best illustrated by the *Confessions*, in which Jean-Jacques' independence from social mores ('I feel my heart and I know men. I am not made like any of the ones I have seen; I dare to believe that I am not made like any that exist')<sup>10</sup> transforms him into a scandalous figure, at odds with the degenerate form of contemporary public opinion: 'Determined to pass the little time I had left to live in independence and poverty, I applied all the strength of my soul to breaking the irons of opinion, and to doing courageously everything that appeared good to me, without bothering myself in any way about the judgment of men'.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, the scandals that circulate around the figure of Jean-Jacques represent the resurgence of a malign type of public opinion, which endeavours to co-opt him into conformity. On the other, the heroic enterprise of 'breaking the irons of opinion' transforms that very scandal into the honourable badge of resistance against conventional hypocrisy. Deliberately foregrounding one's scandalous authenticity within a fallen society could be the first step towards promoting a reformed, utopian community.

## II

### *Gender and Transparency: The Role of the Salon Hostess*

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Rousseauvian concepts of public opinion and publicity, which linked opaque and aristocratic forms of government with the illegitimate exercise of private interests, and political transparency with democracy and virtue, had become powerful political weapons in the struggle against monarchical government and *ancien régime* culture. As Baker has

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Collected Writings of Rousseau: Volume 5: The Confessions and Correspondence Including the Letter to Malesherbes*. Ed. C Kelly, R Masters and P Stillman. Trans. C Kelly. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, this citation Book 1, p. 5. See Appendix 1.5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 303-4. See Appendix 1.6.

pointed out, at its most extreme, theoretical point, absolutism rested on the assumption that politics occurs:

only in the mind and person of the king...there was no reason why the process of seeking counsel or offering representations should be made public beyond the particular (and particularistic) circles of actors directly involved, simply because there was no other public person to address apart from the king... Hence the notion, frequently invoked, of government as the *secret du roi*.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the fact that, during the eighteenth century, the French monarchy made significant concessions to public opinion, this sense of monarchical government as suspiciously clandestine in its operations was deeply rooted in the popular imagination, and may well have been heightened, rather than assuaged, by the emergence of a type of monarchical display which placed the King's person, but not his methods of government, before the public gaze.<sup>13</sup> As Farge has argued, a growing public hunger for information about current affairs and politics in France, combined with an increasingly powerful press culture which was able to deliver that information to a broad-based and geographically dispersed readership, created forms of publicity which made the secrecy and the networks of personal influence associated with monarchical government seem increasingly suspicious.<sup>14</sup>

In Rousseau's *oeuvre*, the half public, half private space of the aristocratic salon, in which personal gossip and public politics could be discussed together by an exclusive and influential group of powerful men and women, epitomized the evils of a society in which government works along hidden lines of influence. The salon was inimical to social transparency, allowing the upper classes a space

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<sup>12</sup> Keith Michael Baker, 'Politics and Public Opinion Under the Old Regime: Some Reflections', in *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France*. Ed. J Censer and J Popkin. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987, pp. 204-246, this citation pp. 209-10. Baker points out that this notion of absolutism was eroded during the 1750s and 1760s by institutional conflicts over the grain trade, and a campaign against arbitrary practices of the administrative monarchy, as the authorities gave ever wider and broader explanations of their policies to the public.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of pre-revolutionary monarchical spectacle in France see Ralph Giesey, 'The King Imagined' in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture Volume One: The Political Culture of the Old Regime*. Ed. Keith Michael Baker. Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1987, pp. 41-59.

<sup>14</sup> Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth Century France*. Trans. R

to arrange political affairs in private, and thus to forward their own particular interests without reference to the will of the vast majority of the people who were excluded from such elite gatherings. Furthermore, as Staël would later argue in *On Literature* (published after the Revolution, in 1800), the mixture of seductive wit and politics which characterized salon culture meant that women were able to wield a great deal of power over public affairs, by using their wit and eloquence to charm the men around them: ‘The influence of women is necessarily very great, when all events take place in the drawing-room, and when all characters are judged by their conversation; in such a case, women become a supreme power, and whatever pleases them is assiduously cultivated.’<sup>15</sup> Consequently, for Rousseau, the *femme de salon* was an exceptionally disturbing figure. As Joan Landes has suggested, she embodied qualities inimical to social openness, such as ‘pleasure, play, eroticism, artifice, style, politesse, refined facades, and particularity’, using her physical allure to influence the political decisions of powerful men in a manner that collapsed the boundaries between public politics and private sexual exchange.<sup>16</sup>

Rousseau’s attitude towards the salon hostess has provided ammunition for those feminists who argue that his work is systematically misogynist, intent on excluding women from the public domain.<sup>17</sup> In *Émile*, a text often cited in support of such claims since it makes a case for differentiated education, Rousseau does indeed seem to suggest that even in an ideal republic, women are

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Morris. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> Germaine de Staël, *The Influence of Literature Upon Society*. Trans. Anon. London: Henry Colburn, 1812, Vol. 2, p. 60. See Appendix 1.7

<sup>16</sup> See Joan B Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, especially part one. This citation p. 46. For the influence of the salon hostess, see also Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism In The Nineteenth Century*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, *passim*, and Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1992, especially chapter four. Also Sara Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Celebres of Prerevolutionary France*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993, *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Susan M Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979; Candice Proctor, *Women, Equality and the French Revolution*. New York, Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1990; Judith Still, *Justice and Difference in the Works of Rousseau: Bienfaisance and Pudeur*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Ursula Vogel, ‘“But in a republic, men are needed”’: Guarding the boundaries of liberty’ in *Rousseau and Liberty*. Op. cit., pp. 213-230; Lori Jo Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s and Germaine de Staël’s Subversive Women*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999.



ill suited to political life because they are unable to achieve the requisite degree of independence from worldly opinion:

When a man acts well, he depends only on himself and can brave public judgment; but when a woman acts well, she has accomplished only half of her task, and what is thought of her is no less important to her than what she actually is...Opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women.<sup>18</sup>

Resisting conventionality by behaving authentically is a strategy available only to men. Even in a society governed by total publicity, Rousseau seems to be arguing, women are condemned to see themselves through the eyes of others, unable to escape the dependence on public opinion that is the ultimate result of theatrical metropolitan culture. To some degree, he implies, they will always be enslaved to their particular interests.

However, this reading has been challenged by a second group of critics, who defend Rousseau, pointing out that while his work appears to restrict women to the private realm, he also gives females important public responsibilities as moral guardians and educators.<sup>19</sup> I believe that this set of arguments come closer to the truth of Rousseau's attitude towards gender than the first. By offering a brief reading of the relationship of women, scandal and social openness in *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), I hope to show that while Rousseau's eponymous heroine, Julie d'Etange, cannot achieve complete autonomy as an individual, she acts as an important facilitator of republican virtue, playing a crucial role in the production of a culture of total transparency which benefits the general public as a whole. My reading supports Dart's contention that this text endeavours to rehabilitate the role of the *femme de salon* for republican culture,

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Émile or On Education*. Ed. and trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979, Book V, pp. 364-5. See Appendix 1.8

<sup>19</sup> Penny Weiss and Anne Harper 'Rousseau's Political Defence of the Sex-Roled Family' in *Feminist Interpretations Of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Ed. Lynda Lange. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2002, pp. 42-64. For other feminist defences of Rousseau, see Joel Schwarz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984; Nicole Ferman, *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Woman and Nation*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997; Penny A Weiss, *Gendered Community: Rousseau, Sex and Politics*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1993; Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997.

as Julie employs the feminine charisma which is the source of the salon hostess's power to coerce individuals around her into abandoning their personal interests for the sake of the general good.<sup>20</sup>

Julie thus becomes the republic's first line of defence against the scandal of opacity. But, prior to her entry into the model society at Clarens, she is also the subject of a sex scandal. Though she is the unmarried daughter of a nobleman, she falls in love with her tutor, Saint-Preux. After the pair have intercourse, Julie's father prevents them from marrying on the grounds that Saint-Preux is of a lower social rank than his daughter. Instead, Julie is persuaded to accept the hand of the Baron de Wolmar, condemning her lovelorn instructor to anguished exile abroad. Some years later, Saint-Preux re-enters Julie's life, when Wolmar invites him to spend some time at his estate at Clarens, where the pair have established a model, socially transparent community. Under the gaze of Wolmar, the pupil-teacher relationship is inverted, as Julie helps Saint-Preux to translate his improper heterosexual desire for her into a commitment to the wider community. The love that the pair so scandalously shared in the past comes to stand for the particular desires and interests which the citizen must lay aside in order to align himself with the greater good.<sup>21</sup> Getting rid of opacity, conquering desire, and overcoming a scandalous past become part of the same project of republican re-education.

Saint-Preux's experience at Clarens teaches him to think about the relationship between individual virtue and the form of public opinion that prevails in various different societies. At the beginning of the novel, he has already noted that a flawed society encourages a gap to develop between true inner goodness and mere external conformity to social mores:

I distinguish in what is called honour, that which is drawn from public opinion, and that which derives from self-esteem. The former consists in vain prejudices more tossed than a windblown wave; the latter has its

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<sup>20</sup> See Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*. *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Dart describes Julie as 'a revolutionary version of the salon hostess, a woman whose muse-like qualities were put in the service of the entire community and not merely an exclusive clique'. See Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*. *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

basis in the eternal truths of morality. Worldly honour can be advantageous to fortune, but it does not penetrate into the soul and has no influence on true happiness. Genuine honour on the contrary constitutes its very essence, because only in it can that permanent sentiment of inner satisfaction be found which alone can make a thinking being happy.<sup>22</sup>

Divorced from particular interests, and independent of fallen forms of public opinion which tends towards social conformity, true honour is a matter of self-consistency, an 'inner satisfaction' which renders the self independent of the world.

However, when he travels to Paris, Saint-Preux finds that it is impossible to maintain his autonomy under the theatrical pressures of urban life. When he is initiated into the 'secret mysteries' of salon life, he finds a society which is governed by a radical disjunction between inner and outer personae, and, consequently, obsessed by scandal:

the guests discretely review the gossip of Paris, reveal all the secret events of the chronicle of scandal, render good and evil equally amusing and ridiculous, and each participant by depicting people's characters artfully and according to the individual interest, unwittingly depicts his own even better; here a remnant of circumspection leads them in the presence of their lackeys to invent a certain tangled language, beneath which while pretending to render the satire more obscure they only make it more bitter.<sup>23</sup>

In salon culture, talking about scandal is neither the expression of genuine moral outrage, nor of a collective ethical consensus; instead, it is simply entertainment. Furthermore, the limited circulation of such gossip only emphasizes the inequalities of aristocratic society, since the aristocrats have developed a private discourse, which deliberately confuses the signifying function of language in order to prevent the spread of private scandalous knowledge to their servants.

It is only in Clarens that Saint-Preux begins to realize that honour and virtue can be reconciled with an enlightened form of social opinion. The

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<sup>22</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live In a Small Town At the Foot Of the Alps*. Trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997. *Op. cit.*, Part 1, Letter 21, p. 69. See Appendix 1.9

combination of *amour-propre* and particular interest which makes urban society so dependent on superficial appearances is replaced at Clarens by a carefully controlled social transparency, which means that public opinion expresses a settled general will which sees into the real truth of matters. Social interaction is arranged so as to prevent scandalous obstacles from preventing individuals from identifying with the entire community:

Although all the domestics have just one common table, on the other hand there is little communication between the two sexes: this item is considered very important here. . . Too intimate relations between the sexes never lead to anything but trouble. Most of the disorders in a household stem from gossip sessions among the chambermaids. If the head butler takes a liking to one of them, he does not fail to seduce her at his master's expense. Agreement amongst the men alone or amongst the women is not firm enough to create much of a problem. But it is always from a combination of men and women that secret monopolies become established which in the long run bring most affluent families to ruin.<sup>24</sup>

What do these apparently disparate evils of intersexual communication, heterosexual seduction, and gossip have in common? Rousseau seems to be suggesting that all three create faction. Gossip is only valuable when the information that is exchanged is not yet entirely public, thus splitting those in possession of knowledge from those who remain ignorant. Furthermore, the existence of communicable secrets implies a world in which private interests and public professions may be at odds with one another. Rather than transgression causing gossip, the opposite is true: the kind of social model in which loose talk has a value will also generate loose living, or seduction. Similarly, promiscuous fraternizing between the sexes creates secret alliances between individuals, which encourage identification with smaller groups, rather than with the whole community. The only way of preventing this is to insist on a Spartan separation of the sexes, which will prevent the possibility that the sexual frisson between men and women could develop into full-blown seduction, dividing the household into warring parties.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 2, Letter 17, p. 203. See Appendix 1.10

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, letter 10, pp. 369-70. See Appendix 1.11

At Clarens, Julie's role is to render Wolmar's social project palatable to all members of the community. She is continually conciliating, mediating and intervening, ensuring that the good of the commonweal is achieved without recourse to force or violence. Her method is to align an individual's affections with his duty, giving moral coercion an attractive 'private' form, making members of the community not merely quiescent, but eager to embrace their given roles. This is nowhere clearer than at the famous wine harvest, where she acts as the guardian of the entire society, ensuring that unity and harmony prevail by working alongside her servants in an apparently egalitarian arrangement, which conceals the extent to which her presence also serves to control those of lower rank and to inspire exertion (just as her attendance at the shared festivities afterwards keeps the company from overstepping the limits of propriety).<sup>25</sup> As Saint-Preux comments, she is at once the *beau ideal* of a private woman, and a prominent public leader; a mixture of gentle benevolence and absolute authority:

Julie! incomparable women! You wield in the simplicity of private life the despotic empire of wisdom and beneficence: you are for the whole country a dear and sacred trust which each individual would be willing to defend and preserve at the price of his own blood, and you live more securely, more honourably, in the midst of an entire population that loves you, than Kings surrounded by all their soldiers'.<sup>26</sup>

Not only does Julie help to produce a consensual 'general will', but she provides an occasion for its realization, as the entire community pours out its love and affection for her. The half public, half private realm of the salon itself is extended until it encompasses the whole republic, including every citizen. In this environment, the private affections of the citizens for Julie are used to connect them to the government, as the persuasive attractions of the salon hostess are used to gain their unquestioning acquiescence and obedience.

One of Julie's roles within the household is to guarantee absolute openness, by ensuring that her public and private selves are absolutely consonant all of the time. By ensuring that no disparity can develop between inner self and

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 5, Letter 7, pp. 492-499.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 5, Letter 7, p. 497. See Appendix 1.12.

external reputation, she guarantees that there is no room for scandal to circulate at Clarens. As Wolmar states:

A single precept of morality can do for all the others; it is this: Never do nor say anything that thou dost not wish everyone to see and hear; and for my part, I have always regarded as the worthiest of men that Roman who wanted his house to be built in such a way that whatever occurred within could be seen.<sup>27</sup>

Yet to function correctly, this transparency has to be carefully controlled. The necessity of making continual efforts to attain total visibility actually mean that scandal is ever present, as the incessant threat which the community must counter. As Julie herself argues:

Imagine for a moment some secret intrigue, some liaison that had to be hid, some reason for reserve and secrecy: instantly the whole pleasure of being together vanishes... when we assemble we wish we could flee each other; circumspection, decorum bring on distrust and distaste.<sup>28</sup>

The merest hint of a secret threatens to transform this society into the aristocratic world of the salon, replacing communal social enjoyment with factional intrigue. Yet at times, the culture of total publicity which prevails at Clarens seems rather simulated than produced. For example, Julie's chambermaid, Babi, has to be exiled from the community because her garrulousness in talking about Julie's private affairs threatens the moral superstructure of the community:

This woman is intelligent and loyal, but indiscrete and garrulous. I suspect that she has more than once betrayed her mistress's secrets, that Monsieur de Wolmar is not unaware of this, and that in order to avert a similar indiscretion with respect to some stranger, this wise man has found a way to put her to use so as to take advantage of her good qualities without being exposed to the bad ones.<sup>29</sup>

Babi's careless talk misrepresents the true state of affairs, making Julie appear

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, Letter 6, p. 349. See Appendix 1.13. As the rest of this essay should make clear, Wolmar's argument is not that the opinion of others is crucial to determining morality, but that secrecy is necessarily immoral. In other words, there is little tension between Wolmar's faith in the public gaze, and Julie's emphasis on the individual conscience as the monitor of the individual's actions.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 6, Letter 8, p. 566. See Appendix 1.14.

aristocratic and theatrical, belying her ‘truly’ virtuous inner self, and threatening the good that her openness works within the community. Under the gigantic pressure of Rousseauvian publicity, any clandestine behaviour begins to look suspiciously corrupt: effectually, privacy and scandal begin to overlap. If Julie embodies a transparency that is carefully manipulated for the benefit of society, the mere suggestion that she has secrets threatens to destabilize Wolmar’s entire project.

But Julie’s demise at the end of the novel reveals a far greater, and more devastating secret, which strikes at the heart of Wolmar’s political experiment. When she knows that she is dying, she writes to Saint-Preux telling him that, despite deluding herself that she had conquered her passion for him, she has never actually managed to overcome her love. She has not, in fact, managed to transcend her particular desires, to identify herself utterly with the good of the people. The state of society at Clarens, she explains, rested on a much narrower and weaker basis than any of them believed: ‘I dare pride myself on the past; but who could have answered to me for the future? One day more, perhaps, and I was criminal!’<sup>30</sup> This return of repressed particular wishes destabilizes the republican project, threatening to collapse the boundaries between Clarens and the salons of Paris, reintroducing opacity and interest into society. Knowing this, Julie is glad to pass the heavy responsibility for the welfare of the republic to her friend, Claire d’Orbe, while taking comfort from the idea that the reward of her virtue will be union with Saint-Preux in heaven.

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, the epistolary form of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* allowed Laclos to articulate a form of libertine selfhood that involves highly unstable multilayered social performances, which remain unanchored by a single or simple ‘truth’. Letters from secondary characters allow the reader to compare the reactions of various observers to the behaviour of Valmont and Merteuil, while the epistles of the two main protagonists reveal an intimate relationship between desire, narrative, and obstruction. Rousseau’s

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, Letter 10, p. 369. See Appendix 1.15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 6, letter 12, p. 609. See Appendix 1.16

epistolary novel, on the other hand, begins with a plot in which letter writing plays a crucial role in promoting sexual exchange, but which leads very rapidly to the fulfilment of desire. The text then loses its narrative momentum, as letters cease to be tools of seduction, and instead become instruments for the discussion and promotion of the republican project of dissipating desire. Whereas in Laclos, letters expose irreducible differences of interest and motivation between the characters, in Rousseau's text they provide an occasion for all characters to become involved in life at Clarens, and to express their shared concern for Julie, proving the possibility of a gradual convergence of opinion and desire amongst them.

This gradual union of opinion is reflected at the level of form. Contemporary women readers of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* noted the fact that Julie was apparently split into two sections, one tending to the fulfilment of desire, the other to its transcendence. As I shall argue in the next chapter, Mary Hays and Amelia Opie argued that an interrupted reading of *Julie*, which exposed a woman reader only to Saint-Preux's seductive letters in the first part, could be far more dangerous than a perusal of the whole text.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, however, in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), Hannah More seems to have fewer objections to the first section of the novel than to the second. What she disliked about Julie is not its seductiveness but its rationality, complaining that Rousseau has not seduced his readers through the sympathetic 'affections', but by inculcating bad 'principles':

With a metaphysical sophistry the more plausible, he debauches the heart of woman, by cherishing her vanity in the erection of a system of male virtues, to which, with a lofty dereliction of those that are her more peculiar and characteristic praise, he tempts her to aspire; powerfully insinuating, that to this splendid system chastity does not necessarily belong.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For reader responses to the novel in France, see Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books, 1984. For the responses of women readers on both sides of the channel see Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*. *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education with A View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune*, quoted in *Selected*



By portraying Julie in such an attractive light, Rousseau does not ask women simply to sympathize with her. Rather, he endeavours to make them abandon 'feminine' morality for 'male' arguments about virtue, which use reason rather than passion to argue against chastity. Such a strategy was particularly dangerous precisely because of the opportunities which Rousseau's text held out to women, flattering their 'vanity' to lead them out of their proper sphere.

For Laclos's *Madame de Merteuil*, however, Julie was a dangerous novel not because it was rational, but because it was seductive. Reading most prose works, she argues, is a distanced and impersonal, and therefore an inherently anti-theatrical, experience. By comparison, the connection of speech to the human body made it particular, emotional and dramatic: 'while the author works himself up into a passion, the reader remains unmoved... Talking is quite different. With practice, you can make your voice tremble with emotion and that can be enhanced by a few well-placed tears'.<sup>33</sup> Rousseau's *Julie*, however, was an exception to this rule: having all the alluring force of conversation, it partakes of the theatricality of verbal exchange: '*Héloïse* is the only possible exception; and though the author of that book is very gifted, this observation has always led me to think that the novel was based on fact'.<sup>34</sup> Whereas More identified the universalised male rationality of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* as its most dangerous characteristic, Merteuil argues that it is a quintessentially feminine text, which partakes of the seductive, theatrical charm of the salon hostess. She concludes from this that the plot must be 'based on fact', refusing to read its emphasis on the transcendence of desire in a general, political light, searching instead for the real scandal behind its apparently fictional surface. Whether her reading is deliberately mischievous, or a sign of the libertine's inability to imagine an authentic society, Merteuil's ability to return a novel that sublimates desire to the realm of particular interests is an act of mastery not only over the text but over its political arguments, a sign of the capacity of theatrical society to absorb and negate the threat of texts which set themselves against its artifice and

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*Writings of Hannah More*. Ed. R Hole. London: William Pickering, 1996, p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. *Op. cit.*, Letter 33, p. 64. See Appendix 1.17.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Letter 33, p. 64. See Appendix 1.18

concealments. Merteuil's reading of *Julie* collapses the boundaries which Rousseau so assiduously constructs between Paris and Clarens, theatricality and authenticity, fact and fiction, republicanism and *ancien régime* culture. The salon hostess recognizes that she and Julie use the same techniques to charm and seduce, albeit in the service of very different societies with widely divergent political and social aims.

### III

#### *Jacobinism and Social Transparency*

As feminist historians have noted, the early phases of the French Revolution opened up unprecedented political opportunities for women. Many French women not only hoped that social upheaval would ultimately lead to their political enfranchisement, but became actively involved in politics in its early phases. Olympe de Gouges argued that the emancipation of women would benefit all France, Etta Palm D'Aelders demanded rights of citizenship and equal education, and Madame Roland virtually ran the Bureau d'Esprit Public from her boudoir. Women of the popular classes marched on the streets as representatives of the people.<sup>35</sup> Dominique Godineau notes that as late as 1793 women were still seen as central to preserving the unity of the revolutionary project, and that, prior to the affair of the cockades, the advances made by the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women were so great that many Parisiennes began to believe that demands for full female citizenship and political rights would shortly be met.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For de Gouges see Gregory S. Brown, 'The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges, 1784-1789', *Eighteenth Century Studies*. Vol. 34: No. 3, Spring, 2001, pp. 383-401; and Joan Wallach Scott, ' "A Woman Who Has Only Paradoxes to Offer": Olympe de Gouges Claims Rights for Women' in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*. Ed. Sara E Melzer and Leslie W Rabine. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 102-120. For Roland see Elizabeth Macarthur, 'Between the Republic of Virtue and the Republic of Letters: Marie-Jeanne Roland Practices Rousseau', *Yale French Studies*. No. 92, 1997, pp. 184-203; and Brigitte Szymanek 'French Women's Revolutionary Writings: Madame Roland or the Pleasure of the Mask', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Vol. 15: No. 1, Spring, 1996, pp. 99-122. For popular female participation see Olwen Hufton 'Women in Revolution 1789-1796', *Past and Present*. Vol. 53, November 1971, pp. 90-108; also Harriet B Applewhite and Darline Gay Levy 'Women, Democracy, and Revolution in Paris 1789-1794' in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*. Ed. Samia I Spencer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 pp. 64-79.

<sup>36</sup> Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*. Trans. K Streip. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988, repr. 1998

Many French feminists in these years grounded their claim to participate in the public realm on explicitly Rousseauvian rhetoric. Drawing on the centrality of *Julie* to the republican project in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, some stressed the important public function of the mother as the educator and moral guardian of future citizens. For example, Marie-Jean Hérault-Séchelles, one of the male speakers at the festival of the Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic in 1793, encouraged women to see themselves as central to French political society:

Let all the generous and martial virtues flow, with the maternal milk, into the depths of all the nurslings of France! The Representatives of the sovereign people offer you... the laurel, emblem of courage and victory, transmit it to your children.<sup>37</sup>

Others used Rousseau's emphasis on transparency to contend that the systems which excluded them were problematically factional, and thus inimical to the open culture of the ideal republic. In an exchange with Louis Prudhomme, who endeavoured to use Rousseau to restrict participation to men only, asking 'the good citizenesses of Lyons to stay at home, to look after their households... without claiming to understand the *Contrat social*', Blandin-Demoulin, president of a female political club, compared his attitude to that of the upper classes in *ancien régime* society: 'Give up your system, Citizen... it is as despotic toward women as the aristocracy was toward the people'.<sup>38</sup> To exclude women from politics, in her eyes, would mean that the general will did not represent the wishes of all, but the desires of an interested faction.

However, 1793-4 saw a clampdown by Robespierist Jacobins on the political activities of women, as a far more misogynist reading of Rousseau's *oeuvre* gained ground. This change to a far more antifeminist climate occurred at roughly the same time that the Jacobin line on Rousseauvian social transparency hardened. The rise of Maximilien Robespierre in the early 1790s was due, in part

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<sup>37</sup> 'Discours prononcé par Hérault-Séchelles, présidente de la Convention Nationale, le 10 Auguste 1793, à la fête de l'unité et l'indivisibilité de la République Française' quoted in Candice E Proctor, *Women, Equality and the French Revolution*. *Op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>38</sup> Prudhomme 'Les Révolutions de Paris', No. 185, January 1793, pp. 19-26, quoted in Blum *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue*. *Op. cit.*, p. 209. Blandin-Demoulin also quoted from Blum,

at least, to the fact that he was able to tap into the Rousseauvian association of secret government and corruption, and, by putting his own life on public display, to cast himself as a figure of near total transparency. Beside his almost constant visibility in the public sphere, the private, salon-based gatherings of the Girondins began to appear more like the clandestine and illegitimate gatherings of an aristocratic faction than the meetings of a popular party.<sup>39</sup> In his 1791 *Discours Sur La Liberté de la Presse*, Robespierre expressed this commitment to complete social openness in terms of a faith in freedom of discussion, arguing that an unconstrained press would allow the emergence of the general will. Equating the arguments of those who wanted to retain restraints on publication with the secrecy and mystery which Rousseau associated with aristocratic government, he argued:

Who are these people who incessantly declaim against the licence of the press, and who demand laws to restrict it? They are equivocal persons, whose ephemeral reputations, founded on the successes of charlatanism, are shaken by the least shock of contradiction; they are those who want to please the people and, at the same time, to serve their tyrants, who are torn between the desire to preserve the glory which is acquired in defending the cause of the public, and the disgraceful advantages that ambition can obtain by abandoning it, who, substituting falsity for courage, intrigue for genius, all the little frivolities of the court for the grand responsibilities of revolutions, tremble without ceasing that the voice of a free man should come to reveal the secret of their uselessness or of their corruption.<sup>40</sup>

In 1791, then, Robespierre was arguing that those who set themselves against the liberty of the press had to be motivated by selfish and particular interests. By 1793, however, he had shifted his ground slightly. Patrice

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p. 210.

<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to draw any actual hard and fast ideological, economic or class-based distinction between the Jacobins and the Girondins, particularly in the light of Sydenham's conclusion that political allegiances were volatile, see M J Sydenham, *The Girondins*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1961. His conclusions are opposed by Gary Kates in *The Cercle Social, The Girondins and the French Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, who concludes that it is possible to talk meaningfully about a self-conscious 'Girondin' party. Some historians have even concluded that Girondin was simply a Jacobin name for any moderate revolutionary who was not a member of the Mountain, see J F Boshier, *The French Revolution*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989, p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> Maximilien Robespierre, 'Discours Sur La Liberté de la Presse, 11 May 1791', in *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre*. Ed Charles Vellay. Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908, pp. 22-42, this quotation p. 37. My translation; for the original see Appendix 1.19.

Higonnet has noted the change, arguing that the Jacobins moved from ‘a benign belief in the exchange of varied opinions in 1790-91 to constraining censorship in 1793-94’.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Mona Ozouf has elaborated on this idea, contending that, by 1793, the Jacobins had ceased to argue that opinion would emerge of its own accord, and had begun to focus on the way in which it had to be produced and constructed by the press.<sup>42</sup> While Robespierre remained deeply committed to using publicity in order to expose aristocratic self-interest (in the 1793 *Discours Sur La Constitution* he argued that it was only by excluding the voices of interested factions that the authentic voice of the people be heard: ‘publicity is the support of virtue, the safeguard of truth, the terror of crime, the scourge of intrigue. Leave darkness and secret scrutiny to criminals and to slaves. Free men want to have the people as witnesses of their thoughts’), his method of realizing this ideal had changed.<sup>43</sup> He began to argue that the authentic voice of the people could only be heard if the clamour of factional and interested voices was excluded from public debate.

In 1794, with the enactment of the notorious law of 22 Prairial, the Jacobin commitment to total publicity took a still more extreme form, as Robespierre moved towards enforcing virtue through terror. Deeply suspicious of the idea that virtue resided in external reputation, he argued that propriety itself was a kind of absurd inherited custom, which inclined towards aristocratic abuse. He began to demand that the new citizens of the republic be internally transformed to erase all division between their public professions and their private behaviour. Concomitantly, the treatment of those who had sinned against the republic altered: trials were not only to be given more publicity, but they were to take a form which excluded critical debate and mediation as much as possible: the accused were to be deprived of defence counsel, and the hearing of witnesses was to be drastically curtailed. The need to produce evidence of

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<sup>41</sup> Patrice Higonet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution.*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 128.

<sup>42</sup> Mona Ozouf, ‘Public Opinion at the End of the Old Regime’, *Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 60, September 1988, pp. S1-S21.

<sup>43</sup> Maximilien Robespierre, ‘Discours Sur La Constitution, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1793’ in *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre. Op. cit.*, pp. 255-274, this quotation p. 269-70. My translation. See Appendix 1.20,

counter-revolutionary activity was replaced by a focus on the inner guilt or innocence of each individual, which could be quickly determined by the judge and the watching public.<sup>44</sup>

With this increasing emphasis on the importance of aligning oneself with the general good, the notion that women were inescapably particular creatures, who were inherently unable to set aside their interests to identify with the collective gained ground. J B André Amar, a spokesman for the Committee of General Security, paraphrased Rousseau's argument in *Émile*, that women were incapable of achieving true authenticity, to reason women should be confined to the home, on 'moral' grounds:

Does the reputation of a woman allow her to show herself in public? In general, women are hardly capable of lofty conceptions and serious meditations; and if, among the ancient peoples, their natural timidity and modesty did not let them appear outside the family, do you wish, in the French Republic, to see them in court, at the podium, in political meetings like men, casting aside reserve, the source of the sex's virtues, and the care of the family.<sup>45</sup>

As the Jacobins turned their attention to eliminating factional voices from public debate, they also began to argue that women had to be excluded from politics if the general will was to emerge. Unfortunately, such arguments were devastatingly successful. As Proctor has concluded, the backlash against female politicians was so harsh that 'the position of women in France in the years following 1793 was in many respects actually worse than it had been in the days prior to 1789'.<sup>46</sup> As Staël complained, the effect of the Jacobin backlash against female politicians was felt long after the death of Robespierre, heralding the beginning of a period in which the opportunities for French women to participate in the public sphere were seriously curtailed:

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<sup>44</sup> For the Jacobin tendency to connect disorder with opacity, faction and cabal see Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', *The Journal Of Modern History*. Vol. 68: No. 4, December 1996, pp.768-785. For a fuller discussion of Amar's speech, see Shirley Elson Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and Politics in the French Revolution, 1789-75*. New York, Washington, Bern, Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna, Paris: Peter Lang, 1996 repr.1998.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted from Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue*. *Op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>46</sup> Candice Proctor, *Women, Equality and the French Revolution*. *Op. cit.*, p. 171.

since the revolution, men have thought it politically and morally desirable to reduce the female mind to the most absurd mediocrity: the conversation they have addressed to women has been in a language as devoid of delicacy as of sense; and consequently the latter have had no inducement to excite the powers of their understanding. We do not, however, find that this has tended to the improvement of manners.<sup>47</sup>

Yet despite the fact that Jacobinism had excluded women from playing an active role in political society, the idea that they could play a crucial role in encouraging individuals to sublimate their individual desires for the sake of a general good continued to recur after 1794. In 1799, for example, Jacques-Louis David painted *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (below), which depicts a number of female figures mediating between two political factions. Just as Rousseau's Julie moves from being the object of sex scandal to acting as the mediator whose influence guarantees peace in the socially transparent, mini-republic of Clarens, the Sabine women overcame a moment of sexual outrage, when they were carried away from their tribe by the Romans, to arbitrate for peace between the two sides when their fathers and brothers came seeking revenge. By persuading their kinsmen to forgive the Romans, they enabled the founding of Rome on a peaceful basis. David's painting represents the moment of intercession itself: at the centre of the picture is a woman, clad in pure white, her soft flesh and pacific stance contrast sharply with the muscularity and the warlike attitudes of the virile, naked male soldiers on either side of her. In a dramatic conciliatory gesture, she extends a hand to each side, urging them to set aside their differences. Her plea is seconded by other women, one of whom clings to a warrior's leg in a gesture of supplication, while babies play around the feet of both warriors and women, representing both the political future that is at stake, and the maternal qualities which the women are employing to influence men on both sides. The image stresses the interconnectedness of the private and public realms, in a way which reinforces the dignity and 'naturalness' of motherhood, while highlighting the reforming potential of domestic affections. If women are the inadvertent cause of the conflict, then they are also the hope for

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<sup>47</sup> Germaine de Staël, *The Influence of Literature Upon Society*. London: Henry Colburn, 1812, Vol. 2, p. 162. See Appendix 1.21

reconciliation: only when individuals are taught to put aside their particular differences and look to the commonweal, can the founding of the republic become a possibility. David's painting can be read, in the context of French politics of 1799, as an argument to bring women back into the public sphere, as a force capable of reminding the warring French political factions that their differences should be subordinated to the increasingly remote aim of founding a republic.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 1. Jacques Louis David, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799).<sup>49</sup>  
Oil on canvas, 385 x 522 cm. Musee du Louvre, Paris.

IV

Delphine: *Germaine de Staël Rehabilitates Rousseau*

Germaine de Staël's earliest novel, *Delphine*, published two years later in 1802, can be read as an attempt to rehabilitate Rousseau's commitment to social transparency from the misogynist reading of Robespierre and the Jacobins,

<sup>48</sup> Yet it should be noted that, in using such an image to depict this message, the painter himself becomes an oddly feminized figure, his attempt to use art to step between the hostile parties and mediate for peace placing him in an analogous position to the Sabine women.

<sup>49</sup> Reproduced from National University of Singapore, 'USE 2206 Emerging Global Politics',



reconstructing a climate of moderate republicanism which creates space for the political participation of women in the Napoleonic era.<sup>50</sup> Though Staël declares in her preface to the novel that the text is apolitical, she carefully provides dates for its major events, so that the struggles of her eponymous heroine are brought into line with a wider political context. *Delphine* begins in 1790, and ends in 1792, just after the September massacres and the siege of Verdun.<sup>51</sup> Thus, both the eponymous heroine and her lover, Léonce, die just before the monarchy was abolished, before the first French Republic was proclaimed, and before Robespierre's rise to power, allowing Staël to analyze the moment at which, from the point of view of the moderates, the revolution began to go 'wrong'.

Throughout *Delphine*, Staël makes her case against both *ancien régime* culture and Jacobinism via an exploration of the effect of their respective cultures of publicity on the situation of the eponymous heroine. The novel's epigraph, a quotation from Staël's mother's *Miscellany*, which paraphrases Rousseau's *Émile*, indicates that this is a text which is centrally concerned with scandal and public opinion: 'A man must know how to defy public opinion; a woman must submit'.<sup>52</sup> But Staël's use of this reference is neither simple nor ingenuous; rather it represents a proposition that her novel explores and ultimately challenges. Her novel centres on the political role played by women, and argues that females are perhaps more capable than men of achieving the autonomy from public opinion which is a requirement for inclusion in the public sphere. While she criticizes *ancien régime* society in highly Rousseauvian terms for its conventionality, its inauthenticity and its theatricality, she argues that the rise of the Jacobins saw the inauguration of a regime of social transparency which was equally inimical to inner virtue and true sensibility. Though the entire novel takes place before the Jacobins actually began to challenge revolutionary women,

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<<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/sep/use2206/index.php>>. 15 July 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Hogsett notes the importance of Rousseau to this novel, but her reading is hampered by the fact that she assumes that there was just one interpretation of his works in France during the early nineteenth century. See Charlotte Hogsett, *The Literary Existence of Germaine de Staël*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed chronology of the novel's events see Germaine de Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. S Balayé and L. Omacini. Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., Vol. 1, pp. 47-50. For a plot summary of the novel see Appendix 2.

<sup>52</sup> Staël *Delphine*. Ed. Avriel Goldberger. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995, p.

Staël's argument is that their experiments with an extreme form of social publicity in the Revolution's early stages committed France to an increasingly extreme and violent course, which would inevitably work against the kind of softening political influence exercised by Julie in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which was necessary to found a peaceful society.<sup>53</sup>

In *The Influence of Literature Upon Society*, published just two years before *Delphine*, in 1800, Staël had adopted the very Rousseauvian position that aristocratic society encouraged people to live artificial lives, which ultimately shored up a rigid social hierarchy: 'It is to be expected from the nature of things, that in a monarchy where a strict conformity to fashion and prejudice prevails, every extraordinary action, every attempt to move out of the sphere in which you are placed, must at first appear ridiculous'.<sup>54</sup> In *Delphine* she shows the psychological cost of fighting against such conventionality. At the beginning of the novel, in *ancien régime* society, Delphine must exercise constant vigilance against false allegations, since the mere fact of a rumour's circulation is enough to undermine her personal reputation. As her sister explains:

Public opinion is everywhere, and you can lay hold of it nowhere; each person says to me that *they* tell the most scurrilous lies about Delphine, and I cannot make out whether the person is repeating them or spreading them himself.<sup>55</sup>

Instead of being the expression of the general will, scandal is a discourse which people are ashamed to own, though not to spread. Despite being spread by predominantly verbal means, the fact that it is always already mediated by a third party who is only ever vaguely identified as a 'they' means that the speaker who repeats it is never morally responsible for its circulation. The only indication in the novel that scandal can also circulate in a more impersonal, printed form is Staël's conventional use of asterisks for the name of Mme de R\*\*\*, a woman

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iii. See Appendix 1.22.

<sup>53</sup> My reading here diverges significantly from that of Marso, who argues that Staël's response to Rousseau focuses on a politics of 'love', rather than of public opinion. See Lori J Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens. Op. cit., passim.*

<sup>54</sup> Staël, *The Influence of Literature Upon Society. Op. cit.,* Vol. 2, p. 158. See Appendix 1.23

<sup>55</sup> Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.,* Part 4: Letter 12, p. 299. See Appendix 1.24.

whose unorthodox sexual behaviour has created a scandal. In an episode which reflects Staël's own personal experience of Napoleon's disfavour, Mme de R\*\*\* is ignored by the entire court when she appears in public. Because selfhood in *ancien régime* society is a theatrical performance ruled by *amour-propre*, society can annihilate the public existence of an individual by refusing to countenance them, literally depriving the individual of an audience which can recognize their status as a performer. Only the fact that Delphine deliberately crosses the room to acknowledge the outcast saves Mme de R\*\*\* from becoming a non-entity, whose identity is literally obliterated from the text. The asterisks which replace the letters of her name were often used in eighteenth century English texts to avoid committing libel, because they allowed the identity of the individual in question to remain legible, even drawing attention to the existence of a real analogue to the textual figure, while simultaneously providing the author with the defence that the actual statement was ambiguous, since any connection between the reference and a particular person occurred in the mind of the reader. They constitute a flimsy fiction, purporting to conceal the naked truth but really providing it with a transparent drapery which actually emphasizes that which is disclosed, dramatizing the same interplay between revelation and suppression which Saint-Preux noted in the 'tangled', aristocratic language of the Parisian salon.

Furthermore, in a society where appearances count for everything, scandal represents a moral consensus that bears no real relation to the actual private behaviour of those who circulate it. As Delphine's friend and adviser, Mme d'Artenas tells her:

It is when Parisian society sets out to show its morality *against* someone that it proves most dangerous. Most of the people who make up this society tend to be quite lenient for their own conduct, and often for that of others as well when blame does not serve their interests; but if, by some twist of luck it suits their purposes to interpret the matter strictly, they are forever expatiating on duties and principles, and they carry their rigor much further than do truly austere women who are determined to conduct themselves by what they say of others. In certain circumstances, libertines and coquettes particularly favour the affected *pathos* developed in

rhetorical expansions which serve jealousy or malice well.<sup>56</sup>

The intense inauthenticity of *ancien régime* culture knows no limits. As in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, even exposure, with its the apparent investment in transparency, becomes a theatrical façade. ‘Libertines and coquettes’ treat scandal as the occasion for declamation about universal standards of morality, in order to promote concealed particular interests.

This calculating, worldly ability to manipulate opinion for personal gain is exemplified in *Delphine* by Madame de Vernon. Like a more sympathetic version of Laclos’s Madame de Merteuil, she is an irreligious latitudinarian at heart, who hypocritically obeys the dictates of public opinion for the sake of appearances, while using scandal as a weapon against her enemies. However, in an extraordinary death-bed letter de Vernon reveals that her inauthenticity is the direct result of her education at the hands of a misogynist guardian, who regarded women as mere objects for the amusement of men, and consequently taught her to focus on her personal attractions rather than her sensibilities. Furthermore, as a parent faced with the same dilemma that Mary Wollstonecraft had described in her *A Short Residence in Sweden and Norway* (1796), between cultivating sensibility in her daughter, Matilda, and thus potentially increasing the amount of suffering that she will have to undergo in life, or deliberately impoverishing her intellectually and emotionally in order to inculcate a respect for conventionality, de Vernon chooses the latter. By bringing Matilda up as a Catholic, de Vernon believes that she will enable her to conform to the external demands placed on a woman by public opinion while retaining a sincere inner life. Her respect for public opinion is the result of misguided principles inculcated by an education which seeks to construct a type of femininity that is subordinate to male wishes, rather than an autonomous and independent form of selfhood that is sufficient unto itself.

For Staël, there can be no compromise between conventionality and authenticity. Indeed, by 1814, she was confidently condemning conventional

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3: Letter 16, p. 224. See Appendix 1.25

education for teaching woman to become a well-taught puppet, instead arguing that a girl's intellectual and affective faculties should be cultivated to create a rounded human being, capable of making her own autonomous decisions about morality.<sup>57</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, Matilda de Vernon's education has disastrous results, transforming her into a religious fanatic, whose sincere belief in the dictates of public opinion stems from an emaciated sensibility and an almost total lack of inner life. She professes not to be a slave to opinion like her mother, but nevertheless advises total adherence to the dictates of conventionality on religious grounds: 'I believe it so essential for a women to be attentive to opinion in every particular, that I would advise her not to defy in any way either superstitions... or decorum, however childish they might be.'<sup>58</sup> Eventually, such strict conformity becomes utterly self-destructive. After she bears a child, Matilda refuses to stop breastfeeding because it is the accepted way of rearing a child, despite the fact that the effort to do so is killing her.

By contrast to the de Vernons, Delphine upholds the fundamental goodness of an inner sensibility to the point that she will deliberately flout convention in order to execute a true moral action. Her husband, a Rousseauvian figure, first taught her to disregard the dictates of worldly censure, and to focus instead on maintaining goodness of heart:

Fear of public opinion turns so many women into dissemblers, that to protect the sincerity of my nature, M. d'Albémar did everything in his power to free me from that yoke. He succeeded: the only things on earth I dread are the justified censure of my own heart or the unjust censure of my friends; but whether public opinion seeks me out or rejects me, it can never affect the joys of soul and thought which completely engross and

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<sup>57</sup> Germaine de Staël 'Second Preface' in *Letters On The Writings And Character Of J J Rousseau*. Trans. Anon. London: Henry Colburn, 1814, p. vii.

<sup>58</sup> Staël, *Delphine*. *Op. cit.*, Part 1: Letter 2, p. 14. See Appendix 1.26. Given that Rousseau was famous as an advocate for breastfeeding, and that images of lactating mothers became important revolutionary emblems, Matilda's death can be interpreted as a clear signal of Staël's critical distance from both Jean-Jacques and Jacobinism. As Jacobus has argued, the images of the good Rousseauvian breastfeeding mother, whose fidelity guarantees the purity of the bloodline and the unity of the family, and the indivisible body of the Republic are intimately connected. See Mary Jacobus, 'Incorruptible Milk: Breastfeeding and the French Revolution' in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*. Ed Melzer and Rabine. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 54-75.

absorb me.<sup>59</sup>

Only the Supreme Being is excepted from Delphine's general disregard for the viewpoints of others: her Protestantism, which Staël explicitly opposes to the ritualistic practices of the Catholic Church, nurtures her independence:

What difference does men's language make to the person who believes in the protection of the Supreme Being and lives in His presence, the person whose noble character delights in the feeling of virtue? Sooner or later that person will win respect, for in the final analysis public opinion follows from truth; but one must know how to disdain all the short-lived commotion stirred up against distinguished natures by calumny, stupidity and envy.<sup>60</sup>

With providential goodwill, truth will always emerge eventually, so that the storm of scandal becomes only a temporary, worldly inconvenience.

Yet despite the theory, when she becomes the object of scandal, Delphine finds that braving opinion while endeavouring to remain in urban society is an arduous, if not an impossible task. She finds herself inevitably drawn to worldly calculations about the nuances of social behaviour, which militate against her independence and autonomy:

Even these past two weeks, have I not had to observe those who visit me and those who do not? Must I not study the nuances of the women's courtesy, the degree of warmth in their expressions of feeling for me? I have felt my heart beat with fear when I welcome a visitor, or utter some courteous banality. I do not know one strong quality of soul, one superior faculty of mind which is not debased by such a life!<sup>61</sup>

One cannot act in a morally exceptional manner, and not be made aware of one's incongruity in a society which judges by external appearances. Delphine is placed in the untenable position of justifying and defending her conduct with an eye to the dictates of corrupt public opinion, while simultaneously trying to ignore worldly opinion and follow her feelings.

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<sup>59</sup> Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, Part 1, Letter 19, p. 48. See Appendix 1.27

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Part 1, Letter 19, p. 48. See Appendix 1.28

But Delphine's struggle against public opinion is not merely a noble, heroic quest for authenticity. It is also a justification for her inclusion in the political system.<sup>62</sup> Just as affective relations in the ideal family teach an individual to identify with the general will in Rousseau's *oeuvre*, Staël argues that the strength of feminine sensibilities means that women could cope easily in the political realm, because they would be able to identify and attune themselves to the general will. In her early commentary on the life and work of Jean-Jacques, *Lettres sur Rousseau*, Staël responded to Rousseau's assertion that women could not portray passion by arguing that feeling was one domain where women excelled men:

It is by the heart alone that they [women] are distinguished; this gives impulsion to their minds, and aids them in finding some delight in a destiny of which sentiments are the only events, and affection the sole interest; it is this which unites them to the fate of him they love, and creates them a happiness of which the only source is the felicity of the objects of their tenderness. Finally, it is the heart which serves them instead of instruction and experience, and renders them worthy of feeling that of which they are incapable of judging.<sup>63</sup>

Bearing the role that Julie plays at Clarens in mind, it is easy to see how this intuitive affective grasp of the world can be transformed into a demand for political authority in a republic. Staël explicitly links Delphine's reliance on private feelings with a revolutionary political outlook: 'of all feelings, love of liberty appears to me the most worthy of a generous nature'.<sup>64</sup> Her independence from convention and her reliance on inner virtue, make her an ideal republican. Even though Staël qualifies this statement to argue that only exceptional women, without domestic ties, could transcend their particularity, her argument has a more positive inflection than her earlier position in the *Lettres Sur Rousseau*, in

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, Letter 22, p. 317. See Appendix 1.29.

<sup>62</sup> My argument here is a challenge to the views of Gutwirth and, to a lesser degree, Hogsett, both of whom read Staël's work in terms of her biography to argue that she was dependent on, and in awe of, public opinion. By focusing less on Staël's psychology and life, and more on the ideological and political tendencies of her work, I hope to challenge and complicate this picture. See Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman*. Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978, *passim*; Hogsett, *The Literary Existence of Germaine de Staël. Op. cit., passim*.

<sup>63</sup> Germaine de Staël, *Letters on the Works and Character of J J Rousseau*. London: G G J and J Robinson, 1789, pp. 17-18. See Appendix 1.30.

which she argued that Jean-Jacques had compensated for condemning women to dependence on worldly opinion by praising their ability to dominate men by their sexual seductiveness:

Although Rousseau has endeavoured to prevent women from interfering in public affairs, and acting a brilliant part in the theatre of politics; yet in speaking of them, how much has he done it to their satisfaction! If he wished to deprive them of some of the rights foreign to their sex, how has he for ever restored to them all those to which it has a claim! And in attempting to diminish their influence over the deliberations of men, how sacredly he has established the empire they have over their happiness!<sup>65</sup>

Such comments elicited a storm of protest from Wollstonecraft, who argued in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that Staël was supporting a Rousseauvian system of ‘sensuality’, designed to render woman a ‘meretricious slave to fondle’.<sup>66</sup> Registering the difference between general equality and the particular sway implied by Staël’s use of the word ‘empire’, with its sexually loaded connotations of dominance and subordination, Wollstonecraft argues that the covert exercise of feminine influence in individual relationships militated against collective enlightenment. Women had a right to participate in the public sphere because they were rational creatures, not because they were sexually alluring. Wollstonecraft singles out Rousseau’s statement that women should be ‘subservient to the public opinion’ for explicit criticism:

There have been many women in the world who, instead of being supported by the reason and virtue of their fathers and brothers, have strengthened their own minds by struggling with their vices and follies; yet have never met with a hero, in the shape of a husband; who, paying the debt that mankind owed them, might chance to bring back their reason to its natural dependent state, and restore the usurped prerogative, of rising above opinion, to man.<sup>67</sup>

Turning Rousseau on his head, she argues that his philosophy was designed not to support general human rights, but particular male interests, making it just as

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<sup>64</sup> Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 60. See Appendix 1.31.

<sup>65</sup> Staël, *Letters on the Works and Character of J. J. Rousseau. Op.cit.*, p. 15. See Appendix 1.32.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Ed. Carol Poston. Second Edition. New York and London: W W Norton, 1975 repr. 1988, p. 103.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87 and p. 92 respectively.



suspiciously aristocratic and factional as *ancien régime* culture. For Wollstonecraft, the kind of intercessory role which Rousseau allowed to women was really a deeply chauvinistic way of further naturalizing their dependence and subordination. In 1789 she wrote a scathing review of the *Lettres Sur Rousseau*, in which she censored Staël for offering herself as the female ‘mediator’ of Rousseau’s work. In the eyes of the early Wollstonecraft, Rousseau’s *oeuvre* was sublime, but like all sublime landscapes, full of flaws, which Staël had tried to iron out, smoothing over the antifeminist bias of some of his arguments. Staël’s attempt to ‘soften apparent defects... rub off some sharp corners, rude unsightly angles’ in order to render Jean-Jacques palatable to women, was ‘childish’, and destroyed all the distinctive features of the original.<sup>68</sup> However, in the wake of the Revolution’s failure to realize republican hopes, Wollstonecraft increasingly turned towards a political model which valued feminine sensibility as a force tending towards social improvement. Her 1796 *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden* are less rationalist, more interested in validating feeling as a means of recovering the republican project from failure. Sympathetic connections become a means for the solitary figure of the female wanderer, at odds with her society, to recover from the disappointments of the revolution, reconnecting with her fellow men:

How frequently has melancholy and misanthropy taken possession of me, when the world has disgusted me, and friends have proved unkind. I have them considered myself as a particle broken from the grand mass of mankind. I was alone, till some involuntary sympathetic emotion, like the attraction of adhesion, made me feel that I was still part of a mighty whole, from which I could not sever myself...<sup>69</sup>

The intuitive radicalism voiced by Wollstonecraft’s disappointed narrator suggests that, towards the very end of her life, she moved much closer to Staël’s affective commitment to a libertarian agenda.

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘Letters on the Works and Character of J J Rousseau’ in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft Vol. 7: On Poetry, Contributions to the Analytical Review 1788-1797*. Ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. London: Pickering, 1989, pp. 136-7, this citation p. 136.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘A Short Residence in Sweden’ in *A Short Residence in Sweden And Memoirs of the Author of the Rights of Woman*. Ed. Richard Holmes. London: Penguin, 1987,

The intimate relationship between politics and sensibility which is fundamental to Staël's feminism allows her to argue that women, as creatures alive to inner feeling and thus to inner virtue, are not just equal, but superior to men, since they are more capable than their male counterparts of freeing themselves from the trammels of conventionality. Delphine is far more able to achieve the disinterested state of mind and moral independence necessary for citizenship than her male lover, Léonce, whose mimosa-like response to the slightest touch of scandal renders him vulnerable to manipulation. He places his trust in a system of honour, in which public opinion penetrates the self to such an extent that there is little space left for an autonomous inner life. His inferior capacity for public virtue is expressed in the novel as a kind of gentle gender confusion: the conflict between his regard for opinion and his desires manifests itself as a sickness which implicitly feminizes him. As rumours circulate about his behaviour, he begins to suffer from physiological tremors, illness, and wounds, the physical manifestations of a psychological conflict between his regard for opinion and a repressed inner life. Even at the beginning of the novel, before his affections are in conflict with his sense of honour, he describes his respect for the public voice in terms of disease: 'My forehead breaks out in sweat when for a moment I imagine that any man, even a thousand leagues away, could dare pronounce my name or the name of someone in my family disrespectfully, and without my being there to take revenge.'<sup>70</sup> The internalized vocabulary of nervous disease, so often associated with sensibility in the late eighteenth century, with its palpitations, its exposed nerves and its emphasis on the susceptible constitution, is here transferred to an external complaint concerning an excessive deference to the impressions of others.<sup>71</sup> It is as if, under the stress of living in the eyes of others, reputation becomes so internalised, that scandal becomes a kind of torture.

Staël greatly admired William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), and Léonce can be interpreted as a character who internalizes the debate which that

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pp.69-70.

<sup>70</sup> Staël, *Delphine*. *Op. cit.*, Part 1, Letter 18, p. 46. See Appendix 1.33.

<sup>71</sup> For the vocabulary of sensibility see J G Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 repr. 1996.

novel dramatizes between Falkland, an originally virtuous man who has been corrupted by chivalry into overvaluing his status in the eyes of the world, and his impoverished servant, Caleb Williams, persecuted by his master when he uncovers a secret which could ruin Falkland's reputation. Throughout the novel, the master abuses his powerful position in society to turn the force of public opinion and of law (a system based on tradition and precedent) against Caleb, terrified that his private misdemeanours may be revealed.<sup>72</sup> In the end, the Caleb can only put a stop to Falkland's persecutions by dragging his pitifully sick master to court in order to ruin the only thing that he values, his good name. In the printed ending to the novel, after Caleb has told his 'artless and manly' tale to the court, convincing his audience not by presenting evidence but simply by developing a clear and coherent narrative of his victimization, Falkland realizes that his greatest fear has been realized. Relieved that the struggle to maintain his public name has ended, that he flings himself into Caleb's arms, and confesses: 'I have spent a life of the basest cruelty to cover one act of momentary vice and to protect myself against the prejudices of my species.'<sup>73</sup> Caleb's subsequent self-reproaches represent the difficulties of converting one's convictions into direct action against an oppressive system. While, on the one hand, his excessive remorse can be read as a troubling acquiescence in the attractiveness of Falkland's chivalric commitments, on the other, converting a sense of inner rectitude into external forms involves him in a power struggle, in which the act of exposure inevitably becomes an act of violence on the body of the oppressor. Taking direct action against the system thus deprives Caleb of the sense of absolute inner innocence that has been his only solace:

I thought that, if Falkland were dead, I should return once again to all that makes life worth possessing. I thought that, if the guilt of Falkland were established, fortune and the world would smile upon my efforts. Both these events are accomplished; and it is only now that I am truly miserable.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*. Ed. D McCracken. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970 repr. 1982. According to Madelyn Gutwirth, Staël, a great admirer of Godwin's novel, see *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman*. *Op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>73</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*. *Op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

At the time that Delphine meets Léonce, he is prostrated by wounds gained in fighting a duel, immediately establishing a connection between his aristocratic code and his feminization. He fears the autonomy of public discourse, realizing that his code of honour is powerless against a tide of gossip, for where origins and authorship cannot be determined, the methods of the nobility for re-establishing truth by force no longer work:

False rumours will circulate at first, soon they will be considered fact by those who do not know him; then he will grow angry, but too late. Even if he hastily sought twenty occasions for a duel, would reckless deeds of courage restore his reputation for character? All that effort, all those impulses suggest excitability, and the excitable person is not respected: calm alone inspires respect.<sup>75</sup>

His disgust at the notion that he is dependent on public opinion is clearly linked to his counter-revolutionary politics. It is as if the prospect of scandal forces him to read his own situation in Rousseauvian terms, recognizing the unwelcome fact that, instead of being a self-sufficient chivalric defender of ancient privilege, his reliance on reputation means that he is utterly dependent on the viewpoint of others for his sense of selfhood. Thus, he connects the unimpeded circulation of scandal concerning an aristocratic family's reputation with a type of political insubordination which challenges the right of the upper classes to power:

It is not worth attaching the slightest value to the words of most men, you say; their hate may be of no importance, but that is never true of their insults. They place themselves on a level with you; they do more, they believe themselves superior when they slander you: must they be left to enjoy that insolent pleasure in peace?<sup>76</sup>

Rumour here is inherently levelling, because the moral judgment inherent within scandal allows anyone to become the arbitrator of another's behaviour, overturning hierarchical structures of deference. Unsurprisingly, Léonce's response is simply to reject sensational exposure to the public gaze as necessarily inimical to the dignity of nobility. For Delphine, however, such a stance represents an adherence to particular and familial interests that is inimical to the

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<sup>75</sup> Staël, *Delphine*. Part One, Letter 18, p. 47. See Appendix 1.34

good of the people. This in fact places Léonce in a position which is analogous to that of the ordinary woman: just as domestic ties render women unsuitable for public life, because they cannot achieve independence from the interests of their menfolk, Léonce's commitment to the nobility is not only inimical to the general good of the people, but heavily influenced by the views of his highly aristocratic mother. Ultimately, Staël shows that the male aristocrat is far less worthy of a public role in a republic than the female revolutionary.

But if French *ancien régime* culture, with its culture of scandal and superficiality, makes it impossible for women to achieve the authenticity that is prerequisite for their entry into political culture, the alternative offered by Jacobinism is no better. Delphine remains a victim of scandal, because Robespierist Rousseauvianism is actively hostile to the kind of personal and emotional political commitments which she espouses, regarding them as suspiciously factional. Staël's moderate radicalism lies somewhere between the two societies depicted in the novel, and there is a brief moment in the novel when a third possibility, a society without the problems of scandal, seems likely to be realized. Lebensei, a Protestant and a moderate revolutionary thinker, gains political power, which he uses to argue against conventions as a form of false consciousness militating against independence. By disguising the chasm between strict moral laws and transgressive behaviour, he argues, scandal actually staves off necessary reforms which would benefit public morality by bringing it into line with genuine private behaviour. Like Staël herself, Lebensei advocates legal divorce, which would bring the law into step with a natural and uncontrollable desire for sexual happiness which finds expression in adulterous behaviour:

Morality will have to make great progress indeed before we encounter many spouses who accept unhappiness without trying to escape it in one way or another; and if they escape, and if society makes allowances for them in proportion to the harshness of its institutions, it is then that all ideas of virtue and duties are in chaos, and that we live in civil slavery as in political slavery, released by public opinion from the shackles of the

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Part One, Letter 18, p. 46.

law.<sup>77</sup>

Moral and political revolution are linked by the need to find a way of rationalizing behaviour, opinion and the law. Yet while Lebensei is interested in eradicating private hypocrisy, Staël is at pains to note that he does not advocate the abolition of the public/private division or insist, with Jacobin fervour, that the inner disposition of the agent is all-important. Instead, he merely desires to bring the law into line with the perspective of public opinion to iron out the moral 'chaos' which results from conflicting standards, allowing individuals freedom to follow their own, private moral course.

However, the delicate balance between private and public life which Lebensei represents is soon overturned in favour of total publicity. The events of the last section of *Delphine* occur between August and October 1792, an era which saw the declaration of the republic, the entry of the Prussian army into French territory, the siege of Verdun, the massacres in the prisons of Paris (after which Léonce goes into exile), the passage of the divorce law, the battle of Valmy, and the declaration of the 6<sup>th</sup> October against the émigrés who took up arms against their country (which enables the death sentence to be passed on Léonce). In her *Considerations on the French Revolution*, written over fifteen years after *Delphine* in 1818, Staël describes this historical moment as the point at which revolutionary feeling ceased to follow a moderate liberal course by departing from 'true' Rousseauvianism. For Staël, not only was the rise of blanket publicity inimical to the continuance of the salon and thus also to the softening political influence exerted by the salon hostess, but it was still more detrimental to the true Rousseauvian authenticity than *ancien régime* culture. The strategy of the Jacobins, she argued, was nothing more nor less than a new, brazen kind of factionalism, disguised as social transparency: 'The means employed to accomplish the Revolution were not better than those generally used to form a conspiracy: in fact, to commit a crime in a public square, or to contrive it in the closet, is to be equally guilty, but there is the perfidy the less.'<sup>78</sup> The

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Part Four, Letter 17, p. 305. See Appendix 1.36.

<sup>78</sup> Germaine de Staël, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*. London:

only reason to prefer the Jacobins over the aristocratic party was that the former did not seek to conceal their wrongdoing from the public gaze. Earlier, in *On the Influence of Literature* she had argued that this openness made Jacobinism guilty of bad taste, as it replaced the finesse of aristocratic society with an uncouth misogynist vulgarity, which was a disgrace to the tradition of classical republicanism, in which women upheld the elegance of public culture, supported the dignity of public opinion and ensured the emergence of the general will:

I believe firmly, that in the ancient government, where opinion held so salutary an authority, that authority was the work of women distinguished by their sense and good character; women who were quoted as examples of eloquence, when inspired by some generous resolution, when pleading in the cause of misfortune, or when boldly expressing some sentiment which required the courage to offend against power.<sup>79</sup>

Only when they lacked education and grace did women become too involved in the particular to be socially useful, introducing ‘a sort of foolery, a party-spirit of slander, a tiresome insipid gaiety, which must eventually banish all sensible men from their meetings’.<sup>80</sup>

After Léonce is arrested for counter-revolutionary activity, Delphine goes to his Jacobin judge to plead for his life. However, the president of the court, trained to exist only as a public functionary, initially refuses even to grant her an interview, on the Robespierist basis that ‘There can be no room for mystery in the conduct of a public man’.<sup>81</sup> Yet, as their conversation proceeds, it becomes apparent that this publicly orientated persona is adopted, not out of a concern for the public good, but as a result of a fearful suppression of private emotion. Afraid of the consequences of exercising personal judgment, the judge believes that he must go against his inner conviction of Léonce’s innocence, because the prisoner would appear guilty to a superficial observer. Delphine’s lover must be condemned because appearances are so strong against him that the people cannot be convinced of his inner goodness. Stressing the conflict between his public

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Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1818, Vol. 2, p. 43. See Appendix 1.37.

<sup>79</sup> Staël, *On the Influence of Literature*. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 165. See Appendix 1.38

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 2, p. 166. See Appendix 1.39

<sup>81</sup> Staël, *Delphine*. *Op. cit.*, p. 448. See Appendix 1.40.

and private roles, the judge confesses the difficulties of his situation to Delphine:

I would certainly have wished that freedom could be established in France without the death of one man for a political opinion; but in the face of the violent ferment stirred up by this foreign war, do not insist that a family man, forced to accept a painful but necessary post in these difficult times, do not insist that he compromise his own life to save a stranger.<sup>82</sup>

The Jacobin pretence to examine inner virtue becomes a façade for a type of mob justice, which divides the personal conviction of the man from the public responsibility of the judge, in the same way that *ancien régime* culture regarded inner virtue as less important than external appearances. For the reluctant Jacobin judge, the personal must be violently and artificially repressed if he is to survive in a frighteningly univocal and dispassionate judicial atmosphere.

In particular, the testimony of Delphine, which convinces his judgement and arouses his sympathy has to be excluded from the proceedings because its power resides in the fact that it is an emotive, verbal discourse. As a salon hostess, Delphine's power comes from her body: the emotive charge of her rhetoric relies on delivery and gesture, which cannot be reproduced for the public who watch over the trial from a distance, or read about it in print at one remove. Instead of Jacobin justice exploring true inner feelings, in Staël's eyes, it does the reverse, transforming the law into an impersonal system, administered for a threatening, unseen, faceless crowd, to the detriment of the individual judgment of those best able to judge true sensibilities because they are present. The trial scenes in *Caleb Williams* show the extent to which a victim must battle against established opinion to bring a case against a member of the upper classes in an English court, and the failure of the system to recognize with the underlying emotional shift in the relationship between oppressor and victim once the mechanisms protecting the upper orders are torn down, revealing the true facts of the case. In *Delphine*, the courtroom scenes reveal the failure of a system which purports to defy established custom to focus on inner guilt, but which actually refers only to popular opinion in its judgments. Jacobin justice is as unconcerned

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 451. See Appendix. 1.41



with real culpability as aristocratic *ancien régime* society. Just as scandal in pre-Revolutionary culture was difficult to check, because it had no clear point of origin, the authority for administering justice in the Jacobin republic is spread so widely, that the personal testimony which reveals true guilt or innocence becomes worthless.

Endeavouring to break through the distance between the administration of justice and the public who oversee its fairness, Delphine first tries to appeal to the judge's sense of citizenship, demonstrating the connection between the ability to feel sympathy and political right-thinking: 'It is not ordinary pity I expect of you, it is nobility of soul that supposes the virtues of antiquity, republican virtues, virtues that bring a thousand times more honour to the party you champion than the most illustrious victories'.<sup>83</sup> This is using Rousseau's Spartan virtue against Jacobinism, to make a claim for the symbiotic relationship of the personal and affective and the public and political. However, Delphine soon finds such a public appeal is ineffectual in breaking through the judge's fear. Desperate to save Léonce, she decides to demonstrate the judge's own investment in particular and personal interests by using the fact that his child is ill to drag the claims of the private to the fore: 'if you hand Léonce over to the tribunal, your child, the object of all your affection, will die! He will die!'.<sup>84</sup> Appealing to a higher, providential justice, Delphine uses the threat of divine retribution to frighten the judge into making a decision that he knows to be right, against the dictates of a system which used terror to denude the judicial process of everything personal and private in the hope that this would ensure 'inner virtue'. Her methods begin to look surprisingly Jacobin; the only difference being that Jacobin claims to see into the inner souls of every citizen compare unfavourably with the omniscience and omnipotence of the Supreme Being whose authority is invoked by Delphine. Fearing the wrath of God, the judge gives way, promising a reprieve. But the wheels of justice now extend so far beyond the individual that any decision based on sympathy is immediately called into question. No sooner has the judge decided to act justly, than he is promptly replaced by another, less flexible

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451. See Appendix 1.42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p. 451. See Appendix 1.43

guardian of public justice from Paris, who condemns Léonce to death, this time without reprieve.

Staël's novel thus establishes a feminist critique of two very different cultures of publicity, both of which exclude women. She is concerned about the untraceable, unstoppable nature of scandal in *ancien régime* society, but she is equally worried about the depersonalised, monologic culture of publicity upon which the Jacobin republic is founded. Before concluding this chapter, I want to consider a third element in her argument: the way in which both sets of criticisms function as an implicit indictment of Napoleonic society of the early nineteenth century. Given that she had already been warned against political interference by Napoleon when she wrote *Delphine*, it is scarcely surprising that Staël goes to considerable trouble to code her arguments, so that their full thrust is only revealed when the novel is read alongside her later, more explicit *Considerations On The French Revolution*. However, despite her efforts, *Delphine's* Anglophilia, its anti-Catholic sentiments, its support for divorce, and its feminism, were still too obviously anti-Buonapartist to be ignored. Napoleon was furious, and exiled Staël in 1803 as a direct response to the novel's publication. In the same year, he destroyed much of the legal machinery which had been implemented by revolutionary governments to improve the condition of women, making the system of divorce law far less favourable to females and overturning laws which gave them equal inheritance rights, the right to become debtors or witnesses and the right to take charge of property when married.<sup>85</sup>

Staël's implicit condemnation of Napoleon is three-fold. Firstly, she attacks him for creating a climate of fear that was inimical to affective relations. By driving individuals into exile, he destroyed the family. People became fearful of maintaining close connections with disgraced relatives and began to hide their true feelings:

friendship, and even love, are frozen in every heart; private qualities fall

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<sup>85</sup> See Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860*. London: Macmillan, 1985, pp. 32-72.

with the public virtues; men no longer care for one another after having ceased to care for their country; and they learn only to employ an hypocritical language, which contains a softened condemnation of those who are out of favour, a skilful apology for the powerful, and the concealed doctrine of egotism.<sup>86</sup>

Napoleonic government is essentially atomistic, permeated by destructive *amour-propre*. Even his personal style is despotic (he has the ‘secret of producing that cold isolation which presented men to him individually and never collectively’), separating individuals rather than uniting them as a people.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, in Staël’s opinion, this despotic tendency is compounded by the fact that Buonaparte explicitly excluded female influence from government with the same rigidity as the Jacobins, preventing women from producing harmonious social consensus. Exploring the restriction of women to the private sphere in the early 1790s becomes a way for Staël to criticise Napoleon’s misogyny by analogising it to the fanatical excesses of the Terror:

I saw him [Napoleon] one day approach a French lady distinguished for her beauty, her wit, and the ardour of her opinions. He placed himself straight before her, like the stiffest of the German generals, and said to her “*Madam, I don’t like women to meddle with politics.*” “*You are right, General,*” replied she, “*but in a country where they lose their heads, it is natural for them to desire to know the reason*”.<sup>88</sup>

Napoleon’s female interlocutor neatly undermines the association of the head with masculine rationality and order, and the body with female irrationality and sexuality, conventionally used to restrict female participation in the public sphere, associating the misogynist forces which governed politics at the time of the Terror with unreasoning violence and its female victims with reason. The inequality of any system which demands that women expiate certain crimes with their lives, while denying them full citizenship, are revealed by this playful feminine speech, the tone of which contrasts sharply with the severely forbidding, authoritarian idiom of the General.

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<sup>86</sup> Staël, *Considerations. Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 306. See Appendix 1.44

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 306. See Appendix 1.45

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 201. Italics in original. See Appendix 1.46.

Staël's third objection to Napoleon is that he operates a system of strict censorship, which is as degradingly inauthentic as the scandalous culture of the *ancien régime*, and as totalitarian as the publicity employed by the Jacobins:

But when the curiosity for news can be satisfied with an allotted portion of falsehood, when no event is related unaccompanied by sophisms, when every one's reputation depends on a calumny propagated by gazettes, which are multiplied on every side, and which there is not a possibility that any person should be allowed to refute; when opinions concerning every circumstance, every work, every individual, are subject to a journalist's word of command, as the movements of soldiers to the leaders of files; then it is that the art of printing becomes what has been said of cannon,- the last reason of kings.<sup>89</sup>

By controlling the press, Napoleon controls reputation, and is thus able to libel anyone at will. He is an arch scandal-monger, wielding exposure against his adversaries with the sole aim of acquiring power: 'he entered into the minutest details of the relations of each individual, so as to unite the empire of the conqueror to the inquisitive curiosity of scandal'.<sup>90</sup> By highlighting instead of healing the breach between public and private behaviour in society, Napoleon becomes a kind of anti-Wolmar, individuating his opponents, and thus preventing them from identifying their will with that of others.

My reading of Germaine de Staël's *Delphine* shows the dangers of assuming that scandal operated only as the instrument of a reactionary gender ideology, a tool for policing the boundaries of separate spheres which would ensure that any woman who had the temerity to enter public life suffered a loss of social standing and reputation in the eyes of her contemporaries. Capitalizing on the Rousseauvian association of deference to public opinion with inauthenticity to create a heroine whose unorthodox behaviour actually signals her suitability for citizenship, Staël uses scandal to stake an ambitious and rather grandiose feminist claim for political rights. Delphine's unusual behaviour becomes the ultimate argument for her inclusion in the political process, the external badge of her intuitive inner commitment to a moderate revolutionary agenda, which sets

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 2, p. 261. See Appendix 1.47

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 2, pp. 306-7. See Appendix 1.48

her apart from the elitist, superficial world of the aristocratic salon and the absolute deference to the opinion of the multitude that characterizes the Jacobin culture of total publicity.

However, using exposure in this manner is not without its problems. The tendency of scandal to emphasize the unique and the personal results in a feminism that is highly individualistic, its compass restricted to a few exceptional women. If defying debased public opinion on the basis of deep moral and political intuition qualifies a woman for inclusion in public life, then only a limited number of females can be included on that basis, since their behaviour can only be found to be unconventional against a background of moral orthodoxy. Even in a utopian republic like Clarens, where a more benevolent culture of social transparency prevails, there can be only one Julie because the power of the revolutionary salon hostess stems from the same source as the power of her aristocratic counterpart. It is her ability to harness this very particularity, to use her seductive manners and her persuasive conversation on behalf of the whole republic that makes her a powerful intercessor, allowing her to soften down the edges of masculine politics to encourage individuals to identify with the general good. Yet rather than grounding a general claim for the emancipation of all women, Staël's feminism allows a few individual women to become the moral guardians of the community, but implicitly excludes the majority from participation in the public sphere. Instead of providing a platform for demanding a more general emancipation of the sex, her feminism stresses the exceptional nature of public women. Despite the fact that *politically*, it is used to forward the general good, in *gender* terms, it is infected with all of the particularity of scandal.

## V

### *English Counter-Revolutionary Responses*

Despite Staël's efforts to rehabilitate Rousseau for a moderate liberal agenda, in 1790s England, Rousseauvian arguments in favour of absolute publicity were regarded with suspicion. Even before Robespierre had seized the reins of power,

English writers opposed to the revolution began to argue that social transparency subverted moral standards, undermined duty and ultimately destroyed civil society.<sup>91</sup> In the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) Edmund Burke argued that Rousseauvianism was nothing short of a sophisticated call for a return to a savage state of society in which unbridled coarseness and sensuality ruled supreme. While the ‘last age’ endeavoured to give ‘grace and nobleness to our mutual appetites’, Rousseau was hell-bent on destroying both public manners and private morality by offering French youth a political education based on a love that was not even refined by gallantry.<sup>92</sup> In the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) he had gone further, arguing that the French enlightenment philosophy (including, but not limited to Rousseauvianism) aimed to tear down the fabric of civil society, exposing the absolutely indecent, naked reality of the savage underneath:

All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.<sup>93</sup>

If obstructions were scandalous for Rousseau, transparency was scandalous for Burke. The revolution represented an attack on the ‘drapery’ of polite society which unveiled not a noble savage, but a degraded and pathetic human form. Life, Burke implies, is valueless without the decorative fabric of civilized life which shades such degradation from view. His famous description of the mob bursting into the bedchamber of an almost naked Marie Antoinette and plunging their poignards into her bed becomes a metonym for the revolution, revealing the

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<sup>91</sup> See Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, *The Anti-Jacobins 1798-1800: The Early Contributors to the Anti-Jacobin Review*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988.

<sup>92</sup> Edmund Burke, ‘A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly’ in *The Works of the Right Hon Edmund Burke*. London: Henry G Bohn, 1841, pp. 476-491, these quotations p. 484.

<sup>93</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien. London: Penguin, 1986, p. 171.

uncouth violence of radical ‘exposure’ which threatens to deprive the queenly representative of the social graces of her clothes, her virtue, and her authority all at once.<sup>94</sup> The whole episode is couched in Burke’s famously flowery and hysterical language, and it is difficult not to read his style, which embarrassed many of those who supported his side of the argument, as a deliberately anti-Rousseauvian idiom, self-consciously drawing attention to the mediating role of language. If Saint-Preux criticized the salon culture of Paris for its ‘tangled’ and suggestive language, Burke responds by championing rococo, aristocratic prose.<sup>95</sup>

As the counter-revolution was bolstered by tales of the transgressive domestic *ménages* indulged in by French revolutionaries, English feminism was bruised by the association of demands for the emancipation of women, sexual immorality and radical politics. The scandal over Wollstonecraft’s sexual conduct, which broke with the publication of Godwin’s *Memoirs Of The Author of ‘The Rights of Woman’* (1798), did nothing to dissociate these issues in the public mind. Anti-feminists picked up on Burke’s political contrast between indecent nakedness and social drapery to associate revolutionary or democratic feminism with impropriety and a lack of social decorum. For example, in *The Unsex’d Females* (1798) Richard Polwhele uses the image of female botanists dissecting the sex organs of plants, to express his horror at the spectacle of forthright, radical women intruding themselves into the masculine public sphere. His poem argues that learning of revolutionary women transgresses the boundaries of modest feminine conduct, involving females in an Eve-like search for forbidden knowledge, which, once discovered, was liable to denature their femininity. In dissecting flowers, the woman biologist aims to

point the prostitution of a plant;  
Dissect its organ of unhallow’d lust,  
And fondly gaze the titillating dust

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<sup>94</sup> For an excellent discussion of this, see Tom Furniss, ‘Stripping the Queen: Edmund Burke’s Magic Lantern Show’ in *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays*. Ed. Steven Blakemore. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992, pp. 69-96.

<sup>95</sup> For a discussion of Burke’s linguistic strategy, see Steven Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: The French Revolution as Linguistic Event*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England for Brown University Press, 1988

With liberty's sublimer views expand,  
And o'er the wreck of kingdoms sternly stand;

Not only does she reduce the beautiful and the decorative to the plain and functional, but her impulse towards the rational and the analytical is propelled by a dangerously unrestrained female desire.<sup>96</sup> If the status quo depended on social facades, which are maintained by naturally modest, retiring women, then the derobing of the flower is deeply transgressive in both gender and political terms: not only does it allow the woman scientist to indulge a very improper desire to gaze at sexual organs, but in acknowledging and fulfilling that desire, her actions attack the very fabric of civilized society. A similar argument, connecting the preservation of female modesty with the safeguarding of civilized society, is made by the gentleman whose letter to a friend opens Maria Edgeworth's slightly earlier *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795). Again, he argues that the knowledge of women on a given subject must necessarily be limited, since this is necessary to maintaining the gendered boundaries of polite culture:

Whenever women appear, even when we seem to admit them as our equals in understanding, every thing assumes a different form; our politeness, delicacy, habits towards the sex, forbid us to argue or to converse with them as we do with one another:- we see things as they are; but women must always see things through a veil, or cease to be women.<sup>97</sup>

Once again, the security of society depends on restricting the vision of women to the point that they can see the world only through a glass darkly.

As I shall argue in the next chapter, this is a position which Edgeworth rejects. In the letters between Julia and Caroline, she shows the superior moral capacity which can be developed in women, where they are treated as rational beings, capable of benefiting from a broad education. But while she sets herself against the counter-revolutionary equation of social opacity with the continued existence of polite society, her argument in favour of female enlightenment is

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<sup>96</sup> Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of The Pursuits of Literature*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1798, pp. 8-9

<sup>97</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies*. Ed. Claire Connolly. London: J M Dent (Everyman), 1993 repr. 1994, p. 2-3



also couched in heavily anti-Rousseauvian terms. Edgeworth explicitly rejects the mediating role which Rousseau offers women, on the grounds that his system to create social transparency is based on a tendency to underestimate the intellectual capacity of women. Like the second ‘gentleman’ of the *Letters for Literary Ladies*, she fears that a daughter who aspired to become a revolutionary salon hostess would acquire habits of falsehood and manipulation rather than openness and honesty, imbibing ‘from the enchanting eloquence of Rousseau, the fatal idea, that cunning and address are the natural resources of her sex; that coquetry is necessary to attract, and dissimulation to preserve the heart of man.’<sup>98</sup>

Unsurprisingly, for the same reasons, Edgeworth was also outspokenly critical of Staël’s arguments in favour of scandalous authenticity. Instead, she drew on a utilitarian tradition of thought about publicity to argue for a type of rational self-determination, which would allow women to acknowledge the utility of social conventions without surrendering completely to the force of opinion. As I shall show in the next chapter, one of the chief arguments that Edgeworth marshals in favour of her rational feminism was that it avoided the particularity of Staël’s gender politics. Rather than advocating a system which singled out particular exemplary female leaders, Edgeworth works from the premise that true moral principles should provide a code of behaviour which could be applied generally without creating social chaos. Her gender politics thus ground women’s claims to moral, intellectual and public significance on their superior ability to uphold universal, gender neutral moral standards. Scandalous behaviour, for Edgeworth, not only indicates a disturbing and irrational individualism, but is liable to work against the emancipation of women, by encouraging men to clamp down on female education and freedoms.

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 34.

## Chapter Two

‘Why should we hide ourselves  
if we do not dread being seen?’:

Publicity, Public Opinion and the  
Problem Of Scandal In Bentham And Edgeworth

# I

## *Cross-channel Connections*

By the 1810s, Madame de Staël had become an international celebrity. Her reputation as an intellectual in Britain was established by the publication of *On Germany* in 1810, while public fascination with her scandalous lifestyle was only increased by her involvement with “John” (Albert Jean Michel) Rocca.<sup>1</sup> When she visited England in 1813-14, she was the fashionable literary lion of the moment, and much courted by high society. ‘The whole talk of London is of Mad<sup>e</sup> de Staël,’ wrote Frances Burney in 1813, noting with amusement that despite ‘having lived Wholly [with] the opposition since her arrival’, the French writer had still been ‘invited to the Prince Regent’s Grand Ball’.<sup>2</sup> This warm reception was a sharp contrast with Staël’s visit to England earlier in 1793, when many people refused to visit her because of her relationship with Louis, Comte de Narbonne. When the young Staël and the young Frances Burney had become friends, the latter’s friends and relations had insisted that she should drop the acquaintance: ‘I had messages- remonstrances- entreaties- representations Letters & Conferences’, Burney recalled, ‘till I could resist no longer, though I had found her so charming, that I fought the hardest battle I dared fight against almost ALL my best connexions!’. Twenty years later in 1813, however, Staël was feted by high society, and Burney was busy calculating whether her fashionable acquaintance could forgive her earlier snub. Though Staël’s moral shortcomings were noted in contemporary reviews, Burney noted that they were all but ignored in society: ‘She is now received by all mankind- but, that, indeed, she always was- all womankind, I should say, with distinction & pleasure’.<sup>3</sup> Her influence was such that she could even override scandal, gaining social acceptance from her own sex despite the fact that she flouted conventional expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> For Staël’s biography see Jean Christopher Herold, *Mistress to An Age: A Life of Madame de Staël*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Burney, ‘Letter to Charles Burney, 1 July 1813’, quoted in *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D’Arblay)*. Ed. Edward A Bloom and Lillian D Bloom. Vol. 7: 1812-14, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p.149.

<sup>3</sup> Both quotations from Frances Burney ‘Letter to Mrs Waddington, 26 August 1813’. *Ibid.* p. 171.

Late in the autumn of 1813, Madame de Staël dined at Bowood, then the seat of Lord Henry Petty, the third Marquis of Lansdowne, and a centre for Whig politics. At the end of the previous century, Bowood had also become a crucial locus for nascent English utilitarianism, under the auspices of its owner, William Petty, Lord Shelburne.<sup>4</sup> From the early 1780s to his death in 1805, Shelburne had been the patron of Jeremy Bentham, offering him financial support, and introducing him to the luminaries of the time. It was through Shelburne's influence that Bentham met Étienne Dumont, who would go on to revise and edit his manuscripts. It is therefore not at all surprising that on the November night when Staël visited his house, the conversation led to the subject of Benthamite theory. Étienne Dumont described the scene, as Staël fulminated against utilitarianism, criticizing the views held by many of the assembled company:

Madame de Staël was in all her shining glory, Lord Lansdowne, Romilly, MacIntosh, Mr. Rogers, Mr Ward and others still kept the electric spark in perpetual motion, alone against everyone in her attacks against Locke, against utility, against Benthamite classifications and definitions, accusing us of killing religious feeling, imagination, poetry, enthusiasm for the great and the beautiful, of reducing men to base arithmetical machines, and deceiving them morally by telling them that virtue was the same thing as happiness, she amazed us with the weakness of her arguments and with the vivacity of her eloquence.<sup>5</sup>

Like one of her heroines, Staël single-handedly takes on the masculine intellects ranged against her, insisting on the primacy of feeling and enthusiasm against the coldly calculating nature of Benthamism. Like Rousseauvianism, utilitarianism was democratic and egalitarian, but in a very different way: its

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<sup>4</sup> Petty also owned Lansdowne House in London. For an assessment of his political similarity to Bentham see Mary Mack, *Jeremy Bentham: An Odyssey of Ideas 1748-1793*. London, Melbourne and Toronto: Heinemann, 1962. Shelburne's colonial policy is discussed in R A Humphreys 'Lord Shelburne and British Colonial Policy', *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 50: No. 198, April 1935, pp. 257-277. For more on the relationship between Bentham and Shelburne see Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*. Trans. Mary Morris. London: Faber and Faber, 1928 repr. 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Étienne Dumont 'Letter to Maria Edgeworth 1 November 1813', quoted from Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972. pp. 222-223. My translation. The original French, as provided in Butler's book, can be seen in Appendix 3.1. Dumont was involved with drawing up the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, but repudiated the document, firstly because it was sentimental rather than rational, but secondly and more importantly, because it was not based on the principles of utility. For more on Dumont and Bentham see Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*. *Op .cit.*, p. 75.

fundamental tenet was that self-interest was unconquerable, to the point that all human actions were motivated by a need to experience pleasure and to avoid pain. Within a consequentialist moral framework, the virtuousness or viciousness of an action could be calculated by adding together the happiness that would result from it to some individuals, and subtracting the misery that would result to others. In Staël's eyes, however, such a method reduced men to machines whose interest could be arithmetically computed, reifying self-interest rather than encouraging its transcendence. Her Rousseauvian salon hostess would have no role to play if Bentham were correct, since there would no longer be any need to smooth out potentially violent contradictions of interest to ensure the emergence of the general will. Rather than acting as a special guardian of public opinion, Julie or Delphine could be the guardian only of their own interests, which would count for no more and no less than that of any other man (or woman) in the realm.

As I suggested at the end of the last chapter, in the wake of the 1790s, the Rousseauvian model of publicity espoused by Staël had become inextricably associated with revolutionary violence. By the turn of the century, the challenge facing British radicals at the more respectable end of the political spectrum was to find an alternative model for thinking about the relationship between public opinion, interest and publicity, which would allow them to harness the power of scandal to argue for a reformist agenda while avoiding the imputation of Jacobinism. This chapter suggests that Jeremy Bentham's philosophy offered a powerful alternative discourse, which represents perhaps the most considered discussion of exposure and scandal in England during the early nineteenth century. Whereas Rousseau's work stressed the need to educate the individual into laying aside personal interests to the point that any kind of privacy began to look suspiciously secret, Bentham's philosophy was based on the need to restrain the extent to which unconquerable particular interests could influence the public sphere, without losing the sense of the importance of a private, domestic sphere in which such desires could be freely indulged. For the utilitarian, exposure had two main functions: it acted as a mechanism for fostering critical debate, which ensured that all sides were heard on a particular

question, and it functioned as a tool of surveillance, which prevented individuals from pursuing their own interests in a manner inimical to the general welfare.

Whereas Rousseau relied on the blandishments of the revolutionary woman to render moral coercion palatable to the people, for Bentham women have no such special role to play in political society. Notionally at least, female interests should theoretically count for no more and no less than those of men, necessitating the inclusion of a female perspective in political debate and in the public gaze. However, where there is a prospect that publicity could produce unwholesome and scandalous revelations, Bentham quickly begins to abandon the egalitarian implications of his theory. As I shall show, in his writings on legal forms of investigation in particular, the need to protect retiring female modesty from the publicity attendant upon acting as a witness, and to safeguard the 'natural' innocence of a wider female audience watching the process unfold in the courtroom, lead Bentham to qualify some of his most central ideas about the need for institutional transparency. Effectively, despite the potentially feminist implication of his fundamental premise, he began to argue that women should be excluded from public discussion.

The last section ended with an analysis of Staël's *Delphine*, a feminist reworking of Rousseau's ideas on publicity expressed in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The conclusion to this chapter adds a third dimension to this discussion of publicity and gender by offering a reading of an English riposte to Staël's novel, Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806) alongside three other novels of roughly the same period which discuss women who resist social conventions: Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1805), and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Like *Delphine*, *Leonora* is centrally concerned with the role played by scandal in society, but Edgeworth uses her discussion of the relationship between publicity and interest to criticize Staël's commitment to scandalous authenticity, instead arguing that conventional morality can prove a useful tool of social control which can be used to police moral transgressions. Developing a powerful critique of the public, political role of the salon hostess championed by Staël, Edgeworth argues that her power is a type of secret, interested and ultimately theatrical

political engagement, which not only encourages corruption, but degrades women by describing them as irrational and fundamentally sensual beings. Her own heroine's natural sphere is not the salon, but the private home, yet her restriction to the domestic world, which deprives her of the opportunities for self-display available to the *femme de salon*, actually enables her to cultivate more important public qualities as an educator and a moral guardian. To mount this critique of Staël's Rousseauvianism, Edgeworth adopts a position close to that of Bentham on the social utility of publicity. Yet she also criticizes consequentialism as an overtly 'masculine' style of argument, and questions the extent of the utilitarian reliance on the external control provided by publicity, arguing instead for the importance of cultivating internal rationality, which allows for some degree of self-determination, without utterly annihilating the value of social customs.

If Staël's behaviour at Bowood shows that she was well aware of English utilitarian thought, then Bentham was reciprocally interested in the French political and philosophical developments of his time. The publication history of his *Essay on Political Tactics* (hereafter *Tactics*), a text which forms the backbone to the first half of this chapter, provides a good example of this. As with so many of Bentham's texts, it is difficult to provide a single date for its publication. Not only did he return to revise it a number of times over the decades, but during the first half of the nineteenth century, it was published in three substantially different versions, two of which were edited by other individuals. Originally written in the context of experimental French politics in the late 1780s and early 1790s (discussed in the previous chapter), Bentham returned to it in 1808-9, a period which saw an intensification of radical activity (discussed in the next chapter), and again during the political turmoil of mid/late 1810s (examined in chapter four). I have chosen to focus on *Tactics* because it contains one of the clearest and most concise statements of Bentham's views on free debate, publicity and public opinion. However, it was not his most influential expression of these views, and for this reason, throughout this chapter, I refer to numerous other works by Bentham, published between 1800 and 1830, in which he expresses similar ideas about transparency and scandal.

The first version of *Tactics* was written in the late 1780s in response to debates on the constitution of the French Estates-General. Begun in the autumn of 1788, it was conceived at the same time as two open letters to Mirabeau, which criticize the French parliament's decision to adopt the 1614 constitution, which meant that the nobility and the clergy could outvote the third estate. In early 1789, Bentham sent pages of *Tactics* to André Morellet in the hope that they could be translated and printed before the meeting of the Estates-General in May. Morellet in turn presented the work to Mme Suzanne Necker, Staël's mother, who discussed it with her husband, Jacques Necker, recently recalled to office to save the country from bankruptcy. Problems with finding a reliable translator, however, led Bentham to abandon the essay by June 1789, but a section of it was printed and circulated in England early in 1791. Bentham's ideas continued to arouse interest in France: in the autumn of 1791, Jean Philippe Garran de Coulon suggested that Bentham's writings on law codes should be investigated, and suggested that he should be invited to communicate his ideas to the National Assembly. A year later Bentham was made an honorary French citizen.<sup>6</sup> As might be expected from the context in which it was produced, this version of *Tactics* is very technical, focusing on practical issues such as the procedures for debates and decision making. It contains very little of the later material on publicity, which forms a prominent part of the first section in the two later versions.

Bentham did not return to *Tactics* for almost twenty years. In 1808, however, popular rebellion broke out in Spain against occupying Napoleonic forces. The news was greeted with satisfaction in Britain, which soon ripened into outright enthusiasm as Spanish representatives arrived in the country to petition for both military support in their struggle against the French and for guidance about parliamentary procedure. Dumont and Lord Henry Petty mentioned Bentham's earlier work as a suitable source of information, but, once again, negotiations between translators and editors hampered the project of

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<sup>6</sup> For all of this background information, I am indebted to Michael James, Cyprian Blamires and Catherine Pease-Watkin's 'Editorial Introduction' to *Political Tactics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, pp. xiii-xl. All the quotations from this work in this chapter are drawn from this edition, which is based on the 1843 version edited by Richard Smith, in the Bowring edition of



producing a Spanish version of *Tactics*. However, the mere fact that the prospect of another edition surfaced in 1808-9 is telling. A number of scholars have identified these years as the era of Bentham's conversion to democratic radicalism, pointing to the beginning of his acquaintance with James Mill as a significant moment in his political development.<sup>7</sup> However, while Bentham's views may have become more overtly radical in the 1800s, the climate of radical opinion in England was also, simultaneously, becoming more conducive to utilitarian ideas. As I shall argue in the next chapter, the events of 1808-9 (in particular the Mary Ann Clarke scandal and the British government's bungling of the military campaigns in the Iberian peninsula) consolidated the influence of 'constitutional' reformism, which shared a considerable amount of ground, ideologically and rhetorically, with Benthamism. Radicals like Burdett, Cartwright and Wardle, seeking to distance their support for gradual reform

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Bentham's works, since, as the editors explain, this version contains 'the only printed material which can be identified with certainty as Bentham's unadulterated work', p. xxxix.

<sup>7</sup> Controversy still rages over Bentham's political commitments. One group of scholars argue that his views underwent a sea change at around 1809, when he 'converted' from Toryism to radicalism. A second set of critics point to earlier flirtations with radicalism, arguing that his opinions were more stable over time. In the latter group, Mack argues that Bentham began to espouse democratic ideas during the French Revolution, and continued to do so for the rest of his life, see Mack, *Jeremy Bentham. Op. cit.*, pp. 432-442. Dinwiddy disagrees, pointing to 1790s pamphlets which argue against parliamentary reform. He identifies 1808-9 as the crucial turning point in Bentham's political allegiance, see John Dinwiddy, 'Bentham's Transition to Political Radicalism 1809-10', *Journal of the History of Ideas*. No. 35, 1975, pp. 683-700. In this he follows Halévy, who argues that personal disappointments and frustration with his lack of recognition in England, contrasted with a warmer reception in Spain and South America, led Bentham towards democratic thought in the late 1800s. Halévy's heavily biographical reading of the 'conversion' emphasizes the importance of Bentham's friendships with James Mill, Francis Burdett, Francis Place and Major Cartwright (see Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism. Op. cit.*, pp. 251-264). Steintrager agrees that James Mill was a crucial influence, but offers a compromise between the two camps, identifying two peaks of radical activity for Bentham in 1788-91 and 1809-10, see James Steintrager, *Bentham*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977. James also contends that Bentham toyed with radical ideas in the early 1790s, but argues that the wider political events of the Terror and the subsequent reaction in Britain frightened him away from radicalism for another ten years, by which time the cultural climate had become more conducive to radicalism, see M James, 'Bentham's Democratic Theory at the Time of the French Revolution', *The Bentham Newsletter*. No. 10, 1986, pp. 5-16. Crimmins' excellent contribution to the debate emphasizes the context of Bentham's thought still more heavily than James' essay. He argues that the views expressed by Bentham in 1788-92 and 1809-10 were specific responses to two very different types of radical thought. Whereas 1790s radicalism was dominated by natural rights theories, which were anathema to Bentham, by 1809 radical reformers had adopted views which harmonized more easily with early utilitarian beliefs. Critics who have refused to recognize that both thinkers were responding to a wider political and cultural shift have overstated the influence of Mill on Bentham's politics. While this argument scarcely does justice to the full complexity of radicalism in either the 1790s or the 1800s, I find Crimmins' emphasis on historical context over biographical influences highly persuasive. See James Crimmins, 'Bentham's Political Radicalism Re-examined', *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Vol. 55: No. 2, April 1994, pp. 259-281.

from violently revolutionary Jacobinism, looked for a model of public opinion which would emphasize not the immediate accessibility of truth to the virtuous citizen, but the importance of allowing it to emerge slowly from a free debate, in which all sides were heard. Bentham's surge of interest in publicity between 1805-1810 (when he also worked on the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, which explores the subject in a legal context), and his famous 'turn' towards democratic reformism need to be placed in the context of this wider climate of change within English radical thought.

It was only eight years after this, in 1816, when Dumont was asked to draw up a set of procedural guidelines for the Representative Council of the recently liberated Geneva, that a version of *Tactics* was actually published. His *Tactique Des Assemblées Législatives* turned to British examples, and particularly to Bentham's ideas in *Tactics* for inspiration, and contains important sections on the political role of publicity which the 1791 edition lacked. Dumont's European editions were often terser and more readable than his mentor's original manuscripts; for example, in his *Tactique*, he abandoned the rather plodding, lawyerly question and answer format of the 1791 *Tactics* for a more fluid prose style. Even some of Bentham's friends, Samuel Romilly for example, sometimes followed his ideas via Dumont's translations.<sup>8</sup> The strong international sale of Dumont's 1816 text throughout the late 1810s and early 1820s helped to increase the currency of Bentham's ideas on publicity in Britain, even though an English version of *Tactics* was not published until 1843, when a version edited by Richard Smith appeared as part of the Bowring edition of Bentham's works.<sup>9</sup>

## II

### *The Role of Publicity in Bentham's Thought*

The differing attitudes of Rousseau and Bentham towards self-interest impacted heavily upon the attitude of each towards truth and critical debate. While

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<sup>8</sup> See William Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice 1817-1841*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> This edition appears to have been a compound of Dumont's text, some of Bentham's original manuscripts and some editorial comments by Smith himself, and forms the basis of the James/Blamires/Pease-Watkin edition that I have used in this chapter.

Rousseau argued that social transparency made truth instantly accessible to all, from his earliest published works Bentham argued that great amounts of labour were necessary to reveal it. ‘Truths’, he said:

are not to be forced into detached and general propositions, unencumbered with explanations and exceptions. They will not compress themselves into epigrams. They recoil from the tongue and the pen of the declaimer. They flourish not in the same soil with sentiment. They grow among thorns; and are not to be plucked, like daisies, by infants as they run. Labour, the inevitable lot of humanity, is in no track more inevitable than here.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas for Rousseau, political concord signalled the virtuousness of a particular measure, in *Tactics*, Bentham warns against associating unanimity with rectitude: ‘The impossibility of an universal and constant concurrence of sentiments in an assembly, is demonstrated by the experience of all times and places’, he argued, describing the notion that a legislative body should be ‘subject to the law of unanimity’ as an ‘extravagance’.<sup>11</sup> He developed this argument in *An Introductory View Of The Rationale of Evidence* (composed 1811-12), stating that it was only by working through the competitive clash between different arguments that the stubborn truth could be revealed:

*Veracity*, therefore, not less than *mendacity*, is the result of *interest*: and in so far as depends upon the *will*, it depends in each instance, upon the effect of the conflict between two opposite groupes of contending interests, which of them shall be the result.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction To The Principles Of Morals And Legislation*. London and New York: Methuen, 1970 repr. 1982, pp. 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Bentham, *Tactics*. *Op. cit.* p. 22. In the 1791 version the attack on the notion of a ‘general will’ is still more explicit: ‘Unanimity may glitter on the surface: but it is such unanimity as famine and imprisonment extort from an English Jury. In a system of well-digested rules, such as the English practice, with little improvement, would supply, will be found the only buckler of defence that reflection can have against precipitancy, moderation against violence, modesty against arrogance, veracity against falsehood, simplicity against deception and intrigue.’ Jeremy Bentham, ‘Essay VI’ in *Essay On Political Tactics Containing Six of the Principal Rules Proper To Be Observed By a Political Assembly In the Process of Forming a Decision*. London: T Payne, 1791, pp. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> Bentham ‘Introductory View of the Rationale of Judicial Evidence’ in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring. 11 vols. Edinburgh: W Tait, 1838-43, Vol. 6, pp. 1-187, this citation p. 19. Italics in original. This text was composed around 1811-12, and the first few chapters were printed in 1812. A more extended version, edited by John Stuart Mill, was published in 1827.

Rather than truth being self-evident, it had to be patiently drawn out via critical debate. Procedures of investigation were needed so that all available viewpoints could be examined and compared, sorting ‘false’ from ‘true’ perspectives.

For Bentham, publicity played a vital role in ensuring that this process was as inclusive and as fair as possible. Over the first three decades of the nineteenth century, he promoted the political virtues of exposure more and more confidently. In later works, he made a positive case for publicity, arguing that it was a force working against corruption, and even suggesting in the *Constitutional Code* that the ‘Public Opinion Tribunal’ should be regarded as an extra-institutional element in government.<sup>13</sup> In earlier texts, however, he tended to focus on debunking the twofold paternalist argument that such exposure would create social chaos by increasing the political power of groups who were too poorly educated to reach good political decisions. In *Tactics*, Bentham counters this line of argument by insisting that an untutored individual is still far better placed to represent his/her own interests than anyone else. The paternalist argument, he believes, fails to acknowledge the extent to which publicity would have a dynamic, educative effect, not only by informing the people about political issues, but also by teaching them to reflect on political decisions:

A habit of reasoning and discussion will penetrate all classes of society. The passions, accustomed to a public struggle, will learn reciprocally to restrain themselves; they will lose that morbid sensibility, which among nations without liberty and without experience, renders them the sport of every alarm and every suspicion.<sup>14</sup>

Publicity here plays a broad and essentially progressive role in society. Far from encouraging an ignorant public, too easily seduced away from reason, to jump to wild and irrational judgments, the detachment it provides inculcates a reflective reading habit, which could actually help to prevent social disorder:

The speeches of the orators, which are known to them [the public] only through the newspapers, have not the influence of the passionate harangues of a seditious demagogue. They do not read them till after

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<sup>13</sup> See Jeremy Bentham, *Constitutional Code*. Ed. F Rosen and J H Burns. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, Vol. 1, pp. 35-39.

<sup>14</sup> Bentham, *Tactics*. *Op. cit.*, p. 31

they have passed through a medium which cools them; and besides, they are accompanied by the opposite arguments, which, according to the supposition, would have all the natural advantage of the true over the false. The publicity of debates has ruined more demagogues than it has made.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas Rousseau would have been deeply suspicious of the mediating influence of the press, for Bentham, the distance that newspapers created between the general public and official institutions was one of the chief benefits they conferred upon society. The enthusiastic cant of popular revolutionary speakers, too sudden and simultaneous in its effects for Bentham's liking, would be counteracted by this inherently cold, rational medium which could teach its readers to weigh all sides of a case, deliberating carefully before reaching any conclusion.

Indeed, while critical debate might look as if it were likely to inflame social unrest, Bentham argued that it actually operated as a far greater source of stability than Rousseauvian consensus. When rulers acted in the general interest, publicity would ensure the public were informed of the reasons behind their decisions, and would know that they had been reached with the general good in mind:

public deliberations... ought to operate upon the general spirit of a nation in favour of its government. Objections have been refuted,— false reports confounded; the necessity for the sacrifices required of the people have been clearly proved. Opposition, with all its efforts, far from having been injurious to authority, will have essentially assisted it.<sup>16</sup>

Bentham's faith in free discussion meant that criticism of a particular set of measures was not a cause for anxiety, but an opportunity to gain legitimacy for a set of measures, which might otherwise have provoked factional controversy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> However, he was also concerned to guard against factionalism, arguing that too much conflict in the political realm produced 'dispositions most opposite to the search after truth; and have even too much tendency to the formation of those violent parties which beget civil wars'. Too strong a party spirit, though, would actually curb critical debate, as each side would have too much of an interest in winning the debate to allow the real truth to emerge. *Ibid.* p. 19.

By the time that Bentham wrote his *Parliamentary Reform Catechism* he was using his belief in the unconquerable nature of self-interest, and his concern about the state of public debate to ground an argument in favour of reforming the franchise. Distinguishing between ordinary self-interest, which was ineradicable, and ‘sinister’ interest, which represented an abuse that was detrimental to the general good, Bentham argued that the combination of patronage and the restricted franchise in Britain combined to allow the interests of the Crown and the aristocracy to become sinister, preponderating over the ‘*democratical*’ interest’, thus ensuring that the well-being of a minority would always prevail over the greater good.<sup>18</sup> Nowhere was this clearer than in the weak culture of parliamentary debate, in which the prejudices of factional M.P.s were allowed to substitute for true investigation of the issues:

Look at the debates.... To so prodigious an extent, not only no mark of active talent, no mark of intellectual aptitude- but, on the contrary, proofs, and, how deplorably abundant!- and that on the most important occasions – that of no such part of man’s frame as the *intellectual*, has any use been so much as attempted or endeavoured to be made.<sup>19</sup>

As much light would be thrown on the question ‘by the barking of a dog’ or ‘the screaming of a parrot’ as by parliamentary speeches dictated by interest.<sup>20</sup> Only an extension of the franchise, Bentham reasoned, could ensure a fully transparent political system, in which votes reflected the interest of the general public. By making re-election depend on securing the votes of a large electorate, and instituting publicity which allowed the public to reach correct judgments about the way in which ministers served their interests, the political system could be made to serve the greatest good of the greatest number.

Bentham believed that anything which restrained free discussion was liable to encourage corruption, and hence he was an advocate for removing restraints on the free press, writing *Truth v. Ashurst* in 1792 (published 1823) to recommend that newspapers should not be prosecuted for libels against public

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Bentham, ‘Parliamentary Reform Catechism’ in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring. 11 vols. Edinburgh, 1838-43, Vol. 3, pp. 434-552, this citation p. 440. Italics in original.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 498.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 499.

and political figures. Because libel law was originally designed to prevent seditious disruption to the state, in the eighteenth century the truth or falsity of a particular allegation was immaterial to deciding whether it was or was not libelous. It became a principle of law that the truer the statement, the greater the libel, because the more veracious the avowal, the more likely it was to create unrest.<sup>21</sup> Though Foxite reforms in 1792 allowed the jury to decide whether a piece of writing was libellous, until the 1840s the assumption persisted that some things, though true, were better unsaid and unwritten.<sup>22</sup> For Bentham, such a law curtailed debate, and allowed corrupt officials *carte blanche* to do whatever they liked:

What neither Mr. Justice Ashhurst, nor Mr. Justice Anybody-else, has ever done, or ever will do, is to teach us how we are to know what is, from what *is not, a libel*. One thing they are all agreed in—at least all among them who have had any hand in making this part of the law—that if what they call *a libel* is all true, and can be proved to be so, instead of being the less, it is the more libellous. The heavier, too, the charge, of course the worse the libel: so that the more wickedly a judge or minister behaves, the surer he is of not hearing of it.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in *On the Liberty of the Press and Public Discussion*, written in the autumn of 1820 as a series of letters to the Spanish people in response to the discussion of press freedom in the Spanish Parliament, but clearly also reflecting on the Queen Caroline scandal which was rocking Britain, Bentham recommended that libel should go virtually unpunished, because

to place on any more advantageous footing the official reputation of a public functionary, is to destroy, or proportionably to weaken, that liberty, which, under the name of *the liberty of the press*, operates as a check upon the conduct of the ruling few; and in that character

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<sup>21</sup> C. R. Kropf, 'Libel and Satire in the Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Vol. 8: No. 2, Winter, 1974-1975, pp. 153-168.

<sup>22</sup> Lobban has argued that Foxite reforms were actually designed to strengthen the law of libel, bringing it into line with public opinion on the matter, by increasing the emphasis on the context of a questionable utterance. Continuing difficulties with libel law, he argues, led to a shift away from prosecuting seditious libel towards a tendency to focus instead on unlawful assembly in the 1820s. See Michael Lobban, 'From Seditious Libel To Unlawful Assembly', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*. Vol. 10: No. 3, Autumn 1990, pp. 307-352.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Bentham, 'Truth v. Ashurst, Or Law As It Is, Contrasted With What It Is Said To Be' in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring, 11 vols. Edinburgh, 1838-43, Vol. 5, pp. 233-237, this citation p. 440. Italics in original.

constitutes a controuling power, indispensably necessary to the maintenance of good government.<sup>24</sup>

From his perspective, the inconvenience that libel law posed to officeholders was outweighed by the benefit afforded by making them accountable to the public. Where politicians were concerned, Bentham advised that vituperative statements should go entirely unpunished, while defamation should be prosecuted only in the most extreme cases, where mendacious individuals had deliberately and consciously circulated falsehoods.

Similarly, Bentham's legal thinking is permeated by his faith in publicity as a surveillance mechanism. In the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, written largely between 1802 and 1812, but unpublished until 1827, he argues that all available proofs of guilt or innocence should be placed before a court of law, so that the most complete picture of the truth could be constructed via the collation and comparison of different versions of events. Even false testimony, in his eyes, was valuable, since it could actually throw light on important truths. Bentham's views here are in step with a more general shift in legal methodology during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, away from a 'truth speaks' theory of justice, in which the demeanour of the defendant was believed to reveal his or her veracity.<sup>25</sup> Towards the nineteenth century, the notion that appearances and realities did not necessarily map onto one another became more generally accepted, which resulted in an increasing emphasis on the need for forensically skilled professionals to intervene in the trial, sifting through different pieces of evidence in order to resolve conflicts between different viewpoints. One result of this was that the psychology of crime took on a new

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Bentham, 'On The Liberty Of The Press And Public Discussion' in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring. 11 vols. Edinburgh, 1838-43, Vol. 2, pp. 275-297, this citation p. 279, italics in original.

<sup>25</sup> For 'truth speaks' theories see John Langbein, *The Origins of Adversary Criminal Trial*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. See also D J A Cairns, *Advocacy And The Making Of The Adversarial Criminal Trial 1800-1865*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998. In my view, Schramm, who argues that Bentham did actually espouse a 'truth speaks' theory, oversimplifies the incredibly complex relationship between the 'moral sanction' and publicity in Bentham's work. The physical disposition of the witness becomes crucial in Bentham's evidentiary methodology only because his or her consciousness of the truth-revealing power of critical debate and publicity affects his or her ability to lie on the witness stand. See Jan Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.



prominence in Benthamite jurisprudence, as questions of motivation and intentionality became increasingly important in judging both the reliability of a witness, and the likelihood of a defendant's guilt. Guilt did not only inhere in a defendant's demeanour; rather, an external observer in possession of all the facts could now assess a criminal's psychology.

But not only did systems have to be just, they also had to be seen to be just in order to gain public confidence and trust. As a form of surveillance, publicity helped both to create procedures that were fair and to secure public confidence in their fairness. As Bentham put it in *Tactics*:

Suspicion always attaches to mystery. It thinks it sees a crime where it beholds an affectation of secrecy; and it is rarely deceived. For why should we hide ourselves if we do not dread being seen? In proportion as it is desirable for improbity to shroud itself in darkness, in the same proportion is it desirable for innocence to walk in open day, for fear of being mistaken for her adversary.<sup>26</sup>

Rousseauvian virtue of the heart is simply not enough: honesty for Bentham is not a personal characteristic, but a matter of subjecting oneself to the public gaze, so that there is no longer any possibility that one can be dishonest. If self-interest was an inevitable feature of human life, an individual could prove his worth only by placing himself beyond temptation, by exposing his conduct to the searchlight of the public gaze.

Yet, as Foucault has demonstrated, subjecting oneself to publicity is not just a matter of establishing surveillance mechanisms that are external to the self.<sup>27</sup> For Bentham, the threat which negative exposure poses to the individual in the public eye creates a kind of artificial inner conscience, which ensures that that public figures are always aware, at a deep psychological level, of the penalties that attach to serving their own interests in preference to the general good. In other words, the individual's subjection to external surveillance is internalised as anxiety about the scandal which transgression will create. In his

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<sup>26</sup> Bentham, *Tactics*. *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. A. Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1975 repr. 1991, *passim*.

early *Introduction to the Principles of Morals*, Bentham argued that the ‘moral’ sanction, or the community’s opinion of an individual, was one of the four basic sources of pain and pleasure. A good reputation was one of the ‘simple pleasures’ of life, while infamy was a source of pain:

The pains of an ill-name, are the pains that accompany the persuasion of a man’s being obnoxious, or in a way to be obnoxious to the ill-will of the world about him. These may likewise be called the pains of ill-repute, the pains of dishonour, or the pains of the moral sanction.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, when misdeeds were exposed by publicity, the scandal that resulted simultaneously revealed the transgression, protected the general interest, and punished the transgressor. In the courtroom, publicity therefore had a deterrent effect, discouraging mendacity in witnesses and unfairness in judges.

Bentham’s philosophy, then, cast publicity in an almost heroic social role, arguing that exposure was not only the scourge of the unreformed system, but a force for social progress, educating the people so that they could engage meaningfully in political debate. In the 1810s, this optimistic view of publicity became the foundation of Bentham’s radicalism, as he developed his claim that everyone should be included in critical discussions into an argument for an extension of the franchise to encompass the votes of all adult males, on the grounds that this would coerce M.P.s into voting with the general interest by making their re-election dependent on the approbation of the majority. As I shall show in the next chapter, as utilitarianism became an ever more powerful political discourse, the influence of such faith in the positive effects produced by exposure began to extend beyond strict utilitarian circles, into the wider culture of respectable radicalism, surfacing with particular intensity where scandal was used as a political tool against the unreformed system. As I shall show, one of the major reasons for this was that the Benthamite concept of publicity allowed radicals to use exposure in a manner that was explicitly anti-Rousseauvian, thus distancing themselves from the Jacobin commitment to a model of publicity designed to encourage transcendence of interest and political unanimity.

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<sup>28</sup> Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals*. *Op. cit.* p. 47.

### *The Problem of Sex Scandal*

However, Bentham's own faith in the positive effects produced by exposure became troubled when publicity involved the revelation of sexually scandalous details. Recently, Cutler claimed that Bentham's commitment to publicity was based on his ignorance of scandal's capacity to become a form of entertainment, transforming public opinion from a serious tribunal for judging political affairs into a mass audience titillated by trivialities:

Whether the disjuncture between political watchfulness and the driving commercial forces of the mass media seriously undermines the role of public opinion as an unbiased "tribunal" is a question that passed Bentham by but is one that is at the forefront of current debate.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, as Klancher and Jones have demonstrated, the notion that the problems of 'mass media' could be noted only by a late twentieth century public is deeply flawed.<sup>30</sup> The early nineteenth century witnessed a rapid rise not only in the amount of printed matter published in England, but in its availability to a socially diverse audience, which led to an unprecedented self-consciousness about the social role played by the press. While Bentham remained optimistic about the ability of a free press to produce discussion, he was neither unaware that public opinion could be manipulated, nor ignorant about the way that publicity could become a kind of commercial distraction from serious politics. Indeed, in *Tactics*, he endeavours to cope with the problematic notion of a powerful 'mass' media by arguing that the amusement value provided by publicity could actually increase the utility of exposure, adding to the pleasure that it creates without taking away from the manner in which the press educated the reading public into critical awareness.

However, the optimism that Bentham voices in this work dealing with political publicity has to be read alongside the extent and the acuteness of the

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<sup>29</sup> Fred Cutler, 'Jeremy Bentham and the Public Opinion Tribunal', *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol. 63: No. 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 321-346, this citation p. 341.

<sup>30</sup> See Jon Klancher *The Making of English Reading Audiences 1790-1832*. Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, and Aled Jones *Powers of the Press : Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth Century England*. Brookfield: Scolar Press, 1996.

anxieties that Bentham manifests in his legal texts about the prospect that publicity could encourage unhealthy forms of public curiosity rather than wholesome critical debate. He had three main concerns about scandalous court cases. Firstly, he was concerned about the effects of publicity on private life, and sought reasons to exempt the domestic sphere from exposure. Secondly, he was anxious about the problems created by the emergence of scandalous details in the public process of critical debate, arguing that infamy could spread all too easily from the narrative of events leading to the commission of a crime to the hermeneutic narrative of investigation, so that innocent people, and particularly women, were punished for their association with a notorious cause. Finally, he was especially worried about the effects of publicity on public standards of decency, particularly where women were the subjects of, or the audience for, exposure. Bentham's complex, and often contradictory, attitude to gender plays a crucial role in all three concerns. Some critics have contended that elements of his system were basically feminist: its emphasis on interest allowed women to be pictured as separate subjects with separate concerns which were not necessarily covered by the interests of a father or a spouse, while its reliance on critical debate could be used as an argument for the inclusion of female voices in public debate.<sup>31</sup> However, others point out that he went to some lengths to restrict the participation of women: he explicitly excludes them from the franchise, mainly for the pragmatic reason that the notion of including them as voters would bring ridicule upon the reformist cause, but also because he believed that their natures were less suited to rational judgment than those of men.<sup>32</sup> As I shall show, while Bentham's thought undeniably created theoretical space for egalitarian feminist arguments, practically, he was only too eager to make concessions to the private realm and to a picture of feminine modesty

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<sup>31</sup> Mack describes him as a 'covert feminist', Mack, *Jeremy Bentham. Op. cit.*, p. 112. Halévy contends that prior to 1832 'the majority of the Utilitarian Radicals, with Bentham at their head, were feminists', Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism. Op. cit.*, p. 20. Williford and Boralevi go further, arguing that Bentham was deeply and explicitly committed to female equality throughout his career, though not always in so overt a manner as his pupil, the more liberally inclined John Stuart Mill. See Lea C Boralevi, *Bentham and the Oppressed*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984 and Lea C Boralevi 'In Defence of a Myth', *The Bentham Newsletter*. No. 4, May 1980, pp. 33-46. Also Miriam Williford, 'Bentham on the Rights of Women', *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Vol. 36: No. 1, January-March 1975, pp. 167-176.

<sup>32</sup> See T Ball, 'Was Bentham a Feminist?', *The Bentham Newsletter*. No. 4, May 1980, pp. 25-32 and T Ball, 'Bentham No Feminist: A Reply to Boralevi', *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

which stressed woman's unsuitability for the public sphere, even when he had no coherent philosophical basis for such an argument.

By comparing Bentham's concerns about scandal with the attitude of William Godwin in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* towards the same subject, the extent of the former's anxiety on the subject can be appreciated. Like Bentham, Godwin champions the notion that individuals are the best judges of their own self-interests, and argues that truth emerges via critical debate. However, unlike Bentham, Godwin's faith in critical debate is so strong that he has virtually no anxiety about the negative effects of bad publicity:

if ... men were encouraged to declare what they thought as publicly as possible, every press would be burdened with an inundation of scandal. But the stories by their very multiplicity would defeat themselves. No one man, if the lie were successful would become the object of universal persecution. In a short time the reader, accustomed to the dissection of character, would acquire discrimination.<sup>33</sup>

What concerns Godwin is not that scandal might have a deleterious effect on public morality, but that it might spread falsehood, and hence he centres his argument in the notion that free discussion would inevitably ensure that calumny would be corrected. The energy of truth is so strong that it did not need the protection of centralized state power, nor the institutional safeguards that Bentham was so eager to implement. In fact, once critical debate was instituted, the best thing that government could do would be to interfere as little as possible. He compared the governmental 'mistake' of interfering with public opinion to what he regarded as the ridiculous idea of interfering to restrict free trade:

The mistake which has been made in this case, is similar to the mistake which is not universally exploded upon the subject of commerce. It was long supposed that, if any nation desired to extend its trade, the thing most immediately necessary was for government to interfere, and institute protecting duties, bounties and monopolies. It is now well known that commerce never flourishes so much, as when it is delivered

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<sup>33</sup> William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Ed. Mark Philp and Austin Gee. London: Pickering, 1993, p. 346

from the guardianship of legislators and ministers, and is built upon the principle, not of forcing other people to buy our commodities dear when they might purchase them elsewhere cheaper and better, but of ourselves feeling the necessity of recommending them by their intrinsic advantages.<sup>34</sup>

Leaving the sphere of discussion alone best helped the exchange of opinions. Like Bentham, Godwin therefore argues against libel law, on the grounds that entirely free discussion will necessarily lead to the embarrassment of falsehood. However, he goes further than Bentham in arguing that publicity should be applied not just to institutional proceedings, but to private character:

If the unrestrained discussion of abstract enquiry be of the highest importance to mankind, the unrestrained investigation of character is scarcely less to be cultivated. If truth were universally told of men's dispositions and actions, gibbets and wheels might be dismissed from the face of the earth.<sup>35</sup>

This commitment to full psychological transparency is more reminiscent of Rousseau than Bentham. In a transparent society, Godwin argues, not only would secret cabals against an individual inevitably be defeated by the process of critical debate, but private mystery would automatically generate public suspicion:

Anonymous scandal would be almost impossible in a state where nothing was concealed. But, if it were attempted, it would be wholly pointless, since, where there could be no honest and rational excuse for concealment, the desire to be concealed would prove the baseness of the motive.<sup>36</sup>

By contrast, in his legal writings, Bentham was eager to preserve the private realm as a sphere impervious to the public gaze. When the prospect of a scandalous court case brought the demands of publicity and those of privacy into conflict, he begins to contradict all of his arguments about the necessity for all procedures to be overseen by the public, to argue instead that private hearings should be used. For example, in *A Treatise on Judicial Evidence*, an 1825 compilation by Dumont of extracts from Bentham's manuscripts, the latter

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

argues that ‘family cases... above all... cases of adultery, and all cases connected with the mysteries of the marriage bed’, should not be heard in a public courtroom because the impulse to investigate every aspect of the case could mean that the narrative generated by the investigation became sexually charged.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in *Offences Against Oneself*, Bentham suggests that his usual objection that private hearings are open to abuse by particular interests simply do not apply where scandalous court cases are concerned, arguing that the damage that they cause outweighs the benefits of publicity.<sup>38</sup> What was the reasoning behind these exemptions?

Basically, Bentham was worried that the pressures created by his legal methodology would begin to tear the domestic realm apart. Because sexual misdemeanours were by nature private, the only people in a position to collect relevant evidence were those living in the same private space. The home would have to be transformed from a realm of domestic peace to a space riven by strife and surveillance. Obtaining sufficient evidence for conviction would turn each family member into a potential informer, destroying the affective bonds which make the domestic sphere valuable. Because publicity was a distinctly public tool of surveillance, its presence in the domestic sphere denatured the private simply by exposing it to the world. Ultimately, Bentham argued, the damage that this could cause to all families would outweigh any positive benefit to be drawn from prosecution.

Bentham was therefore keen to ensure that few scandalous cases actually reached court. He argued that sexual transgressions between consenting adults should not be punished. Not only would prosecuting them represent an unnecessary intrusion into the privacy of individuals, but it would be futile, as clandestine transgressions were unlikely to affect public morality in any

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>37</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *A Treatise on Judicial Evidence Extracted From the Manuscripts of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. M Dumont. London: J W Paget, 1825, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Offences Against Oneself’, sometimes called Bentham’s ‘Essay on Pederasty’ existed in manuscript form only until it was printed in the 1970s. See ‘Offences Against Oneself’, *The Journal of Homosexuality*. Vol. 3: No. 4, 1978, pp. 389-406 and Vol. 4: No.1, 1978, pp. 91-107. See also Louis Crompton’s introduction to the text, ‘Offences Against Oneself’, *Ibid.*, Vol. 3: No. 4, pp. 383-8.

negative manner. Furthermore, because such acts would be concealed from the public gaze, few of the ‘criminals’ would be caught. No clear association between offence and punishment would be established, which would prevent any official sentence from having a deterrent effect. Instead, Bentham argued that such offences were a matter of ‘private ethics’, punishable not by the law but by the moral sanction, via the scandal that exposure would generate. Yet, given his insistence on the stubbornness of truth, and the need for full critical debate, it is hard to see how the fairness of such a method of punishment could be guaranteed. In these cases, the insistent rhetoric of exposing and unveiling which permeates Bentham’s legal and penal tracts is exchanged, under the pressure of defending the private sphere, for a discourse which values the very opposite: non-investigation, combined with a type of rather odd scandal which does not expose anything very clearly, but rather simply taints the offender with a vague and incompletely justified odour of disrepute.

In his *Principles of Penal Law*, Bentham tried to deal with objections to using the ‘moral sanction’ as a penal tool, arguing that scandal was an extremely efficient instrument of punishment, capable of inflicting an degree of notoriety on an offender proportionate to his or her offence: ‘it is variable in quantity, from the paternal admonition of the judge, to a high degree of infamy’.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, because it was inflicted by the people, it was a popular punishment, as well as being, for obvious reasons, exemplary. However, in other texts, Bentham expressed anxieties about using negative publicity to penalize an offender because it was difficult to control. In a scandalous case, there was a danger that infamy could not be confined to the realm of punishment, but would begin to attach to the process of the trial itself, as everyone involved in the narrative of investigation became tarnished by the notoriety that should have attached only to the narrative of crime. Merely being asked to reveal the past in public could produce a degree of ‘unintentional’ suffering that outweighed the sentence that a judge would have given. In the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, which Bentham worked on between 1803-6, though it remained unpublished until John Stuart Mill’s 1827 edition, he argued



that exposure itself could become a punishment which outweighed any legal remedy:

At the same time, in many a cause of this kind, such is the quantity of suffering produced on the part of this or that party, or perhaps all the parties, by the mere exposure of such incidents as have happened to have place in the course of the dispute (in particular, of the conduct maintained by them in the course of the dispute,) that, in comparison with the suffering thus unintentionally produced, any suffering, that by any express act of the judge, would on the occasion in question be intentionally produced, would be to any degree inferior to its amount.<sup>40</sup>

By confusing the chronological order of the trial, and pre-empting punishment, scandal could upset the careful calculations of pain and benefit upon which Bentham's penal system was founded.

Because female reputation was a delicate, easily damaged commodity, this tendency of scandal became particularly problematic where women were concerned. The mere fact of acting a public part in the public eye transformed the 'naturally' retiring, modest domestic women into the subject of an oddly sexualised public curiosity, particularly in cases where offences against decency were concerned:

When a person of the female sex has received an insult of a nature offensive to decency (especially if to youth and virginity refined habits of life be added,) it is no small aggravation of the injury to be obliged, on pain of seeing the author triumph in impunity, to come forward, as in England, and give a description of it, in the face of a mixed and formidable company of starers, many of them adversaries. Females have been seen to faint under such trials.<sup>41</sup>

Merely participating in a trial, standing before the eye of the watchful public, inflicted punishment on innocent women. Not only was the female victim placed in an analogous position to the actress on the stage, performing to a crowd of onlookers, but the very fact of being on public display, however unwittingly, tended to besmirch her reputation. Consequently, Bentham

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<sup>39</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Principles Of Penal Law* in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring. 11 vols. Edinburgh, 1838-43, Vol. 1, pp. 365-580, this citation p. 463.

<sup>40</sup> Bentham, 'The Rationale of Judicial Evidence' in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring. 11 vols. Edinburgh, 1838-43, Vol. 6 and 7, this citation Vol. 6, p. 368. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 364.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 368.

believed that many women were reluctant to resort to official channels to demand justice:

For females, whose natural sensibility has been increased by a cultivated education, the pain of a public proceeding is so great, that they will rather submit to a long course of injustice than resort to so violent a remedy. In proportion as their sentiments are more delicate, they are more at the mercy of their persecutors.<sup>42</sup>

Rather than publicity ensuring that critical debate produces truth, the type of exposure associated with the trial prevents the modest woman from resorting to such a public remedy for her grievances.<sup>43</sup>

Not only female witnesses, but also female members of the audience within the courtroom created problems for Benthamite arguments in favour of free discussion. While his ideas on critical debate stressed the importance of using exposure to include everyone in public debates, where sexually scandalous material was concerned, Bentham demurred about including women in the public audience. For example, in the case of a scandalous court case where ‘irregularities of the sexual appetite’ were under discussion, he advises that the room should be cleared of ‘the female sex in general, and in both sexes, minors below a certain age’.<sup>44</sup> Despite the fact that he was well aware that women’s interests did not necessarily concur with those of the male sex, Bentham seems to have concluded that the damage to female modesty would outweigh the benefits of including a female perspective in the audience which surveyed these cases. Yet, once again, Bentham’s reasons for this exemption are confused. On

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<sup>42</sup> Bentham *A Treatise on Judicial Evidence*. *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> In his essay on Bentham in *The Spirit Of The Age*, William Hazlitt makes a similar point about the bluntness and imprecision of scandal as a penal instrument. For Hazlitt, Bentham’s plans for a panopticon are founded on the mistaken basis that the criminal mind is capable of rational decision making, so that individuals can be reformed if they can be convinced of their sins against utility. Really, Hazlitt argues, the only way to motivate such men is not to discipline their bodies, but to threaten their good name. The problem, however, with using scandal as a punishment, is that it dooms the criminal without reprieve: ‘It is the apprehension of being stigmatized by public opinion, the fear of what will be thought and said of them, that deters men from the violation of the laws, while their character remains unimpeached; but honour once lost, all is lost. The man can never be himself again!’. Degrees of infamy could not be measured out carefully in an exact ratio to the crime, rather, scandal tended towards extremes: either one was guilty, or one was innocent. See William Hazlitt, ‘Jeremy Bentham’ in *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits*. Ed. W Carew Hazlitt. London: George Bell and Sons, 1894, pp. 1-20, this citation p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Bentham, *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*. *Op. cit.*, p. 367.

the one hand, he argues that women are ‘naturally’ sensitive and delicate. On the other, he acknowledges that this is simply an ideal, which does not actually correspond to realities either of nature or behaviour. He notes with some displeasure that, far from avoiding scandal as injurious to their feelings, women flock to see sensational trials:

In England, the resort of persons of the female sex to scenes so little suited to female delicacy, has been a frequent subject of animadversion. Exclusion in this case (supposing it worth while) could no otherwise be effected than by the authority of the judge. The subject, however, can scarcely present itself as of light importance to the sort of reformers who of late years have busied themselves so much about print-shops, and who, when they have excluded loose character from this or that house or garden, conceive themselves to have extinguished looseness; like those politicians who, when without increasing capital they have increased the number of places capable of being traded with, conceive themselves to have increased trade.<sup>45</sup>

Here, Bentham criticizes moral reformers, like the Society for the Suppression of Vice, for targeting erring individuals rather than focusing their attention on institutional problems. Yet in so doing, he commits a similar error, shifting attention away from the fact that the scandal is generated by the institutional proceedings of a Benthamite trial, to focus blame on the female section of the audience who are passive spectators of the events. This helps him to ignore the fact that there is no reason, in the logic of Benthamism, why these women should not attend. Theoretically, their views and interests should be represented in the public gaze, and any argument that their natural modesty prevents them from attending to fulfil this role is punctuated beyond repair by the fact that many of them quite clearly have chosen to attend of their own free will.

This is typical of Bentham’s gender politics. Though willing to acknowledge the rights of women in theory, he tends to pull back from the practical application of such beliefs, falling back on unconvincing essentialist arguments. Often, the reason behind this is nothing but pragmatism: in the appendix to his essay, *Economy As Applied To Office*, written in 1822, Bentham acknowledges that there is no philosophical bar to the enfranchisement of women, accepts that female happiness is worth as much as male felicity, and even states that the superior physical strength of men makes it all the more

desirable that women have political power. But the fact that the bare mention of the idea is enough to throw ridicule on any electoral project prevents him from advocating it:

In no political state that I know of should I think it at present expedient to make any such proposal. Before the state of the legal system had been made on almost all other points contributory in the highest degree to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, scarcely could any prospect be afforded of [its] being rendered so as to this. The contests and confusions produced by the proposal of this improvement would engross the public mind and throw improvement in all other shapes to a distance.<sup>46</sup>

While he was unwilling to let similar types of ridicule throw his plans for extension of the male franchise into confusion, apparently they provided an insuperable obstacle to women's enfranchisement.

#### IV

#### *Maria Edgeworth's Leonora*

Maria Edgeworth is frequently described rather loosely as a 'utilitarian' writer.<sup>47</sup> She was personally acquainted with several leading proponents of

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 367-8.

<sup>46</sup> Jeremy Bentham 'Economy as Applied to Office'. In *First Principles Preparatory to Constitutional Code* Ed. Philip Schofield. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 3-122, this quotation pp. 99-100.

<sup>47</sup> Modern critics, and particularly those who have focused on Edgeworth's pedagogic writings, have tended to describe her as a utilitarian. Mitzi Myers argues that she admired Bentham's 'vision of a reformed and accountable government apparatus' and the 'central principle of the greatest secular happiness for the greatest number of citizens' see ' "Anecdotes from the Nursery" in Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* ', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*. Vol. 60: No. 2, Winter 1999, pp. 220-250, this citation p. 291. Other assessments of Edgeworth's utilitarianism tend to use the term carelessly, using it to describe the fact that Edgeworth's texts tend to aim at inculcating moral lessons, despite the fact that those lessons may not be overtly Benthamite. Brookes describes her theory of moral balances as 'utilitarian' in Gerry H Brookes, 'The Didacticism Of Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* ', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. Vol. 17: No. 4, Autumn 1977, pp. 593-605, this citation p. 603. Hollingworth describes Edgeworth's style as 'utilitarian didacticism', see Brian Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997. The debate on Edgeworth's moral and political allegiances is further complicated by the fact that a second set of critics eschew the term in favour of debating whether Edgeworth is an 'individualist' or a 'collectivist', terms which are often so ill-defined that critics have been able to espouse diametrically opposed views on the subject. Butler contends that Edgeworth is so individualist as to be almost Jacobin in Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 repr. 1990, pp. 124-6. On the other hand, Roberts sees Edgeworth as fundamentally paternalist and collectivist in attitude, see David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*. New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979, p. 4. For an article which discusses and attempts to resolve this critical debate by looking at Edgeworth's characters as individuals who are at the same time the

utilitarianism, and is even mentioned approvingly by Bentham in the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*:

Yes: it is from novels such as Maria Edgeworth's, that virtues such as the love of justice and veracity,- it is from the benches, the bars, the offices, the desks in and about Westminster Hall, that the hatred of these virtues, and the love of the opposite vices,- is imbibed.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, she was a longstanding friend and correspondent of Étienne Dumont, reviewing his version of the Bentham's *Rationale of Reward*, which he entitled *Théorie des Peines et des Recompenses* in one of her rare excursions into prose journalism.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Dumont's description of Staël's behaviour at Bowood, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, comes from a letter that he wrote to Edgeworth shortly after the dinner. It continues:

She [Staël] has taken Castle Rackrent away from here. She is charmed with *Ennui* and *Manoeuvring* – you were worthy of enthusiasm, but we have lost ourselves in this sad utilitarianism. Oh well, this sad utilitarianism will live longer than sparkling enthusiasm.<sup>50</sup>

For Staël too, then, Edgeworth's work was clearly utilitarian in its bent, which was enough to qualify the Frenchwoman's warm admiration for the English writer's novels.

But Edgeworth's response to Staël's work was equally mixed. Like Bentham, she was intensely interested in French culture and politics, though this

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representatives of a particular family and class, see Teresa Michels, 'Commerce and Character in Maria Edgeworth', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Vol. 49: No. 1, June 1994, pp. 1-20. In my view, the first group of critics have been too ready to ascribe a greater degree of commitment to utilitarianism than is actually evidenced in Edgeworth's writings, while the latter set's unwillingness to move beyond simple ethical and political binaries has compounded the confusion. (Utilitarianism, it should be noted, contains both individualist and collectivist elements). My view of Edgeworth's political and moral commitments is closest to that of Butler in her earlier biography of Maria Edgeworth, where she argues that Edgeworth was deeply indebted to utilitarian thinkers, but was able to maintain her own critical independence from their views. See Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*. *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> Bentham, *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*. *Op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>49</sup> See Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction' to *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth Volume 3: Leonora and Harrington*. Ed. Marilyn Butler and Susan Manly. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999, pp. vii-xxxvii, especially p. xxv.

<sup>50</sup> 'Étienne Dumont to Maria Edgeworth 1 November 1813', quoted in Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*. *Op. cit.* p. 223. My translation. For the original French see Appendix 3.2.

aspect of her writing has been obscured by the recent explosion of academic interest in Romantic nationalisms, which has led many recent writers to focus on her engagement with Irish national identity.<sup>51</sup> While many of these readings are both important and illuminating, opening up new vistas on her Irish texts, they have done nothing to highlight her rather more cosmopolitan side, as a writer who maintained a lifelong interest in European, and especially French culture. Staël in particular appears to have been something of an object of fascination for Edgeworth, as her letters are peppered with anecdotes of the Frenchwoman's eccentricities and generosity.<sup>52</sup> In 1802-3, Edgeworth witnessed the furore surrounding the publication of *Delphine* at first hand, having travelled to France during the Peace of Amiens, and later in life she remembered it as an example of the political status which a woman could achieve, marvelling at the 'wonderful pains and deceit made use of by Napoleon's emissaries in persecution of one woman'.<sup>53</sup> Ten years later in 1813, she hoped to meet Staël personally when she visited London, though, unfortunately, the encounter never took place. Again, in 1820, after Staël's death, Edgeworth travelled to Geneva and stayed at Coppet, Germaine's estate on the banks of Lake Geneva. Her letters describe her time at the chateau with considerable reverence, as a kind of literary pilgrimage. She speaks of passing through 'All the rooms which she had inhabited and of which we could not think as of common rooms,<sup>54</sup> and even indulges a very Staëlian fit of dejection for her counterpart's death: 'There is something inexpressibly melancholy!- awful! in this house in these rooms where the thought continually recurs '*Here genius was! Here was Ambition! Love! All the struggles of the fury passions! Here was Madame de Staël!*'.<sup>55</sup>

This chapter argues that Maria Edgeworth's novel *Leonora*, published in 1806, ought to be read as an ambitious public riposte to Staël's *Delphine*, and thus as an intervention in an international debate on the relationship between

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Brian Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing. Op. cit., passim*. See also Sophie Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>52</sup> For more information see Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas. Op. cit., passim*.

<sup>53</sup> 'Maria Edgeworth to Louisa Beaufort, 14 November 1820'. Quoted from *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth Family Letters*. Ed. Christina Colvin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 274.

<sup>54</sup> 'Maria Edgeworth to Honora Edgeworth, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1820'. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>55</sup> 'Maria Edgeworth to Sophy Ruxton', 26<sup>th</sup> September 1820'. *Ibid.* p. 253. Italics in original.

scandal and early feminism. Like Bentham, Edgeworth reacted against a Rousseauvian model of publicity, rejecting Staël's arguments in favour of flouting established moral conventions as liable to engender a culture of corrupt political manoeuvring, in which the interchangeability of sex and power was liable to favour personal interests rather than the general good. Instead of basing moral and political decisions on affective responses, Edgeworth contends that women had to strike a balance between the dictates of their independent reason and attention to social conventions. Where Staël's feminism makes grandiose claims about the political significance of women, it is individualistic, enfranchising only an exceptional few, Edgeworth's feminism is at once more modest, in that she does not demand direct access to the political realm for her heroine, and more ambitious, since it makes a claim about the public significance of the ethical decisions made by all middle and upper class women, not just a few exceptional females. In *Leonora*, female domestic virtue (contrasted with the powerbrokering which typifies the salon hostess) takes on a public significance, becoming a force which guarantees social stability, by ensuring that political decisions are made on a rational, rather than a sexual basis.<sup>56</sup>

*Leonora* centres on the machinations of the very Delphine-like Lady Olivia, who casts herself in the model of a sentimental heroine and espouses a feminism which allows her to complain against the artificial, unnatural boundaries which restrain female behaviour in modern culture: 'Condemned to incessant hypocrisy, or ever-lasting misery, woman is the slave or the outcast of society'.<sup>57</sup> Casting herself as a Staëlian 'natural' heroine who has experienced the 'nameless evils' that 'await the woman who dares to rise above the prejudices of her sex!', she sets herself above behavioural norms and polite conventions, terming them 'commonplace morality'. She scorns to repress or control her emotions, arguing that concealment or dissimulation of her feelings is a type of vice: 'If my views had been less pure, if I had felt less reliance on the firmness of my own principles, and less repugnance to artifice, I might easily

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<sup>56</sup> For a plot summary of the novel, see Appendix 4.

have avoided some appearances, which have injured me in the eyes of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Like Delphine, Olivia argues that to be veracious is to wear one's heart on one's sleeve, to make passions instantly transparent to others. Consequently, she espouses a Staëlian anti-utilitarian morality, which stresses the importance of spontaneity:

Now in my opinion, when generosity becomes duty it ceases to be a virtue. Virtue requires free-will; duty implies constraint. Virtue acts from the impulse of the moment, and never tires or is tired; duty drudges on in consequence of reflection, and, weary herself, wearies all beholders.<sup>59</sup>

Yet Edgeworth's language here teases out a paradox: is duty degraded because it is plodding and predictable, or because it is ugly? Is morality being judged by practical or aesthetic criteria? Olivia's insistence on the supremacy of inner feeling is actually far more theatrical than it appears, paying a good deal of attention to the response of the 'beholder'. While Olivia's reliance on sensibility might appear to render her independent of society, Edgeworth seems to be suggesting that it is actually orientated towards appearances, making her dependent on others for the social ratification of her identity. She continually uses her sensibility to 'make a scene', performing emotional sensitivity for the benefit of an audience. Leonora's down-to-earth friend, Mrs C—, compares her performances of feeling to the wearing of make-up, emphasizing their inherently inflationary quality:

Those who put on rouge occasionally are suspected of wearing it constantly, and never have any credit for their natural colour; presently they become so accustomed to common rouge, that mistaking scarlet for pale pink, they persist in laying on more and more, till they are like nothing human.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth Volume 3: Leonora and Harrington*. Ed. Marilyn Butler and Susan Manly. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999, pp. 9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



Olivia's emotional transparency is artificial, an affected imitation of real feeling, which has lost touch with any inner emotional 'reality'.

Like Staël, Olivia is an advocate of divorce and admires the celebrity afforded to the divorcee and the woman of notoriety.<sup>61</sup> Instinctively a Francophile, she argues that Parisian society offers women opportunities for public appearances that are lacking at home. She desires the glittering self-display of Staël's salon hostess, whose self-image is carefully manipulated for the gaze of an adoring audience:

In Paris, the insipid details of domestic life are judiciously kept behind the scenes, and women appear as heroines upon the stage, with all the advantages of decoration, to listen to the language of love, and to receive the homage of public admiration.<sup>62</sup>

Placing a high value on the truth of private feelings, then, by no means implies a concomitant respect for the private or domestic sphere. Indeed, Olivia complains that Leonora's devotion to the details of domestic life is actually a sign of her selfishness and her lack of public virtue. Being more attached to her own family than to other people, Leonora is condemned to the realm of the particular, and thus unfitted for a public role:

Leonora's selfishness breaks out perpetually; and, alas! it is of the most inveterate, incurable kind: every thing that is immediately or remotely connected with self she loves, and loves with the most provoking pertinacity. Her mother, her husband, she adores because they are her own; and even her sister's children, because she considers them, she says, as her own. All and every possible portion of self she cherishes with the most sordid partiality.<sup>63</sup>

Private feeling is here degraded as a form of particular interest which is detrimental to the well-being of society as a whole. Affection for relatives and

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Even her correspondent, Madame de P- is less enthusiastic about divorce, concluding that it is 'not always advantageous to women', *Ibid.*, p. 42. On the other hand, Mr L-'s friend, General B points out that despite the legal status of divorce, the popular moral sanction still condemns it: 'With a few exceptions in extraordinary cases, I have observed that *les divorcees* are not received in good society', *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

neighbours becomes the sign of a dysfunctional and uncitizen-like attitude, which renders a person incapable of selfless devotion to public virtue.<sup>64</sup>

Like Staël, Olivia condemns ‘public opinion’ as a malign form of social consensus, which is at odds with the instinctive commitments that inspire the general will. Writing to her Parisian correspondent, she points to scandal as a signal indication of the malevolent influence of English public opinion on morality, arguing that it is a type of old-fashioned gothic prejudice which is the natural product of a confined society:

You have no idea of the miserable force of prejudice which still prevails here. There are some women who emancipate themselves, but then unluckily they are not in sufficient numbers to keep each other in countenance in public. One would not choose to be confined to the society of people who cannot go to court, though sometimes they take the lead elsewhere. We are full half a century behind you in civilization; and your revolution has, I find, afforded all our stiffened moralists *incontrovertible* arguments against liberty of opinion or conduct in either sex.<sup>65</sup>

Olivia measures social progress by the ability of the individual to sever him or herself from moral hegemony and yet retain social influence. Yet at the same time that she advocates a more open and free society, she is pragmatic enough to recognize that her essentially aristocratic notion of social enjoyment, associating with those who can attend court, depends on her ability to remain on the right side of conventionality.

The heroine of Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) is much less ambiguous in her approach to social convention. Her attitudes are shaped by the formative experience of reading Rousseau’s *Julie*, though when her father discovers her with this ‘inappropriate’ reading material, he confiscates the

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<sup>64</sup>As a criticism of Staël this is rather unfair. As I argued in the last chapter, while Delphine argues that exceptional women could be capable of public political engagement only where they lacked such family ties, at the end of the novel, she draws on the power of private feelings and particular interests in order to make her case against the Jacobin judge. There are echoes here of Godwin’s notorious discussion of the conflict between familial emotion and public duty, in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, where he argues that a moral individual faced with the choice of saving a close relative, such as a wife or a mother, or the French philosopher, Fenelon, should set aside his private attachments to rescue the latter.

<sup>65</sup>Edgeworth, *Leonora. Op. cit.*, p. 36

book.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, the text has a profound impact on the course of her life: ‘the impression made on my mind was never to be effaced— it was even productive of a long chain of consequences, that will continue to operate till the day of my death’.<sup>67</sup> As an adult, Emma adopts the Rousseauvian position of insisting on her right to follow the dictates of her feelings in preference to worldly opinion and the ‘precise, general rule’. However, this personal quest to achieve autonomy from convention is revealed to be not a direct choice, but the result of Emma’s inability to channel her energies in a more public and political direction. In response to the arguments of a friend who encourages her in her quest for independence, she replies by quoting Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*:

Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman—*crushed, and then insulted*— why call her to *independence*— which not nature, but the barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her? *This is mockery!* ... “Excluded, as it were, by the pride, luxury, and caprice, of the world, from expanding my sensations, and wedding my soul to society, I was constrained to bestow the strong affections, that glowed consciously within me, upon a few”.<sup>68</sup>

Like Julie and Delphine, Emma’s sensibility, her ability to combine reason and passion, intellect and sensibility, makes her the ideal Rousseauvian citizen, able to ‘wed her soul’ to the greater social good. However her gender means that she is arbitrarily denied the opportunity to exercise her sensibility in a positive, political manner. Effectively, the rules restricting women to the domestic sphere doom her to the realm of particular interests, so that her feelings become improperly concentrated on a few objects. Whereas for Delphine, erotic engagement with Léonce is part of a wider political pursuit of scandalous authenticity, for Hays, the scandal of Emma’s personal involvement with Augustus Harley is the result of the obstructive influence of social prejudice on female political engagement.

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<sup>66</sup> Hays was a member of the circle gathered around Joseph Johnson, who was also the publisher of many of Maria Edgeworth’s works.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Hays, *Memoirs Of Emma Courtney*. Ed. Eleanor Ty. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Edgeworth, on the other hand, is deeply critical of the type of political engagement associated with Staël's liberal, emotionally sensitive salon hostess, arguing that such figures rely on sensuality rather than rationality, and associating them with the opacity of an aristocratic and theatrical culture, which is inimical to the virtues of the private home and, by extension, the well-being of society as a whole. In *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), the second gentleman argues:

Rousseau admires these sirens; but the system of Rousseau, pursued to its fullest extent, would overturn the world, would make every woman a Cleopatra, and every man an Anthony; it would destroy all domestic virtue, all domestic happiness, all the pleasures of truth and love.<sup>69</sup>

Here, the 'siren-like' charms of women can create only a dangerous, uncontrolled passion. Instead of combining the couple in a rational union, the talents of the salon hostess have the effect of individuating husband and wife, engendering unhappy, paranoid delusion rather than tranquil felicity. However, for the second gentleman, the fact that Rousseau's system is flawed is not a reason for forbidding young women to read his works. Rather, the best way of combating his ideas is to expose young women to a range of contrary beliefs, allowing her to listen to critical debate, and then to reach her own conclusions:

I would not, however, proscribe an author, because I believe some of his opinions to be false; I would have my daughter read and compare various books, and correct her judgment of books by listening to the conversation of persons of sense and experience.

In *Leonora*, Olivia's Parisian correspondent, Gabrielle de P— is a *femme de salon* who exemplifies all the vices of the siren. She combines a genius for political plotting (she operates as a spy), with a positive relish for the experience of erotic obstruction which is reminiscent of Laclos's libertines: 'Nothing [is] so tiresome as love without mystery and without obstacles'.<sup>70</sup> Correspondingly, her salon is a half-public, half-private space designed to facilitate secret

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<sup>69</sup> Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies*. Ed. Claire Connolly. London: J M Dent, 1993 repr. 1994, p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> Edgeworth, *Leonora*. *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

conspiracies and frequented by 'all those who wish without scandal or suspicion to intrigue either in love or politics'.<sup>71</sup>

Gabrielle is prone to employ a discourse of affective openness, but she does so only to obscure her Machiavellian involvement in secret cabals. Her language is infected with references to play acting, which expose the existence of hidden designs: frivolity is an 'excellent, because an unsuspected mask, under which serious and important designs may be safely concealed',<sup>72</sup> courts are peopled by 'masks, instead of the human face divine; and instead of fellow-creatures, you must content yourself with puppets',<sup>73</sup> while she describes herself as a master of 'court intrigue, and of the arts of representation'.<sup>74</sup> Once she finds out that Olivia has ensnared Leonora's husband, and is poised to figure in the political world in Russia, she loses no time in advising her friend that her Rousseauvian commitment to sensibility is essentially a sham. Instead of thinking of affections as valuable for their own sake, she asks Olivia to consider them as tools for the acquisition of influence: 'Love has been with you the sole of love; whereas it ought to be the beginning of power'.<sup>75</sup> Recognizing that the political power of the salon hostess is grounded in erotically charged interpersonal relationships, Gabrielle advises Olivia to use her sexual allure to gain influence over powerful men, offering her letters to help her on her way to becoming the mistress of the Emperor of Russia. Gabrielle's plans however, are foiled when Olivia discovers that her friend has seduced the affections of R\*\*\*, a former lover whose name recalls the scandalous Madame R\*\*\* of Staël's *Delphine*. Incensed at what she regards as an empty attempt on the part of her friend to hide her perfidy, Olivia rejects her offer, preferring to remain firmly attached to her sentimental creed rather than to enter Gabrielle's world, where sex and power are infinitely exchangeable.

Edgeworth's eponymous heroine, Leonora, also seeks to emancipate herself from public opinion, though in a rather different manner. Defending

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Olivia, she argues that her friend has every right to prioritise her own judgment over that of the public:

Scandal, imported from the continent, has had such an effect in prejudicing many of her former friends and acquaintance against her, that she is in danger of being excluded from that society of which she was once the ornament and the favourite: but I am determined to support her cause, and to do every thing in my power to counteract the effects of malignity. I cannot sufficiently express the indignation that I feel against the mischievous spirit of scandal, which destroys happiness at every breath, and which delights in the meanest of all malignant feelings, the triumph over the errors of superior characters. Olivia has been much blamed, because she has been much envied.<sup>76</sup>

Given the patriotic element in Leonora's critique of dubious imported information, her position is, paradoxically, very Staëlian. Gossip is the result of social envy, which bears no relation to real behaviour; like Delphine, Leonora believes that scandal is dangerous because it looks like beneficial and regulatory public opinion, when it is in fact influenced by hidden personal motives, which confound the false and the true. But whereas Olivia's sentimentality is almost entirely Rousseauvian, Leonora reaches the same conclusion about the fallibility of social consensus from a more utilitarian perspective. Her arguments about scandal are redolent of some of Bentham's concerns about publicity. For example, she worries that the covert nature of scandal makes it an unfair instrument of correction:

The whisper of secret scandal, which admits of no fair or public answer, is too often sufficient to dishonour a life of spotless fame. This is the height, not only of injustice, but of impolicy. Women will become indifferent to reputation, which is so difficult, even by the prudence of years, to acquire, and which it is so easy to lose in a moment, by the malice or thoughtlessness of those who invent or who repeat scandal. Those who call themselves the world often judge without listening to evidence, and proceed upon suspicion with as much promptitude and severity as if they had the most convincing proofs.<sup>77</sup>

Because there is too little recognition of the gap between actual behaviour and assertion, individuals can be condemned without a thorough and fair

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

investigation of their conduct. As reputation comes to depend more on the caprice of the malicious than real uprightness of character, its true value is undermined.

Like Bentham, Leonora complains that scandal, when severely applied, lacks proportionality as a form of punishment. By refusing to differentiate between light infractions of social rules and serious transgressions, it becomes inflexible: ‘The decisions of opinion may and must vary with circumstances, else the degree of reprobation which they inflict cannot be proportioned to the offence, or calculated for the good of society.’<sup>78</sup> Not only does this inexactness make bad publicity an unjust instrument to use against an offender, but it diminishes scandal’s utility as a punishment. Once an individual has been a subject of scandal, they have nothing left to lose:

Those who were disposed to yield to their passions would, when they had once failed in exact decorum, see no motive, no fear to restrain them; and there would be no pause, no interval between error and profligacy.<sup>79</sup>

A more refined instrument, which will allow reform and rehabilitation, is required. Leonora regards the human, and particularly the feminine mind as a complicated and easily bruised organ, even describing it in classic sentimental fashion as a mimosa, which ‘when too long exposed to each rude touch, loses its retractile sensibility.’<sup>80</sup> Managing such a feminine psychology in a successful and fair manner requires hair-breadth distinctions between shades of virtue and vice, not wholesale condemnation or approbation. Indeed, Leonora identifies a tendency to maintain rigid moral standards as a despotic attempt to deny women true justice:

But, because Caesar, nearly two thousand years ago, said, that his wife ought not even to be suspected, and divorced her upon the strength of this sentiment, shall we make it a general maxim, that suspicion justifies punishment? We might as well applaud those, who when their friends

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

are barely suspected to be tainted with the plague, drive them from all human comfort and assistance.<sup>81</sup>

Pompeia, the wife discarded by Caesar on the ground of rumour alone, here becomes the victim of a masculine conspiracy to maintain honour at the cost of justice. Leonora is determined to avoid this trap by finding an alternative, flexible and essentially humane way of reaching moral judgments about public conduct.

However, while Leonora draws on utilitarian arguments, her morality is not fundamentally consequentialist. When asked whether a flirtation with another man would be wrong, even if conducted for the sole purpose of recapturing the love of her husband, she answers in a firmly deontological spirit, that unworthy actions can never be justified: ‘she would not allow her mind to be cheated by female sophistry; nor yet by the male casuistry of, “The end sanctifies the means.”’<sup>82</sup> Not only are right and wrong irreducible to a calculation of pain and pleasure, but consequentialism, with its egalitarian rationale, is condemned as a ‘male’ form of false argument, designed to palliate moral failings. Implicitly, the firm moral standards associated with a deontological moral framework constitute a more ‘feminine’ form of argument, because they are less susceptible to the vagaries of masculine desire. Indeed, throughout the text, Edgeworth insistently presents women as the moral guardians of the nation, while her male characters are unworthy and rather pitiable moral pragmatists, liable to do what is easy and pleasurable rather than what is right. The claim that sexual transgressions are much worse in women because of their ‘moral’ nature becomes in Edgeworth’s hands an argument about the superiority of the majority of women to the majority of men. Noting the way that Edgeworth appeared to have turned the terms of the sexual double standard on its head, one contemporary reviewer was stung into complaint against:

the partiality which led Miss Edgeworth, in all her conjugal portraits, to give such an unreasonable share of merit to the lady; and we cannot

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.



easily forgive her upon this occasion, for having made her English wife in all respects so much more amiable and respectable than her husband.<sup>83</sup>

However, the crux of Edgeworth's plot rests on the fact that this moral firmness is far less superficially attractive than Olivia's sentimental creed. Because Leonora does not perform her feelings, her husband, Mr L-, believes that his wife lacks 'feminine' virtues of emotion, affection and tenderness: 'There is so much of selfishness, of hypocrisy, of coldness, in what is usually called female virtue,' he argues 'that I often turn with distaste from those to whom I am compelled to do homage for the sake of the general good of society'.<sup>84</sup> In his eyes, her moral position seems the result of cold, self-seeking calculation, an attempt to win prestige rather than love. Yet he is compelled to acknowledge the social utility of her position, admiring the strength of the moral example she provides to the public. On the surface, Olivia's revolt against public opinion looks much more seductively self-sacrificing than Leonora's conventionality: she is prepared to risk her reputation for her lover. Yet Mr L- acknowledges that such behaviour would not set a desirable social precedent, readily accepting Olivia's exclusion from respectable society which results from her behaviour. The problem is that Staëlian scandalous authenticity is essentially dialectical: for rebellion to have meaning, there must be fixed conventions that can be transgressed. Olivia's morality is based on her status as an exceptional woman, and espouses values that, in Edgeworth's eyes, cannot be universalised without engendering social chaos.

Leonora, on the other hand, works from a morality which endeavours to balance internal convictions of right and wrong with an eye to public example: her moral decisions are made from the perspective that they should be generally applicable. Her position is similar to that of Lady Anne Percival in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), who advises that respect for social opinion needs to be balanced against rational independence:

As we cannot alter the common law of custom, and as we cannot render the world less gossiping, or less censorious, we must not expect always

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<sup>83</sup> 'Miss Edgeworth's *Leonora*', *Edinburgh Review*. *Op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>84</sup> Edgeworth, *Leonora*. *Op. cit.*, p. 85

to avoid censure; all we can do is never to deserve it— and it would be absurd to enslave ourselves to the opinion of the idle and ignorant. To a certain point, respect for the opinion of the world is prudence; beyond that point, it is weakness.<sup>85</sup>

Maintaining this balance means Leonora always has an eye to social example, but in other ways she is actually freer from convention than Olivia. She insists on her independent right to judge a situation for herself, instead of conforming to the taste of her husband, preferring to look to female example rather than male arguments where moral questions are concerned: ‘I have done all that my reason and my dearest mother counselled; surely I cannot have done wrong. How apt we are to mistake the opinion or the taste of the man we love for the rule of right!’<sup>86</sup> Yet her refusal to consult the aesthetic effect of her ethics means that her moral thought lacks the theatrical allure of Olivia’s rebelliousness. Though the fact that she genuinely does have deep feelings allows her to win the contest for her husband’s affections in the end, her victory over her rival is achieved only via a long process of lonely suffering, culminating in a self-sacrificing act of devotion, when she risks her own life to nurse her wayward partner through a dangerous illness.

The plot of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) centres around a similar need to find some sort of rapprochement between feeling and social convention. Marianne Dashwood has Olivia-like inclinations to glory in a self-conscious lack of self-restraint. ‘I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank’ she states, when her behaviour is criticized, ‘I have erred against every common place notion of decorum; I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful.’<sup>87</sup> Like Olivia, she argues from her feelings, justifying her unchaperoned visit to Allenham with Willoughby on the grounds that she did not experience it as an offence against decorum:

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<sup>85</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*. Ed. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. London: J M Dent, 1993 repr. 1994, p. 233.

<sup>86</sup> Edgeworth, *Leonora*. *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>87</sup> Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*. Ed. Ros Ballaster. London: Penguin, 1995, p. 42

if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure.<sup>88</sup>

However, the dichotomy between affective authenticity and conventional morality which Marianne establishes is deconstructed by Elinor, whose moral code offers a compromise between sensibility and public duty. Elinor may caution against the dangers of relying upon the types of individual judgment favoured by Marianne, but she is also far from positive about the value of social conformity:

“But I thought it was right, Elinor,” said Marianne, “to be guided wholly by the opinion of other people. I thought our judgments were given us merely to be subservient to those of our neighbours. This has always been your doctrine, I am sure.”

“No, Marianne, never. My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour. You must not confound my meaning. I am guilty, I confess, of having often wished you to treat our acquaintance in general with greater attention; but when have I advised you to adopt their sentiments or conform to their judgment in serious matters?”<sup>89</sup>

In the course of the narrative, Marianne’s behaviour is revealed to be *more* dependent on social mores than Elinor’s, precisely because of its theatrical quality: her sensibility is deliberately cultivated for an admiring audience, and is occasionally far less feeling than Elinor’s much quieter form of independence.<sup>90</sup> By contrast, Elinor is admirable precisely because she is able to divide her inner life from her outer demeanour, retaining enough self-control that she can maintain a polite social façade in spite of inner turmoil, without negating the private domain of her feelings, thus achieving a rational, individual autonomy without becoming a theatrical performer of her own identity.

Leonora’s mother, on the other hand, is an uncompromising adherent to public morality. She regards as dangerous her daughter’s faith in sensibility,

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 82.

<sup>90</sup> For a more indepth discussion of this aspect of theatricality in Austen, see Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992.

with its tendency to place the good of the slandered individual over that of the community:

A taste for the elegant profligacy of French gallantry was, I remember, introduced into this country before the destruction of the French monarchy. Since that time, some sentimental writers and pretended philosophers of our own and foreign countries have endeavoured to confound all our ideas of morality. To every rule of right they have found exceptions, and on these they have fixed the public attention by adorning them with all the splendid decorations of eloquence; so that the rule is despised or forgotten, and the exception triumphantly established in its stead... Their doctrine, so convenient to the passions and soporific to the conscience, can never want partisans: especially by weak and enthusiastic women it is adopted and propagated with eagerness; then they become personages of importance, and zealots in support of their sublime opinions:- and they can read; and they can write; and they can talk; and they can *effect a revolution in public opinion!* I am afraid, indeed, that they can: for of late years we have heard more of sentiment than of principles; more of the rights of woman than of her duties.<sup>91</sup>

While Leonora complains about the importation of rumour from France, her mother fears a wider continental tendency to subvert public ethics by arguing from extreme examples, rather than the general rule. A Staëlian system which focuses on inner feelings rather than external examples, she argues, will inevitably undermine the transcendent significance of virtue and vice, transforming them from universal standards into relative terms. The claim of the 'exceptional case' is all the more threatening because of its allure for women, to whom it offers a platform from which they can achieve notoriety or celebrity, entering the public sphere instead of confining themselves to the domestic realm. The result is an epidemic of vulgar women writers, whose credentials consist only of an ability to write formally correct prose:

Every scribbling young lady can now string sentences and sentiments together, and can turn a period harmoniously. Upon the strength of these accomplishments they commence heroines, and claim the privileges of the order; privileges which go to an indefinite and most alarming extent. Every heroine may have her own code of morality for her private use, and she is to be tried by no other; she may rail as loudly as she pleases

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<sup>91</sup> Edgeworth, *Leonora. Op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

‘at the barbarous institutions of society’, and may deplore ‘*the inexorable tyranny of the English laws*’.<sup>92</sup>

In the Duchess’s eyes, writers like Staël and Hays, who favour a sentimental style, *become* their own heroines. There is no difference between their lives and their prose: the act of asserting themselves in the public sphere as novelists becomes part and parcel of their need to perform a subversive, anti-social identity. To be a public woman, in her view, is already to have lost one’s virtue. Scandal becomes a necessary corrective to such behaviour. It acts as a comforting assertion of transcendent moral law, a ritual of cleansing which ensures that decency is maintained. Its bluntness as a penal instrument thus turns out to be its virtue: when individuals know that even the *vague appearance* of transgression will be enough to condemn them, they will cease to adopt ‘Jacobin’ styles of writing which stress the authenticity of social rebelliousness.

The Duchess’s moral views go hand in hand with her belief in a hierarchically organized, paternalistic society: ‘the pride of family, and the pride of virtue, should reciprocally support each other. Were I asked what I think the best guard to a nobility in this, or in any other country, I should answer, VIRTUE.’<sup>93</sup> This dual insistence of birth and virtue marries an older model of authority, based on the innate qualities of blood which are guaranteed and kept pure by virtuous conduct, with a more middle class idea of influence as a commodity that is contingent upon the maintenance of exemplary standards of behaviour. Aristocratic power will only continue if the upper classes avoid excess proving their innate qualities of social leadership by behaving in an exemplary manner. However, though the Duchess’s enthusiasm for conventionality is distinctly reactionary in class terms, in gender terms, it is actually designed to ameliorate some of the inequalities which women suffer in society. One of the reasons that Leonora’s mother is concerned about sensibility heroines is that she believes that their behaviour encourages men to restrict female education:

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

If men find that the virtue of women diminishes in proportion as intellectual cultivation increases, they will connect, fatally for the freedom and happiness of our sex, the ideas of female ignorance and female innocence; they will decide that one is the effect of the other. They will not pause to distinguish between the use and abuse of reason; they will not stand by to see further experiments tried at their expense, but they will prohibit knowledge altogether as a pernicious commodity, and will exert the superior power which nature and society place in their hands, to enforce their decrees. Opinion obtained freedom for women; by opinion they may be again enslaved. It is therefore the interest of the female world, and of society, that women should be deterred by the dread of shame from passing the bounds of discretion.<sup>94</sup>

Rather than being an inherent and inalienable right, liberty for women is contingent upon the approbation of public opinion, governed by men and attuned to their interests. If the progress of education and the decline of a sense of social shame go hand in hand, then men seeking to protect their own interests will begin to question whether women should be allowed to continue as rational, self-determining beings. Despite the fact that in the Duchess's view this male-dominated opinion would be manifestly incorrect in connecting 'female innocence' and 'female ignorance', women would be unable to challenge this judgment. Female education is an endowment, the continuation of which depends on women adopting certain types of quiescent behaviour. Just as virtue depends on outer appearances, the way that things seem to those who control the channels of power is an issue of far greater importance than the question of how things actually are under that potentially delusive surface. In both class and gender terms, regulation of one's conduct according to the opinion of the world is not a matter of upholding customs for their own sake, as Burke argued, but a pragmatic way of preserving social influence; an agreement to uphold appearances in order to create a moral hegemony which will rule out the appealing aura of transgression.

Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*, published in 1805, offers a similar critique of a Rousseauvian commitment to feeling over external standards of right and wrong to that of *Leonora*. Like Hays's Emma Courtney, Adeline (a character loosely based on Mary Wollstonecraft) seeks to render herself

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

independent of public opinion, judging her actions by her inner consciousness of right and wrong instead of social convention. And like Emma, Adeline is a keen reader of Rousseau. She is initially exposed to his writings through her mother's library, when she selects a copy of *The Social Contract* to read. However, this maternal collection contains only the 'proper' works of Jean-Jacques, and thus does not contain editions of *The Confessions* or *Julie*. Adeline stumbles across the latter when she visits the library of the libertine Sir Patrick, whose masculine collection bears witness to the more disreputable side of Jean-Jacques, containing only his more indelicate works. Adeline is enthralled by the letters of Saint-Preux and Julie, but, like Emma Courtney, her experience of the text is interrupted at an early stage by a solicitous parent, who forbids her to read on. For Opie, the disruption of this reading experience is infinitely more dangerous than anything in *Julie* itself, because Adeline has absorbed only the seductive love letters, without witnessing either Julie's repentance or the resocialization of Saint-Preux at Clarens:

the sacrifice which the guilty but penitent Julia makes to filial affection, and the respectable light in which the institution of marriage is held up to view, would have strengthened, no doubt, Adeline's resolution to obey her mother, and give up Glenmurray; and have led her to reconsider those opinions which taught her to think contemptible what ages and nations had been content to venerate.<sup>95</sup>

Instead of gaining this salutary message by proxy, Adeline has to suffer the consequences of her misguided beliefs personally. The novel's plot is a kind of conservative reworking of the story of *Julie*, as Adeline undergoes a series of trials and sufferings which teach her to recognize the need to align herself not with a utopian general will, but with the external customs and prejudices of contemporary English society.

Adeline's contempt for social prejudice leads her to insist on becoming the mistress of Glenmurray, and eventually to bear his illegitimate child. By the end of the novel, however, she has been beaten into submission by the scandal that her behaviour creates, and the hardship of existing outside the pale of polite

society. She writes to her mother that she bitterly regrets daring ‘to think and act contrary to... opinion and the reverend experience of ages’, concluding that it is impossible to base standards of right and wrong on inner feelings, as they are invisible to the world.<sup>96</sup> Such a system would confound good with bad behaviour, because both are alike from an external perspective:

True it is, that I did not act in defiance of the world’s opinion, from any depraved feelings, or vicious inclinations: but the world could not be expected to believe this, since motives are known only to our own hearts, and the great Searcher of hearts: therefore, as far as example goes, I was as great a stumbling block to others as if the life I led had been owing to the influence of lawless desires; and society was right in making, and in seeing, no distinction between me and any other woman living in an unsanctioned connection.<sup>97</sup>

Like the Duchess, Opie argues for a morality based on visible example rather than invisible inner promptings. From this perspective, there is no moral difference between Adeline’s principled stance and profligate hedonism, because the invisible intentions of the agent matter far less than the preservation of external propriety. Tellingly, whereas Adeline begins by adopting a Staëlian position, arguing that the prejudices of society are a scandalous barrier to authenticity, she ends by describing her own example as a ‘stumbling block’, a phrase etymologically synonymous with scandal. From the perspective of public morality, where appearances count for everything, she has become an obstruction in the smooth path of virtue, liable to trip others into sin.

Following *Delphine*, Edgeworth chose to present her novel in an epistolary form, despite the fact that the novel in letters was beginning to feel slightly old-fashioned by 1806.<sup>98</sup> However, while both Rousseau and Staël used first person narrative to present the tension between social conventions and the inner life and desires of the individual, Edgeworth uses letters in a very unRousseauvian fashion, to dramatize a debate between different theories of

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<sup>95</sup> Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*. Ed. Shelley King and John B Pierce. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 56.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>98</sup> See Marilyn Butler, ‘Introduction’ to *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth Volume 3: Leonora and Harrington*. *Op. cit.*, p. xxvi.



public opinion. While Bentham praised Edgeworth's novels as vehicles for moral teaching, the epistolarity of *Leonora* is utilitarian not because it teaches an unproblematically Benthamite creed, but because it is discursive. No one character presents an entirely convincing argument, and whilst bitter experience teaches Leonora's husband to modify his views, there is little convergence of opinion amongst the other characters towards the end of the novel. If the novel demonstrates conflict between different viewpoints, its plot is also driven by divergences of desire, which both mirror and test the abstract theories of scandal voiced by each character. The whole debate is ultimately resolvable only via a *deus ex machina*, which sees letters intended for one character re-routed so that they end up in the hands of another. If Edgeworth opposed the censorship of women's reading on the grounds that females should be exposed to different viewpoints and make up their own minds, then *Leonora* looks like a vehicle designed to begin this process with a debate on publicity itself.

To conclude, the debates about scandal in women's writing, discussed in the second half of this chapter, once again centre on the relationship between general and particular interests. For Edgeworth, the role played by the Rousseauvian salon hostess in Staël's novel encourages a corrupt and irrational political engagement, based on sexual allure and affect rather than reason. Rejecting the notion that such women smoothed over the contradictions between conflicting male perspectives, producing social consensus, Edgeworth argues that Staël's political thinking actually tends towards a scandalous particularism and a troubling moral relativism. Yet, at the same time, she recognizes the immediate appeal of Staëlian authenticity, depicting Olivia and even the hypocritical Gabrielle as siren-like figures, whose magnetic sensibility is far more attractive in its distinctive individuality than the quiet, totalizing reason of Leonora. Indeed, the sensibility heroine in this novel is so fascinating and charismatic that the only way in which the 'wronged wife' can triumph is patiently and passively to place her faith in the notion that the truth of her goodness and the correctness of her social morality will eventually emerge to be recognized by her erring and fallible husband.

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As such, the novel becomes an attack on way that the very quality of scandalous particularity which makes figures like Olivia socially dangerous is fetishized by male desire. Rather than attending to the general good, Mr L- is hopelessly fascinated by the individualistic allure of the salon hostess, leaving Leonora and her mother the sole guardians of reason, universal moral standards and the general good. The political machinations of Gabrielle make it clear that there is more at stake in Leonora's battle to act correctly than the outcome of her personal situation: the recognition of her superiority also brings about the exposure of the hypocrisy and the public ambition of her rival's French mentor. While Edgeworth deprecates the showy, public display of the *femme de salon*, she does so in order to criticize the way that pursuing a scandalous career inevitably serves personal interest. By avoiding such behaviour, the influence that is exerted by the virtuous, domestic wife actually extends over a far greater sphere, as she attends not only to her own welfare and that of her faction, but to the wellbeing of the whole of society.

PART TWO

## Chapter Three

### 'A Bumper of Sedition':

### Radicalism, Jacobinism And Gender Ambivalence

### In The Mary Ann Clarke Scandal

On January 26<sup>th</sup> 1809, Gwyllym Lloyd Wardle rose to his feet in the House of Commons, and openly accused the Duke of York and his mistress, Mary Ann Clarke of dishonest trafficking in army commissions. As Commander in Chief of the army, the Duke was responsible for overseeing promotions: when a commission was vacated, he had the power either to nominate a meretricious successor, or to sell the office, giving the proceeds to funds offering relief to the children of deceased officers. The official price of promotion was relatively high: a majority cost £2,600, a company £1,500, a lieutenancy £550 and an ensigncy £400.<sup>1</sup> Rumours that the system was corrupt had been circulating in the press for a few years before Wardle's speech in the House, and this gossip was intensified by the publication in 1808 of Major Denis Hogan's *An Appeal To The Public And A Farewell Address To The Army*, which complained that the system of promotion was unfair, while dropping broad hints about the Duke's tendency to allow the 'allurements of Venus' to 'interfere with the interests of Mars'.<sup>2</sup> In 1809, Wardle was more explicit, directly alleging that Mary Ann Clarke had used her influence with the Duke to offer a number of individuals promotion at a knockdown rate (£900 for a majority, £700 for a company, £400 for a lieutenancy and £200 for an ensigncy), pocketing the proceeds herself to fund an extravagant establishment in Gloucester Place.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he argued, Clarke's corruption had resulted in the advancement of individuals who were entirely unsuitable for military service, either because they had no intention of ever actually fighting, or because they came from a social class far below the rank that they were given.<sup>4</sup>

The challenge facing the radicals who sought to bring the scandal of the Duke's conduct to public attention was to find a model of publicity which would

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<sup>1</sup> According to Wardle himself. See T C Hansard *The Parliamentary Debates From The Year 1803 To The Present Time* (hereafter *Hansard*). London: T C Hansard and others, , Vol. 12, January 27 1809, Col. 185.

<sup>2</sup> See Denis Hogan *An Appeal To The Public And A Farewell Address To The Army*. London: J M Richardson, 1808, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Figures from *Hansard. Op. cit.*, Vol. 12, January 27 1809, Col. 185.

<sup>4</sup> This chapter assumes some familiarity with the main events of the scandal. For a full account see Paul Berry *By Royal Appointment: A Biography Of Mary Ann Clarke, Mistress Of The Duke Of York*. London: Femina Books, 1970. Also see Frank Kenyon *The Duke's Mistress: The Story Of Mary Ann Clarke*. London: Hutchinson, 1969.

enable them to relate the particulars of the affair to a wider campaign against Old Corruption, while distancing their arguments from the violent revolutionary fervour associated with Jacobinism.<sup>5</sup> Focusing mainly on the ‘polite’ side of radicalism, I shall explore the language which radicals used in the Clarke affair to frame their commitment to a type of publicity which shared many basic assumptions with Benthamite theory, though it was not always explicitly utilitarian.<sup>6</sup> As I suggested in the last chapter, Jeremy Bentham’s ‘conversion’ to political radicalism in 1809-10 coincided with a period in which he returned to two works that deal with publicity, the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* and *Political Tactics*. I argued that this apparent shift in his commitments was caused as much by the changing socio-political context of the late 1800s, which brought radicalism closer to Benthamite ideas about critical debate and publicity, as it was by a change in Bentham’s personal convictions. This chapter explores the circulation of arguments in favour of free critical debate in 1809, looking at the way in which radicals used rhetoric which stressed the gradual emergence of a true narrative of events and the need to hear all sides in order to construct a complete picture of political corruption.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> My reading of the affair certainly confirms the findings of Iain McCalman, J Ann Hone, John Cannon and Peter Spence, that the years between 1800 and 1816 were not a relative blank in terms of radical political activity, but witnessed a lively and energetic campaign for parliamentary reform, fought in the ‘legitimate’ spheres of parliament as well as in more ‘illegitimate’, underground arenas. See John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1972. J Ann Hone, *For The Cause Of Truth: Radicalism In London 1796-1821*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1982. Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries And Pornographers In London 1795-1840*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988 repr. 1988. Peter Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics And English Radical Reformism 1800-1815*. Scolar Press: Aldershot and Vermont, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> As Harvey argues, the radical resurgence in the late 1800s was shaped by the fact that, in the Westminster Election of 1807, radicals gained seats in Parliament. They wielded this influence in a way which indicated a ‘more modest notion... of what was possible’ than the 1790s radicals. See A D Harvey, *Britain In The Early Nineteenth Century*. London: B T Batsford, 1978, p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> For constitutional radicalism see J A W Gunn, ‘Influence, Parties and the Constitution: Changing Attitudes 1783-1832’, *The Historical Journal*. Vol. 17: No. 2, June 1974, pp. 301-328 and Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004, passim. Belchem points out that Rousseauvian language did persist into the new century, however. See James Belchem, ‘Republicanism, Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform in Early Nineteenth-Century England’, *Social History*. Vol. 6, 1981, pp. 1-32. For the persistence of Rousseauvian rhetoric see James Epstein, ‘Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth Century England’, *Past and Present*. Vol. 122, February 1989, pp. 75-118.

Once again, I pay particular attention to the way in which abstract political debates about publicity were problematized by gender concerns. In the case of the Mary Ann Clarke affair, the increasing strength of separate sphere ideology meant that figures on both sides of the question registered discomfort with the fact that the investigation into the Duke's behaviour seemed to jar with the notion that the domestic sphere should remain sacred from the intrusions of the public gaze. Yet, at the same time, the very nature of the allegations against the Duke seemed to suggest that no clear boundary could be drawn between the public and the private spheres. Not only did the intimate sexual contract between Clarke and the Duke become a matter of national concern, but Clarke's domestic economy, from the cost of her service of plate to the furnishing of her kitchen, became relevant to the enquiry. Then, on the public side of matters, the fact that the charges concerned the welfare of the army and emerged in wartime, raised the stakes: to what extent did the Duke's ostensibly private sexual immorality have international ramifications, impacting not only on the defence of Britain, but on the wider battle against Napoleon? As I shall argue in the second half of this chapter, these concerns were often played out at the level of gender politics. As a courtesan, neither a completely public prostitute, nor a completely private wife, Clarke seemed to exemplify the blurring of the boundaries of separate sphere ideology in the scandal, and political anxieties about the limits of publicity were often played out in terms of gender ambivalent representations of her behaviour, which cut across the lines of political factions. Thus, some of Clarke's antagonists, as well as her supporters, portrayed her as an ultra-feminine siren, and equally, figures on both sides of the debate argued that she was a disturbingly masculine woman, who had ridden roughshod over the conventions of 'proper' female behaviour. Similarly odd ambivalences can be seen in attitudes towards the Duke: some radicals argued that he was a red-blooded, virile male, while some of his supporters portrayed him as a weak, passive and feminized figure.

# I

## *Constitutional Radicals or Jacobins in Disguise?*

### *Critical Debate versus Jacobin transparency*

Since the time of Madame DU BARRY, who was instrumental in giving a climax to the corruptions that afterwards brought her country to misery and herself to the scaffold, no Courtezan has so identified herself with the influence of the times as the Duke of YORK'S Mistress. The conversation respecting her and her paramour has superseded not only the talk of foreign politics, but almost every other talk, small talk as well as great; you cannot go into a company, you cannot meet a friend, or acquaintance, or stumble upon a conversation of any kind, but the first question is, "Well, what do you think of Mrs. CLARKE – what of the DUKE- or what of the last evidence?" Persons of the most scrupulous nicety in appellations are sometimes so absorbed with their reflections on the subject, that with no very flattering forgetfulness they address ladies in company by their wrong names; Mrs CLARKE ushers in the first mouthful of meals and waits upon the last; the weather is no longer the presiding genius of English sympathies; Mrs. CLARKE, like MILTON'S Chaotic Deity, has subdued those four great champions, hot, cold, moist, and dry'.<sup>8</sup>

As *The Examiner* noted, in a piece which stresses the levelling effect of scandal on British conversation, the Clarke affair engrossed public attention for the first few months of the year 1809. Not only did talk of the scandal supersede both the 'small' and 'great' subjects of usual conversation, it was itself at one and the same time a matter of light gossip and weighty politics, of hot news, which also required cool calculation. Apparently private, trivial sexual affairs had suddenly become fundamental to the burning issues of both national politics and foreign policy. Implicit in *The Examiner's* argument is the sense that behind this discursive levelling lurked a potentially democratic social force. Not only is everyone, irrespective of class, discussing the same theme, coupling the names of a royal Duke and a courtesan together as familiar characters for obsessive discussion, but the social conventions which uphold rank are collapsing under the pressure of the interest provoked by the scandal, as people cease to be precise about names and titles.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Charges Against The Duke Of York', *The Examiner*. No. 60, Sunday Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> 1809, p. 113.



Similarly, the fact that even that most well-weathered English topic of conversation, the climate, is superseded in favour of talking scandal is given a distinctly political resonance through the allusion to Milton. In the second book of *Paradise Lost*, Sin opens the gates of hell, allowing Satan to pass through into the world of men. However, between hell and Earth is a gulf of chaos, where:

Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, four champions fierce  
Strive here for mastery, and to battle bring  
Their embryon atoms; they around the flag  
Of each his faction, in their several clans  
Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or slow,  
Swarm populous.<sup>9</sup>

This confused region, a realm of faction and ‘endless wars’, provides the writer with a usefully topical, if rather melodramatic, analogue to British politics in the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Not only was Britain embroiled in the struggle for mastery that was the Napoleonic wars, but, as J A W Gunn has argued, the strengthening of the party system during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sparked debates on the role played by opposing factions in domestic politics also.<sup>11</sup> When, after successive Tory administrations, the Whigs came to power with the ‘Ministry of All the Talents’, and then failed to make any real impression, it seemed to many that both of the main political parties were equally venal, equally self-interested, and equally careless of the real interests of the country.<sup>12</sup> As Peter Spence has argued, by the late 1800s radicals were able to exploit widespread concerns that the English political sphere was itself the site of chaotic factional struggle.<sup>13</sup> By casting Clarke as the ‘Chaotic Deity’, subduing the contending parties around her (here imagined as the elements of the weather) and focusing the entire attention of the

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<sup>9</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*. Ed. A Fowler. Longman: London and New York, 1968 repr. 1971, Book 2, Lines 898-903, pp. 131-2. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 2, Line 897, p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> See J A W Gunn, ‘Influence, Parties, and the Constitution: Changing Attitudes, 1783-1832’. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 17: No 2, June 1974, pp. 301-328.

<sup>12</sup> See A D Harvey, *Britain In The Early Nineteenth Century*. *Op. cit.* pp. 225-30. Also see James Vernon, *Politics And The People: A Study In English Political Culture c. 1815-1867*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Spence, *The Birth Of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics, And English Radical Reformism, 1800-1815*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996, *passim*. However, in my view, Spence’s reading overemphasizes the inevitability of this surge of support for radicalism,

nation on a single moral issue, *The Examiner* argues that the scandal is not a trivial matter, but an event which is capable of including every individual in an important nationwide debate:

instead of lamenting all this as an infringement on weightier matters, I do think that no matter can be weightier, as it concerns the solidity of our establishments, and involves a most *vital, though easy question of right and wrong*, of which every body can and ought to judge.<sup>14</sup>

By focusing on the moral dimension of the issue, rather than its political aspect, Hunt is able to insist on the right of even the disenfranchised to voice their opinions on the moral conduct of the great. Furthermore, by suggesting that the ethical question at issue is actually 'easy' to answer, he argues that the outcome of the Clarke affair should be the emergence of public consensus, which replaces the corrupt and factious debates of politics with a kind of Rousseauvian 'general will' based in the instinctive moral sympathies of the people.

Yet Hunt's faith that the Clarke affair will produce a discursive obsession that will ultimately result in the triumph of moral unity is undermined by the fact that he appears to have misread, or misremembered the original quotation from *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's poem, the Chaotic Deity is not the bringer of order, but an umpire whose decision 'more embroils the fray/ By which he reigns'; rather than replacing factious discord with a discursive and moral consensus, this figure actually inflames violent disagreement and controversy.<sup>15</sup> Underlying the passage's optimistic advocacy of a Rousseauvian model of public opinion is the fear that the dream of social consensus is an illusion; that the actual result of the scandal will be a cacophony of dissenting voices which will only increase divisions in the political sphere. As this might suggest, Hunt could be very suspicious of Benthamite optimism about the ability of critical debate to produce truth. Just as he advised the public to consult their

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ignoring the active role that many radicals played in constructing the impression that their party was the only viable alternative to the factious Whigs and Tories.

<sup>14</sup> 'Charges Against The Duke Of York'. *The Examiner. Op. cit.*, p. 113. Italics in original.

<sup>15</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost. Op. cit.*, Book 2, Lines 908-10, p. 132. See R Schwartz 'Milton's Hostile Chaos: "... And the Sea Was No More", *ELH*. Vol. 52: No. 2, Summer 1985, pp. 337-374. Also M D Northrup 'Milton's Hesiodic Cosmology', *Comparative Literature*. Vol. 33: No. 4, Autumn 1981, pp. 305-320.

moral intuitions rather than the outcome of the official investigation when judging the Clarke affair, he warned them against trusting the machinery of the national press for the emergence of truth, advising them instead to consult their own experience and inner feelings:

Let them compare what they themselves hear and see everywhere with what they read in the papers, and then they may discover the truth. Let them mingle with all parties and companies, and then hear what is said by independent men of good sense and good behaviour, who are certainly the most candid judges of a question like the present, having neither folly nor immorality to defend on their own parts. Depend upon it, these men have but one opinion and therefore will give but one answer on the subject.

Truth here emerges not through the competitive clash between different viewpoints, but from simply mixing with disinterested observers from all ranks of society. Though, at other times, *The Examiner* expresses more faith in factional discussion, it never completely divests itself of this suspicion that reliance on a process of free debate poses a threat to independent political rectitude.<sup>16</sup>

However, most of the parliamentary radicals were disinclined to fight their battle against corruption on the moral terrain upon which Hunt grounded his campaign. Instead, they preferred to foreground their belief in the logic of investigation in overtly Benthamite rhetoric, though muting the ultra-rational basis of the utilitarian's insistence on critical debate by situating free discussion in a well-established tradition of British constitutional thought.<sup>17</sup> This enabled them to signal their distance from Rousseauvianism on two grounds: not only were they arguing that truth emerged through discursive competition between clashing viewpoints, but they were situating themselves within a national tradition of parliamentary discussion, arguing that they were the upholders of a distinctly British convention which they imagined extending back through 1688

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<sup>16</sup> A similar point is made by Philip Harling 'Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* And The Language Of Patriotism', *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 111: No. 44, Nov. 1996, pp. 1159-1181.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny, in the face of the compelling evidence presented by J Ann Hone and Iain McCalman, that there was a considerable degree of overlap between radicals active in the Clarke affair, and late 1790s Jacobins arguing a 'natural rights' case. See J Ann Hone, *For The Cause Of Truth*. *Op. cit., passim.* and Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld*. *Op. cit., passim.*

to the signing of the Magna Charta.<sup>18</sup> At times, this rhetorical shift away from a Rousseauvian idiom was a highly self-conscious strategy: at a reform dinner held on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1809, in celebration of the Clarke affair, Wardle pointed to the fact that Lord Cochrane had been described as a Jacobin to argue that the inappropriacy of the comparison between the naval hero and the revolutionary *sans-culottes* should lead to a rehabilitation of the term: ‘If, then, such men as him and you, Gentlemen, are denominated Jacobins, proud am I to have my name inserted in the list’.<sup>19</sup> By pointing to the imprecision with which the slur of Jacobinism was used, Wardle was able to use such attacks to distinguish his campaign against the Duke from revolutionary thought – a point which he pushed home in his subsequent toast: ‘May the real Jacobinical Conspirators be deprived of the power of undermining the Constitution’.<sup>20</sup>

Casting Jacobinism as a utopian movement, which paid no heed to custom and convention, the parliamentary radicals dissociated themselves from the French revolutionaries by arguing that their demands demonstrated the utmost respect for British traditions. Instead of seeking to overturn the status quo, they argued that they were actually trying to restore ‘true’ English liberties which had been eroded over time. Instead of revolution, they sought restitution. Hence Madocks advised his fellow radicals to counter accusations of Jacobinism with robustly patriotic rhetoric:

Gentlemen, if any of our enemies should call us *Jacobins*, and tell us, as they will, no doubt, that we want a *Revolution* in this country – throw back upon them this answer- “No, we want not a *Revolution*, we want a *restoration* – a *restoration* of the true principles of the Constitution, as intended by our ancestors, and handed down to us as our undoubted birth-right.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The standard work on radically inflected patriotic rhetoric is Linda Colley *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992. For a discussion of the Clarke affair which builds on the work of Colley, see Philip Harling, ‘The Duke Of York Affair (1809) And The Complexities Of War-time Patriotism’, *The Historical Journal*. Vol. 39: No. 4, Dec. 1996, pp. 963-984.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Anonymous, *Parliamentary Reform. A Full And Accurate Report Of The Proceedings At The Meeting Held At The Crown And Anchor Tavern On Monday The 1<sup>st</sup> Of May 1809 Relative To Reform In The Commons House Of Parliament*. London: Geo Mcardell, 1809, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Revolution and restoration here are two entirely separate phenomena, backed by completely different types of rationale. The latter looks backward to an idealized precedent, the former sweeps precedent away in favour of a new order. *The Examiner's* approach to the same situation was quite different:

Revolve these matters well in your mind, and when the Courtiers accuse you of Jacobinism and conspiracy, and tell you that revolution always hinders reform, answer, that virtue is the only cause of good upon earth, that you love your family and your good fame, and that if revolution always hinders reform, timely reform always hinders revolution.<sup>22</sup>

For the newspaper, reform and revolution are different means of achieving the same inevitable end. By this logic, if reform is smothered, the chances of revolution will increase, if it is promoted, the necessity for violent insurrection will vanish. Indeed, throughout early 1809, *The Examiner* repeatedly endeavours to destroy the sense of distance which the parliamentary radicals were so eager to maintain between restitution and revolution, instead insisting that the French Revolution was a kind of Clarke affair, produced by 'the corruption of those intrusted [sic] with public offices and by private vice, and not by philosophical theories'.<sup>23</sup> Hence the provocative comparison, in the extract cited at the beginning of this section, of Mary Ann Clarke and Madame du Barry, the mistress of Louis XV, who was guillotined during the Revolution.

### *The Logic of Investigation in Parliamentary Debate*

For the parliamentary radicals, only a thorough investigation into the Duke's conduct, which would establish a clear narrative of his behaviour, could get to the truth of the allegations. One of the most striking features of the early debates on the Clarke affair is the inability of the Duke's supporters to counter this argument.<sup>24</sup> Part of their problem was that the radicals, whose power in

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>22</sup> 'Charges against the Duke of York', *The Examiner. Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> 'Thursday March 9<sup>th</sup>', *The Examiner*. No. 63, Sunday March 12<sup>th</sup> 1809, p. 169.

<sup>24</sup> Among the handful of historians who have dealt with the Clarke affair, some have expressed bewilderment over the apparent willingness of opponents of the radicals to allow the investigation to proceed. See, for example, Roger Fulford, *Royal Dukes: The Fathers And Uncles Of Queen Victoria*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co, 1933 repr. 1949. A D Harvey

parliament had been increased by recent elections, were able to draw on a sense that parliamentary enquiry, even more than free discussion in the press, was a time-honoured constitutional tradition which only a despot with a concealed interest in maintaining a perverted or incomplete narrative of events would endeavour to abridge. Thus, while opponents of the radicals might fulminate that Wardle and company were Jacobins trying to destroy the constitution, they could not actually resist the demands for an enquiry very forcibly without appearing to involve themselves in an equally disturbing attack on British traditions. In this way, the Mary Ann Clarke scandal not only provided an occasion for airing opinions about publicity, but was also to some degree produced by the fact that investigating corruption was one of the main roles of parliament.

Thus, when the investigation opened on January 27th, many M.P.s referred to the fact that rumours had been circulating on the subject for some time. Most of the Duke's own partisans gave statements confirming their faith in the ability of the Commons to elicit the truth in the matter, opposing the openness of its investigative procedures to the unverifiable and anonymous nature of newspaper innuendo. For example, Sir Arthur Wellesley

rejoiced that the hon. gent. had at length brought forward facts, to which a specific inquiry might be directed; and he rejoiced also, that the character of the Commander in Chief would not be the subject of that general sort of discussion, which sometimes took place in that house; but that every fact would be fully and fairly sifted.<sup>25</sup>

The Secretary at War, also arguing on the royal side, expressed 'unfeigned satisfaction, that, at length, an opportunity was afforded of instituting an effectual inquiry into the grounds of the various calumnies and misrepresentations which had of late been so industriously circulated against that illustrious personage'.<sup>26</sup> And Spencer Percival noted the 'unanimous

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argues that ministerial incompetence did not have more serious effects only because the opposition 'failed to profit' by capitalizing on the affair. See Harvey, *Britain In The Early Nineteenth Century. Op. cit.* p. 243.

<sup>25</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 188.

<sup>26</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 187.

feeling of the house, that to the most solemn and serious accusation brought forward that night, the most solemn and serious inquiry ought to be afforded'.<sup>27</sup>

However, maintaining a sense of the distinction between the methods of the scandalmongers and the procedures of parliamentary investigation proved difficult, not least because the publicity afforded by the fourth estate was an important element in constitutionalist arguments. However, while all parties apparently felt obliged to acknowledge the need for investigation in their rhetoric, they actually disagreed strongly about the practical role that publicity would play in the enquiry, offering very different solutions to the problem of keeping the public informed of the substance of debates, without generating socially and morally 'unwholesome' kinds of exposure. Firstly, there were those who advocated full parliamentary investigation and yet expressed doubts as to the moral effects that would be produced by its representation in the press. Castlereagh, for example, argued that the Duke was courting an open enquiry, expressing his pride in the spectacle of 'a personage the most exalted in rank of any subject in the realm (except one), desiring the same publicity in his examination of the charges against him, as would take place in the case of the lowest and meanest subject'.<sup>28</sup> But at the same time as he demanded a full investigation, he expressed concerns about the extraparliamentary circulation of scandal, arguing that current libel laws were too lax to allow the prosecution of offenders, and alleging that the free press was a tool which aided revolutionary feeling: 'It was evident, that the same party, who, in times past, endeavoured to subvert all the establishments of the country by force of arms, was now endeavouring to undermine them by calumniating whatever is exalted in rank, or distinguished in station'.<sup>29</sup> Canning, too, argued for the case to be heard in public, but was disturbed by the 'unbridled licentiousness' of the press. Notoriously, he both praised Wardle's 'public spirit' in bringing charges, and hinted darkly that 'whether they be refuted or substantiated, infamy must attach somewhere – either upon the accused or the accuser'.<sup>30</sup> This remark became infamous in the course of the trial, as the radicals in particular never ceased

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<sup>27</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 196.

<sup>28</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 201-2.

<sup>29</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 202.

reminding the House and the public of what they saw as an unconstitutional attempt to restrict the freedom of M.P.s to raise whichever issues for discussion they felt to be appropriate. Immediately after Canning had spoken, Whitbread rose to condemn his utterance, arguing that it was supported by neither the 'spirit or usage of the constitution'.<sup>31</sup>

Secondly, there were a number of figures who paid lipservice to the importance of critical debate, and then endeavoured to restrict the enquiry, arguing that it should not involve the whole house, but a small number of M.P.s operating in a closed forum. Wilberforce, who was active in the Society for the Suppression of Vice, fell into this group. He argued that the affair ought to be dealt with by a parliamentary commission, because 'party spirit' would inevitably make it impossible that truth would emerge should the whole House be involved: 'By the appointment of a Commission the witnesses would be examined upon oath; all party bias and personal altercation would be prevented, and, of course, a weight and confidence would be attached to the decision of those delegated'. He then moved on to stress the dangerous nature of the publicity which the affair could generate. Reiterating the international context of the debate, Wilberforce argued that intense surveillance of the workings of British government transformed the dignity of the Commons into a matter of pan-European significance: 'in the present unexampled and critical state of the civilized world, all Europe looked with a vigilant and anxious attention to the deliberations of the British House of Commons'. The unseemliness of an investigation which threatened to expose a wealth of salacious detail could weaken one of the sole institutions standing firm against the fury of Napoleon's onslaughts. If this were not bad enough, titillating evidence could also seriously endanger the public morality of the British, which Wilberforce and the SSV had worked hard to safeguard. Placing the affair before a Commission would mean that the evidence could be vetted for public consumption, avoiding the problems of allowing everyone to hear everything: 'It would afford the best

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<sup>30</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 199.

<sup>31</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 201.



species of communication, namely, publicity at the end, but not in the progress of the investigation'.<sup>32</sup>

Mr Yorke also argued for the charges to be heard before a Commission, but for a very different set of reasons. Like other supporters of the Duke, he punctuated his speech with declarations of satisfaction that the accusations were presented in a 'tangible shape', praising the free press as a 'palladium of liberty'.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the rest of his speech evidenced a deep discomfort with the notion of critical debate and scandalous exposure. He railed against the circulation of libellous publications against the Duke, making it clear that, in his opinion, the 'licentiousness' of such publications should not be tolerated.<sup>34</sup> Then, far from regarding the investigation as a signal indicator of a healthy political system, he warned that the charges were actually evidence of

a Conspiracy of the most atrocious and diabolical kind against his royal highness... founded on the Jacobinical spirit which appeared at the commencement of the French revolution; for though this spirit did not shew itself exactly in the same form as at first, when once raised it was not easily quelled, and it never could promote its view with better hopes of success than by talking down illustrious persons- (hear! hear!) It was the object to write down his royal highness – it was no less so to write down all the establishments of the country.<sup>35</sup>

By describing the investigation as a personally motivated attack on the Duke, which, by extension, was an onslaught upon the monarchy and the status quo, Yorke suggests that it is necessary to look beyond radical arguments that a complete narrative of current events had to be constructed, to deeper chains of causation which constitute a revolutionary 'plot'. While pretending to place his faith in exposure, peeling back layers of concealment to expose vice and corruption, for Yorke, Wardle was actually using the scandal as an obstacle to conceal his true Jacobinical intentions.

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<sup>32</sup> All quotations from *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 195.

<sup>33</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 12, January 27 1809, col. 190.

<sup>34</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 12, January 27 1809, col. 191.

<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 12, January 27 1809, col. 190.

Yet, although his speech apparently received vocal support in the House, Yorke's argument foundered. In the first place, he himself was forced to acknowledge that this new Jacobin spirit certainly took a very different shape to old Jacobinism. The logic of reform, with its emphasis on discussion, simply didn't invite comparisons with Rousseauvianism, which tended to regard factional disputation as a source of corruption. Then, his allegation that the charges against the Duke were the sign of a secret conspiracy was inconsistent with his own emphasis on the importance of critical debate at the start of his speech. Like Wilberforce, Yorke's position involved an irreconcilable contradiction, pressing for publicity and suppression at the same time. As Cartwright pointed out in *Reasons for Reformation* (1809), arguments that reform was Jacobinism in disguise looked suspiciously like a despotic attempt to curb British liberties and inhibit free discussion. In his view, rather than Wardle's actions masking a Jacobin conspiracy against the status quo, the arguments of the Duke's supporters concealed an unconstitutional unwillingness to allow the parliamentary investigation to proceed: 'Here we cannot but call to mind a late infamous but abortive attempt at reviving the senseless yell of *Jacobin*, and the impudent imputation of *conspiracy* and *treason*, for silencing Mr Wardle, and discrediting his witnesses'.<sup>36</sup>

However, the notion that the charges against the Duke concealed a Jacobin conspiracy was based on more than the fact that both French revolutionaries and English reformers used sex scandal as a powerful tool against prominent aristocratic figures. The latter group used the scandal to draw attention to the wider incidence of dishonesty in the political system and to argue for reform of the franchise. They argued that the Clarke scandal was a kind of metonym for a wider range of current abuses, drawing parallels between the interested behaviour of the Duke, who put the desires of his mistress above the welfare of the country, and the interested behaviour of M.P.s, who pursued their desire for place to the detriment of the national interest. For example, Cartwright's pamphlet, *The Comparison*, published in 1810, draws on concerns

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<sup>36</sup> John Cartwright, *Reasons For Reformation*. London: Bone And Hone, 1809, p. 20. For more on Cartwright see John W Osborne, *John Cartwright*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

about faction to argue that radicalism provided a more public spirited alternative to the corrupt world of conventional politics:

Long enough, my countrymen, had you been the dupes of factions contending for power. In ceasing to be dupes you are in a right state of mind for saving your country from ever again being put in that situation, between *Whigs* and *Tories*, which an honest historian calls being crucified between two thieves.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas the two main parties had an interest in keeping the whole narrative of corruption hidden, the radicals posited themselves as the party of the people, with no concealed motive for perverting the truth. Thus, in *On the Revival of the Cause of Reform* (1809), Capel Lofft praised his fellow radicals for addressing their audience in ‘language free from all party; in the language which best becomes *Englishmen*, and lovers of the *Constitution*: clear, simple, energetic; forcible in Argument; pure, elevated, disinterested in Sentiment’.<sup>38</sup> Linguistic transparency is identified not with Rousseauvianism but with a truly British type of independence from particular interests which is capable of grasping political truths, while factionalism is presumably associated with winding, opaque language, designed to obscure the narrative of affairs.

The wartime context of the scandal lent a distinctly patriotic resonance to Cartwright’s arguments against faction. In his view, an unreformed country was a weak country, liable to yield to the ‘yoke of the Corsican’ for want of ‘a common interest between the people and the government’.<sup>39</sup> But, still more worryingly, a corrupt nation was also vulnerable from without. Exploiting concerns that the Clarke scandal had raised about the ability of the army to defend a country at war, Cartwright argued that a system governed by particular interests was also liable to allow foreign influence to undermine British interests from within, as corruption might allow Napoleon a foothold in the British parliament. Because boroughs were in the control not of the people, but of individuals, a foreign state could buy them, making it easy for an enemy to

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<sup>37</sup> John Cartwright, *The Comparison In Which Mock Reform, Half Reform And Constitutional Reform Are Considered*. London: Joseph Johnson and Co, 1810, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Capel Lofft, *On The Revival Of The Cause Of Reform In The Representation Of The Commons In Parliament*. London: Richard Taylor and Co, 1809, p. 3

‘procure a party of men to act for it under the mask and character of members of this house’.<sup>40</sup> The only way of avoiding either unintentional or deliberate treachery to the interests of the nation was to make the system of representation more transparent. However, while the case for reform was self-evident, it was only through critical debate on the issue of the franchise that this truth could emerge: ‘Then give us DISCUSSION!... Free and wide DISCUSSION to awaken the nation; that it may examine the pretensions of *the Borough Faction*’.<sup>41</sup> Fears that such a reform would denature the British constitution are silenced by the fact that the grounds given for extending parliamentary debate are unambiguously patriotic.

However, while in some instances the relationship between the Clarke scandal stood, metonymically, for Old Corruption, in others the relationship between public outrage and the unreformed parliamentary system was rather more straightforwardly practical. Throughout the first six months of 1809, radicals repeatedly criticized the system which governed the final method of voting on the scandal. On a number of occasions, figures were quoted from a petition of 1793, in which it was calculated that ‘154 individuals did, by their own authority, appoint or procure the return of 307 members of that House, (exclusive of those from Scotland) who were thus enabled to decide all questions in the name of the whole People of Great Britain’.<sup>42</sup> Using logic that is highly reminiscent of Benthamite arguments about the incorruptibility of an entire people, radicals argued that only extending the franchise until the number of voters was so great that bribery was impossible could control the abuse of personal interests. As Lofft put it:

were there a *free, equal and full Representation in Parliament* once obtain’d, I should have little fear of Men holding necessary, and high, and honorable Offices under Government sitting and voting in Parliament. The *Ministers of the Crown* would be then *Ministers of the People* also.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cartwright, *Reasons for Reformation*. *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> Speech by Cartwright, quoted in Anonymous, *Parliamentary Reform*. *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

A result in the Duke's favour would signal the triumph of interest over truth, which would only go to prove the necessity for reform. Arguments about free discussion had acquired a new, democratic ring: if veracity emerged from the struggle between different ideological perspectives, then the more viewpoints that were included, the more likely it was that the true narrative would emerge. Suddenly, arguments about the constitutional right to freedom of discussion threatened to include a much larger group of people than were currently enfranchised under the political system, making it more difficult to distinguish between calls for debate and calls for a more representative democratic system.

Lofft's pamphlet repeatedly describes the battle against corruption in rhetoric of exposure and revelation, creating linguistic connections between political enlightenment and a more representative system, both of which were set against the darkness and opacity of Old Corruption. He argued that it was not enough to attend only to the 'glaring and offensive' manifestations of influence, but that its most secret workings had to be rooted out and destroyed by a thorough, cleansing reform of parliament:

Ministers will take care that you shall not *see* this as a commerce between Officers and Dignitaries, ecclesiastical and civil, and the *Lais* of the Hour. But will any thing short of an effectual *parliamentary reform* secure to you that this commerce shall not *be* again...or that when they do operate you shall have a miracle of Indiscretion again to bring them to light; another Prodigy to maintain and pursue the Investigation calmly, disinterestedly, and intrepidly, under every discouragement; another of Zeal to urge the Enquiry in the vain hope of discrediting the Enquirer; and another of voluntary Acquiescence in the Public Sentiment, to perform for the People that which the House of Commons did not perform?<sup>44</sup>

The scandal should have been uncovered by the natural workings of parliament, but was in fact the result of the sheer personal persistence of a few radicals. Lofft repeatedly speaks of the exposure in terms of a quasi-divine revelation, describing it as a 'miracle', 'a flash from Heaven', a 'kind of Adumbration of the final Day of Judgment when the secrets of all Hearts shall be reveal'd', emphasizing its nature as a rare moment of enlightenment provided by a God

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<sup>43</sup> Lofft, *On The Revival Of The Cause Of Reform. Op. cit.*, p. 5.

who rarely intervened in human affairs.<sup>45</sup> However, his providential rhetoric aimed at ensuring that such divine omniscience was unnecessary. Reform would ensure that the system was transparent, allowing the people to look after their own interests, so that there would no longer be any dark corners in which corruption could lurk.

*The Loyalist Reaction: Scandal, The Press and the Mass Audience*

Where the radical cause did encounter serious opposition was amongst those loyalist writers who were bold enough to challenge the logic of investigation openly. However, their arguments against critical debate were usually framed not as onslaughts on the procedure of parliamentary investigation, but as attacks on free discussion in the press in the form of calls for a stricter enforcement of libel laws. By fighting against radicalism in this manner, loyalists could attack the logic of investigation without appearing to run directly against the spirit of a constitution that encouraged free parliamentary debate. Yet even though they restricted their arguments to the issue of press freedom, many were clearly still anxious that their opinions would be seen to favour despotism. The anonymous writer behind *A Brief Appeal To The Royal Heir Of The Throne* (1809) disclaims any intention of restricting the liberty of the press: 'Far be it from me to insinuate, that in such a free and fortunate country as Britain, it would be advisable to curb the pens and opinions of public writers'.<sup>46</sup> Yet he goes on to argue that newspapers require regulation, to safeguard the middle classes 'who are always most oppressed by, and most severely feel the necessary burthens of the STATE' from 'the Satanic falsehoods of the wretches who would delight in a Revolution'.<sup>47</sup> Like the parliamentary radicals, many loyalist pamphleteers in

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Anonymous ('A Commoner'), *A Brief Appeal To The Royal Heir Of The Throne, The Hereditary Noblemen, The Heads Of The Church, The Judges, The Opulent Landholders And The Members Of Parliament Of The British Empire: Occasioned By The Present Alarming Licentiousness Of The Press...* London: B McMillan, 1809, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. The anonymous author of an 1807 pamphlet, published before the Clarke affair, but referring to calumnies against the Duke of York, writes in a similar vein, arguing that 'False and scandalous libels have ever been held highly criminal by the laws of all ancient and modern nations'. But given that the author offers no means of determining with any degree of objectivity the truth or falsity of a given statement, and given the concomitant emphasis throughout the pamphlet on the suppression of 'licentiousness', in practical terms, this

1809 clearly felt that they could not afford to be identified with suppression of debate. Indeed, *Thoughts on Libels* (1809) attributed to Sir James W Gordon and dated just days before Wardle's motion was discussed in the Commons, refers directly to the rumours circulating in the press about the Duke of York's conduct as an incidence of the need to curb the false narratives of the press by opposing them to alternative narratives which would emerge in a libel trial: 'The Trials, no doubt, will be printed *verbatim*;- and on these Trials, attentively listen'd to in the Court, or deliberately read by their fire sides, Englishmen will establish their opinions.'<sup>48</sup> Gordon's aim was:

that Sedition (however it may evade our laws) may be "discover'd and surpris'd by the test of Truth,- as Satan was touch'd by the spear of Ithuriel – it is to drive the Libeller from his post, where he has been too long sitting, "squat like a Toad, at the ear of" – the Publick.<sup>49</sup>

The official machinery of the law would reveal the truth of the matter, preventing the public from being seduced by the satanically false narratives created by the press. Whereas *The Examiner* used a Miltonic comparison between Clarke and the 'Chaotic Deity' to insist that public discussion of the scandal's moral dimensions would produce something akin to a general will on the subject, Gordon uses Milton to liken the press to Satan and the public to Eve, feminising newspaper readers and suggesting that they were being seduced into a Fall by the dangerous whisperings of interested parties.<sup>50</sup>

Comparisons between the English press in 1809 and the French press of the early 1790s provided a stronger line of argument, allowing loyalists to tap into the same patriotic rhetoric that Cartwright had used in arguing for reform. The argument of *A Brief Appeal* is an inversion of Cartwright's in *The Comparison*: in this text, it is not the unreformed House of Commons, but the

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concession was of little value. See Anonymous, *The Bonne-Bouche Of Epicurean Rascality; Dedicated To The Worst Man In His Majesty's Dominions: Containing More Ample Elucidations Of The Conduct Of His Royal Highness The Duke Of York As Commander In Chief*. London: C Chapple, 1807, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous, ('A Patriotick Loyalist', attr. Sir James Gordon), *Thoughts On Libels; And An Impartial Inquiry Into The Present State Of The British Army: With A Few Words, In Answer To Cobbett's Critique On The Book Before It Was Published*. London: T Egerton, 1809, p. 39.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> For the allusion see Milton, *Paradise Lost*. *Op. cit.*, Book 4: Line 800, p. 243.

English press that is open to abuse by foreign interests. Radical papers, the writer maintained, were supported by foreign cash, ‘set in motion by engines of gold – yes, by *foreign gold*, employed through the medium of English Traitors’.<sup>51</sup> *Thoughts on Libels* is not behind in using patriotic xenophobia against the press either, likening the newspaper press of 1809 to that of revolutionary France to argue that its unbridled status was a suspiciously foreign perversion of a good British tradition of free debate. Whereas the Gallic tree of liberty as a weak sapling, watered with the blood of the Revolution’s victims, and then lopped down by Napoleon, the true British tree of liberty was

as indigenous to England as the Oak of our Druids. At periods, no doubt, it was sadly nipp’d and shatter’d, by the blights and hurricanes, incidental to the Isle: but it has survived; and, since the close of the seventeenth century, it has flourish’d with additional grace, and vigour. Pity! that Sedition, like a slow snail, should still crawl over the bark, and trace its slime upon the beauty of the foliage.<sup>52</sup>

This organic metaphor is powerful, not least because it reclaims the language of constitutionalism (including a reference to the watershed of 1688) for a loyalist agenda. The change sought by the radicals represented neither a return to an earlier and purer state of political affairs, nor an extension of older constitutional principles which would improve the system, but the intrusion of a slimy, foreign body into good old British traditions. Implicit in both of these statements is a sense that the British constitutional tradition of free debate was being twisted to a distinctly un-British, un-constitutional use as the tool of reform. Whereas the radicals argued that the corruption of the Commons was a threat to the constitution because it excluded the real interests of the people, for these authors, the fourth estate is constitutionally dangerous, because it tips the balance of authority too much towards the people. As Gordon states: ‘God forbid! that, in this our happily blended Government, the influence of the King and the Lords should be able to enervate the establish’d vigour of the People!

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<sup>51</sup> ‘A Commoner’, *A Brief Appeal To The Royal Heir Of The Throne*. *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Gordon, *Thoughts On Libels*. *Op. cit.*, p. 8. A similar point is made by the author of *A Brief Appeal* who also states as his reason for opposing press liberty the notion that the free press acted as the ‘secret agent of the most horrible Revolution in France – that Revolution which has deluged the earth with blood – which made the Arc of Heaven so long reverberate the lamentations of widows and orphans!’. *Op. cit.* p. 6.



but may Providence also prohibit the potency of the People from withering the energies of the Throne, and the Nobility'.<sup>53</sup>

Another way of squaring the relationship between the tradition of critical debate and an argument for stronger libel laws, was to conflate 'the People' and 'the Mob', to argue that popular consent was not truth, but a type of mass delusion. The author of *The Bonne Bouche of Epicurean Rascality* (1807) stated 'the cause which enrages and gives such dangerous violence to the tide of public clamour, does not originate in any distinction between truth and falsehood; of this verity history is too pregnant with the most striking instances.'<sup>54</sup> For Gordon, such popular delusions were produced and fostered by the press; in his eyes, the production of scandal was the flipside of the radical coin of free discussion:

In other words, the State (either from a too dignified contempt of innumerable low libellers, or from a policy in leaving them untouch'd till there is a *certainty of proving* guilt,) has permitted the Press to run riot:- By which forbearance, readers are, now, so habituated to its unrestrain'd, and increased licence, that publick sentiment has insensibly changed, in respect to the line of boundary to which the privilege of printing animadversions upon publick character and conduct is subject.<sup>55</sup>

Yet Gordon's pamphlet is unsure whether to blame the press itself, or the appetites of its readers, for this increase in scandalous publications. Above, he suggests that newspapers themselves are to blame, having 'habituated' readers to an increasing deluge of scandal from the press. However, at other times he suggests that the readers themselves have driven the process:

Readers (once good sober souls) have been *seduced* by the Press. It, first, enticed them to sip private scandal like negus; it, then, led them on to indulge in strong defamation, like a glass of wine too much every day,- and then another; and now, readers have become confirm'd soakers and swallow *Sedition*, as a matter of course, like a bumper of brandy.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Gordon, *Thoughts on Libels*. *Op. cit.* p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous, *The Bonne Bouche of Epicurean Rascality*. *Op. cit.* p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Gordon, *Thoughts on Libels*. *Op. cit.* p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

For Gordon, scandal is potentially addictive: the reader who begins with titillating scandal about individuals, would inevitably develop a taste for harder types of sedition. However, this does not prevent him from fighting fire with fire: the end of his pamphlet presents the reader with an annotated list of the most influential radical pamphleteers, complete with scurrilous personal attacks on each of them. However, to avoid directly libelling these figures, Gordon does not name them directly, instead building on his earlier Miltonic allusion to represent radical pamphleteers in terms of the ‘fiends’ which populate the hell of *Paradise Lost*. The chief of Gordon’s ‘Pandemonium’ is Cobbett:

The *Writer of a Register*.- The principles of this *Satan*- this Leader of an “ARMY OF FIENDS- *fit body to fit head!*” have been render’d so palpable (not only by those who have dissected them, but even by himself) that to prove them now is like the useless labour of proving a self-evident axiom<sup>57</sup>

The real problem that the press presents for Gordon is not that scandal makes every common individual a judge of illustrious character. Rather, it is that the press encourages readers, who may be distant from the actual scene of politics, to accept the ready-prepared opinions of writers rather than exercising their own judgment: ‘among the cart loads of mud, now emptied through the country, for the purpose of bespattering dignified character, much of it will stick in the opinions of those who will not “*undergo the fatigue of thinking for themselves*”’.<sup>58</sup> If Stael’s Léonce worried about the way that verbal scandal could deprive an individual of control over his or her reputation, for Gordon, mediated forms of representation intensified this problem. Good or bad fame was being taken out of the hands of the individual agent, and placed in the hands of potentially unscrupulous pressmen. This meant that there was no way to correct false narratives, as the writer of *The Bonne Bouche of Epicurean Rascality* lamented: ‘... it is the characteristic, and bane of Englishmen, to swallow, with greedy avidity, a virgin tale; which, taking root in public faith, is seldom removed by any subsequent demonstration of its fallacy’.<sup>59</sup> Not only did this create an opening for the demagogue, but it transformed the critical public

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous, *The Bonne Bouche of Epicurean Rascality*. *Op. cit.* pp. 14-15.

into an unthinking mob. Far from competition between discourses producing an educated and alert reading public, loyalist writers were concerned that the increased power of the press was causing a tide of uncorrectable falsehoods to sweep the country. For Gordon, true rational freedom actually lay in curtailing English liberties to the point that people would behave rationally, and uphold the status quo. As I shall argue in the next chapter, this view of the reading public as a passive audience had intensified by 1820, as Benthamite optimism about the ‘march of mind’ was increasingly countered by concerns about the quiescence of a mass audience.

In the face of a powerful radical case for investigation, arguments about the need to curb the power of the press for the sake of the welfare of a mass audience formed a much stronger backbone to loyalist counter-attacks than moral arguments that investigation would involve the airing of improper details. Indeed, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which was the body most associated with arguments about the need to maintain standards of public decency, was badly damaged by the Clarke affair. Founded in 1802 in response to a perceived decline in the standards of public morality, it dealt with issues from Sabbath-breaking to the production of obscene and seditious publications. Strictly Church of England and loyalist in its bent, and less dominated by evangelicals than by middle class professionals, it was an outlet for the loyalist energies of figures such as John Bowles, John Reeves and Francis Feeling, all of whom had been prominent in loyalist associations during the 1790s.<sup>60</sup> It aimed to reform from the bottom of society upwards, contending that aristocratic vice was largely invisible, whereas popular immorality could be seen everywhere.<sup>61</sup> As John Scott argued in 1804, the society:

confines its attention to particular moral and social duties, the *open* violators whereof will be found chiefly among the middle and lower

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<sup>60</sup> For more detailed information on the SSV and Proclamation Society see M J D Roberts, ‘The Society for the Suppression of Vice and Its Early Critics 1802-1812’, *The Historical Journal*. Vol. 26: No. 1, March 1983, pp. 159-176 and Edward J Bristow, *Vice And Vigilance: Purity Movements In Britain Since 1700*. London And Basingstoke: Gill And Macmillan, Rowman And Littlefield, 1977.

<sup>61</sup> For a complaint against this strategy, see Anonymous, *A Letter To A Member Of The Society For The Suppression Of Vice, In Which Its Principles And Proceedings Are Examined And Condemned*. London: Thomas Collins and J Cawthorn and C Chapple, 1804

orders; while the offences of the higher orders are, for the most part, committed within the interior of their houses, whither the magistracy of the country cannot follow them<sup>62</sup>

In the eyes of SSV members, transgressions that were kept out of sight represented a far lesser threat than sins committed in open view, because they posed a threat to the moral ‘drapery’ of society, and, by extension, to the interests of the country.

As I argued above, radicals in the Clarke affair developed a connection between the Duke’s abuse of his position and a broader network of government patronage. In 1809 John Bowles, a prominent member of the SSV and a well-known loyalist pamphleteer, was publicly accused of corruption as part of this wider campaign. In the mid 1790s, his efforts as a government pamphleteer had been rewarded with a sinecure. He was made Commissioner for Dutch Prizes and, like many other placemen of the time, he milked the office for his private gain. From Bowles’s own moral perspective, however, his conduct was perfectly consistent. He believed in upholding public standards because they acted as a bulwark against social disorder, using his 1801 *Reflections at the Conclusion of the War* to trumpet the value of an innate ‘moral sense’ which tended to

preserve the human race from the destructive hand of innovation, and to produce in the human mind a happy preference, even for the imperfections of long tried systems, above those specious novelties, which wear the delusive face of improvement, but which tend ultimately to subversion.<sup>63</sup>

For Bowles, the imperfections of the system were less worrying than attempts to reform it, which were founded in revolutionary sedition, not true British tradition. However, in the climate of 1809, he began to look hypocritical: here was a man who had used arguments about the importance of public decency to

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<sup>62</sup> John Scott, *An Account Of Societies For The Reformation Of Manners, And The Suppression Of Vice With Answers To Objections Against Them Being An Appendix To “A Sermon On The Importance Of The Sabbath, Preached Before The Magistrates Of Kingston-Upon Hull”*. Second Edition. Privately Printed, p. 17

<sup>63</sup> John Bowles, *Reflections At The Conclusion Of The War*. Second Edition. London: F And C Rivington, 1801, p. 13.

please a reactionary government, making a personal profit from his politics. In other words, Bowles's insistence that certain things were better left unsaid in the public domain, which had led him to become a leader of the SSV, looked less like a genuine concern for the general welfare, and more like an self-interested effort to throw a veil over his exploitation of private interests.

### III

#### *Publicity and Privacy: Gendered Discourses of Virtue*

If the proximity between parliamentary critical debate and press scandal was a source of anxiety for both the Duke's supporters and the radicals in the Clarke affair, then this unease was intensified by the fact that the scandal confused the boundaries between public and private behaviour. Some commentators argued that the availability of details about the private, sexual connection between the pair represented a violation of the private sphere, while others pointed to the fact that the relationship was adulterous to argue that the details should not have the same protection from the public eye that was afforded to the domestic realm of the non-working wife. Clarke's socially anomalous status as a mistress and a courtesan complicated matters. As a prostitute, her domestic establishment was not just a haven which allowed the Duke to retire from the cares of the public world, but also both the arena of her professional endeavours, and the reward of her exertions. At Gloucester Place, the public world of competitive financial exchange intruded into the most intimate areas of the private sphere, as the domestic house became the location for an exchange of sex for financial gain. This was made a still more pressing issue by the fact that some of the money had not come to Clarke directly from the Duke's pocket, but through a corrupt trade in commissions, a point which Clarke made very explicitly in the House of Commons when she famously alleged that she used to pin a list of her preferred candidates for promotion to the head of the bed that she shared with the Duke.<sup>64</sup> Sex in this case seemed to affect the welfare of the army during a time of international warfare, making it impossible to draw a strict boundary between even the most private and the most public of events.

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<sup>64</sup> See *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 459.

This tension between publicity and privacy in the Clarke scandal was often played out in the gender discourses that surrounded the affair. Mary Ann Clarke herself became the focus of debate, as concerns about the public ramifications of her behaviour were translated into anxieties about her place within separate sphere ideology. The respectable female author of the anonymously published *Observations and Strictures on the Conduct of Mrs Clarke*, (a pamphlet often attributed to Olivia Wilmot Sirres) argued that Clarke should not be regarded as a 'public' woman, but as a 'private' wife-like figure. This allowed Sirres to downplay the troubling aspects of the Duke's sexual immorality, while attacking Clarke all the more virulently for betraying her duty to her 'husband' in colluding with Wardle. The investigation into Clarke's business dealings becomes, in Sirres's hands, a nightmarish overturning of the proper relationship between the sexes, as Clarke uses her anomalous position as a mistress to claim a legal identity to which she would not be entitled as a wife:

A wife cannot be admitted in evidence in any thing concerning her husband; the legislative power acted wisely that ordained this prudent law; as what horrors and calamities has it not prevented in civil society? Then is it not rather hard that there is no provision of a similar nature made relative to a mistress?<sup>65</sup>

Under the legal principle of *couverture*, a married woman's legal identity, and property were subsumed into those of her husband, preventing wives from testifying against their spouses. The idea behind this restriction was that the interests of both parties in a marriage were absolutely identical, and could therefore be adequately represented by the male. However, part of the problem for Sirres was that this argument that the courtesan ought to have been treated as of 'one flesh' with the Duke simply ran against the whole tenor of the investigation, which revealed that the interests of the country, the interests of the Duke and the interests of Clarke were by no means one and the same thing. It was well nigh impossible to ignore the fact that, as a mistress, Clarke occupied a far more obviously independent position than a wife, in legal, economic and

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<sup>65</sup> Anonymous (attr. Olivia Wilmot Sirres), *Observations And Strictures On The Conduct Of Mrs Clarke By A Lady*. London: T J Hookman, 1809, p.14.

social terms. Indeed, when combined with Sirres's fulminations against Clarke for having independent desires and ambitions ('she loved *variety*; she loved *extravagance* (witness her luxurious way of living a little time back); she liked *power*, and was a stranger to the prudent managing of it'), her insistence on viewing the relationship between Clarke and the Duke as a marriage actually suggested the possibility that the interests of wives, as well as those of mistresses, might be very different to those of their husbands.<sup>66</sup> Then, the fact that her pamphlet, though anonymous, was sold as the production of 'a lady' further problematized her argument. Though in theory Sirres upheld the denial of the separate, public identity of women, her argument was undercut by the fact that she had herself ventured outside of the domestic sphere into the political arena to grapple with a set of issues which were usually defined as the preserve of male writers.

Clarke's own memoir of the scandal, entitled *The Rival Princes* and published in 1810, exploits this ambivalence. On the one hand, she is eager to cast herself as a private individual and a mother, who had 'never *wantonly forced myself upon the public attention*'.<sup>67</sup> On the other, she represented herself as a woman with a broader education and a wider range of experience than most of her sex, which made her a particularly suitable candidate for public life. After quoting from a classical source she explains:

It may appear somewhat strange to the reader, that I should have quoted an author not generally read by my sex, but that kind of reading usually resorted to by ladies, never engaged my attention. I scarcely know a novel by name, while historical and political writers have long been the chief authors of my contemplation. This may be accounted for, from having mixed much with persons of the first *rank* and *talents* in the political world, from whose conversations I acquired a taste for books not common to a lady's library, and from whom I also derived considerable intellectual advantage.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. Italics in original.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Ann Clarke, *The Rival Princes Or A Faithful Narrative Of Facts Relating To Mrs M A Clarke's Political Acquaintance With Colonel Wardle, Major Dodd, &C &C &C Who Were Concerned In The Charges Against The Duke Of York*. London: C Chapple, 1810, Vol. 1, p. x.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 122-3.

In this passage, Clarke's sexual circulation and her political education are virtually the same thing. She becomes a political expert as a direct result of having sex with politicians, the femininity that she trades upon to survive economically enabling her to acquire a stock of distinctly masculine knowledge. Like a more extreme version of Staël's salon hostess, Clarke inhabits a world where private sexual seductiveness can be exchanged for public knowledge and influence.

But Clarke's ability to confuse public and private spheres, and male and female traits disturbed radicals as well as loyalists. While at the disrespectable end of radical culture, a misogynist, bachelor culture tended to want to see Clarke as a sexual bombshell, using subversive laughter to glory in the Duke's discomfiture at her hands, more respectable reformist pamphlets expressed anxieties about her ambivalent gender status.<sup>69</sup> In *The Agent and His Natural Son*, a radical novel published in 1807 before the parliamentary enquiry had begun, the anonymous author takes an unexpectedly charitable line on the Duke's behaviour, arguing that the siren-like charms of his mistress made it inevitable that the Duke's sexual passion should overmaster him: 'the fascinations of a harlot may deprive man of his reason... there are females, who convey, even in their fondest endearments, a dagger into the heart, more pernicious in its effects, though more slow than the lancets of the celebrated Dutch Maiden'.<sup>70</sup> A footnote explains that a condemned man in Holland is allowed to choose between death by poison, or by the maiden. If he chooses the latter:

he is conducted to her arms, which open to receive him by means of secret springs; and, as she fondly presses the victim to her lips, he merely

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<sup>69</sup> It should be stressed that there was by no means one single gender ideology amongst radicals. As Clark has stressed, artisanal radicalism, with its bachelor, libertine culture tended to regard women in a very different manner from respectable radicalism. This exacerbated the political confusion surrounding gender ambivalent representations of Clarke. See Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995 repr. 1997, *passim*.

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, *The Agent And His Natural Son; A New And True Story With Important Strictures On The Commander In Chief Relative To His Duties And His Confidants*. Second Edition. London: J F Hughes, 1808, p. 10.



tastes to die.- Her treacherous embrace resists all effort to be free, and conveys innumerable lancets to the vital parts.<sup>71</sup>

The machine appears to represent an idealized, passive and highly sexualised female form, and encourages the condemned man to react as if he still possessed the sexual agency to act on his desire. However, this apparently private, individual 'choice' is actually thrust upon him by public justice: the Maiden's apparently private, erotic embrace is indistinguishable from her function as a public, penal instrument. Male desire becomes an emasculating force: Clarke's ability to convert her sexual encounters with the Duke into an instrument of revenge becomes the Maiden's reversal of the usual order of sexual penetration, as 'she' kills her lover by stabbing his 'vital' parts.

However, running alongside anxieties about Clarke's relationship to separate sphere ideology were concerns about how the Duke's behaviour should be interpreted. One of the central issues raised was whether a virtuous private life was necessary to the integrity of a public leader. The argument that rulers should demonstrate moral uprightness as well as political competence was bolstered by the fact that, as Linda Colley has noted, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed a growing emphasis on the domestic virtue of the royal family as an important element underpinning the popularity of the monarchy, a notion which was consolidated in the figure of the paternal and rather vulnerable George III.<sup>72</sup> Whereas in the 1790s, the anti-monarchical focus of much radical thought led reformers to regard this tendency to sentimentalise about royal morality with considerable suspicion, recognizing, as Barrell notes, that 'no discussion of the authority of the king could be conducted if the distinction between the king's private and public character was not clearly defined', by 1809, radicals were far more willing to embrace the notion that the private and public character of a ruler were interlinked.<sup>73</sup> By proclaiming their loyalty to the sovereign on moral grounds, they could distance themselves from

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons*. Op. cit., pp. 195-236. See also Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820', *Past and Present*. No. 102, February 1984, pp. 94-129.

<sup>73</sup> John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 53.

dangerous Jacobinism, while increasing the power of their attack on parliamentary corruption. As one loyalist noted:

The outcry, a few years ago, was against the encroachments and influence of the Crown, which we were assured, were threatening to overwhelm the other branches of the Constitution. But, when the story became stale, and people were persuaded, that the prerogatives of the Crown, so far from being dangerous, were not more than was necessary to impart splendour, vigour, and activity to the government, the democratic jugglers conceived it politic to shift the scenes, to exhibit another set of tricks, and to raise a storm against the popular branch of the legislature.<sup>74</sup>

Constitutional radicalism, far from being anti-monarchical, embraced loyalty to the King. Thus, at a meeting convened at the high point of radical success after the Clarke affair, Burdett's first move was to stand on the table and toast the King 'and the principles which seated his Family on the Throne', before saluting the 'People', and finally 'the Progress of public opinion'.<sup>75</sup>

But this apparent goodwill towards the monarch could also form the basis of more subversive arguments, which used the language of constitutionalism in a non-traditional manner to argue that the Crown was not only dependent on the popular will for its authority, but should also listen to the voice of public opinion on moral matters. Predicating respect for King George upon his domestic virtues could actually provide a rationale for criticizing the dissolute behaviour of the royal princes, and their consequent unfitness for a leading role in the state, while avoiding accusations of Jacobinism.<sup>76</sup> Instead of denuding scandal of its critical capacity, the cult of the benevolent monarch that sprung up around George III had the effect of individuating the king, making his authority depend not on his hereditary position but his personal demeanour. Scandal about the princes could thus be used to argue for resistance against them. In *A Letter To Mrs Clarke*, penned by a 'Friend to Church and State', the author adopts a similar line to Hunt, arguing that the real moral problem raised

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<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, *The Faction Detected and Despised*. London: J J Stockdale, 1810, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted from Anonymous, *Parliamentary Reform*. *Op. cit.* p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> For more information on this strategy, see Philip Harling 'Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* and the Language of Patriotism'. *The English Historical Review*. *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

by the affair concerned the rightness and wrongness of the original actions, not their representation:

if ill reports respecting the moral conduct of his Royal Highness, for which Mr Yorke would not allow there could be any just foundations – if merely *writing* and *talking* of his misdeeds could be so alarming in their effects as to indicate a jacobinical conspiracy – to be calculated to engender a revolutionary spirit – what must be the effect of the *misdeeds themselves* to which I have been alluding?<sup>77</sup>

Calling for a debate on the meaning of ‘rational allegiance’, the pamphleteer argues that the relationship between moral and political authority needs to be rethought: ‘Can an individual be really great, or endearing, merely from official situation? Does personal elevation confer the claims of moral merit? Do we revere George the Third simply because he is our *King?*’<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, his answer is that birth and situation are actually inadequate to commanding respect. He therefore criticizes Wilberforce for using the phrase ‘elevated character’, because it concealed the assumption that high status and a good reputation were one and the same thing, when in reality the two were often poles apart: ‘The *character* is *one* thing, and the rank *another*. An elevated character may exist independently of dignity of birth; and an exalted personage may be without elevation of character – nay, may even be base and *degraded* in character’.<sup>79</sup> Similar arguments can be heard in other radical writings. The author of *The Agent and His Natural Son* argued that ‘high birth is *not inseparable* from barren genius, or ill-directed talent’.<sup>80</sup> The very arguments which were used to defend the authority of George III and advertise the author’s loyalty, become powerful weapons against the notion of hereditary authority and even of constitutional power, by rendering monarchy dependent on popular moral approval and the affection of the crowd. ‘Rational allegiance’ to one king whose virtue was openly acknowledged could easily shade into ‘rational

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<sup>77</sup> Anonymous (‘A Friend To Church And State’), *A Letter To Mrs Clarke On Her Late Connection With The Duke Of York And The Charges Preferred Against His Royal Highness By G L Wardle*. London: J Bell, 1809, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>80</sup> Anonymous (‘An Inhabitant of Craig’s Court’), *The Agent And His Natural Son: A New And True Story, With Important Strictures On The Commander In Chief, Relative To His Duties, And His Confidants*. London: J F Hughes, 1808, pp. 4-5.

disobedience' to his sons, whose well-publicized sexual transgressions were the frequent subject of popular jokes and innuendoes.

Importantly, this moral argument does not seem to have carried specific class resonances. As Dror Wahrman has argued, a political idiom which consistently identified the middle classes as the repositories of virtue did not really emerge in the political arena until debates on the reform bill in the late 1820s.<sup>81</sup> Instead, it tended to be based on a two-tier model of society, which opposed the entirety of the people to their leaders where the latter were profligate. Thomas Hague, author of *A Letter To His Royal Highness The Duke Of York On Recent Events* (1809) sets the Duke of York's behaviour in the wider political context of the Napoleonic Wars to argue that the whole of England, imagined as a war-torn country full of bereft families whose class differences were lost in their collective grief, rejoiced at the resignation of the Duke: 'the widow and the orphan; the helpless and agonised mother; the distressed and aged father, all sympathise together; and in your departure from office, they feel a mitigation of their personal sorrow, and of those losses which swell the dreadful and exasperating page of our disasters'.<sup>82</sup> George III in this text becomes a sympathetic parental figure, the woeful father whose sorrows enable him to understand the feelings of his subjects. By contrast, the Duke's libertinism is the result of his anti-familial outlook. If he had children of his own, the author reasons, respect for their feelings might have served to check his licentiousness:

the sorrows of a *good man* are always sacred, and the woes of a father affect a large portion of human nature. *You are not* a parent--- you have not a son whose cheek shall turn pale as he reads of Dunkirk, the Helder, or the commons journals: you have not a daughter whose face shall burn between duty and indignation, at the folly and impurity of her father.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain c.1780-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Hague, *A Letter To His Royal Highness The Duke Of York On Recent Events With A Statement Of The Conduct Of Generals Trigge And Fox, During Their Commands At Gibraltar And An Inquiry Into Major Charles James's Claims To Promotion*. London: William Horsemen, 1809, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Loyalists, however, argued that it was not the Duke but his radical antagonists who had set themselves against the family. Sirres lamented:

the cruelty of wounding the feelings of a beloved and aged King and father, whose virtues and beneficence should have entitled him to the most tender respect, instead of his suffering mental anguish at a time that repose and peace of mind are requisite.<sup>84</sup>

If royalty was to be judged according to private character rather than public function, then the Duke should be treated as a fallible individual, subject to the same temptations and desires as other men. By harping on about his failings, Wardle was aiming a death blow at the peace of the royal family, which would

destroy the good fellowship and affection that should unite a family, which may justly be, for the amiable features that distinguish every part of it, deemed the pride and boast of every honest Englishman, as well as esteemed the admiration of all other powers, and which has manifested itself ever the friend of humanity and the protector of merit of every degree and kind?<sup>85</sup>

This time, it is the identification of the family as a peculiarly English institution which enables the radical threat to be regarded as a suspiciously foreign menace. Similarly, for the author of *The Rival Dukes* (1810) the radicals were home-wreckers, bent on destroying England from within: 'wives, families and friends are deserted; promises broken; debts left unpaid; and creditors swindled; government opposed and baffled; royalty insulted; and the necessary distinctions of society virtually abolished'.<sup>86</sup>

Just as Clarke's half public, half private status meant that she was portrayed in a gender ambivalent manner, the Duke's failure to live up to the moral standards of his royal father raised questions about his masculinity. Some loyalist writers tried to argue that the Duke was being tried not for corruption, but for adultery, which was not itself a crime. Indeed, the author behind *The*

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<sup>84</sup> Sirres, *Observations And Strictures On The Conduct Of Mrs Clarke*. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>86</sup> Anonymous, *The Rival Dukes, Or Who Is The Dupe? Containing A Complete Refutation Of The Calumnies Which Mrs Clarke Has Cast Upon The Character Of His Royal Highness The Duke Of York In Her Recent Work, Entitled "The Rival Princes" And Throwing New Light Upon The Secret History And Intrigues Of Gloucester Place*. London: M Jones, 1810, p. 25.

*Bonne Bouche of Epicurean Rascality* argued that the Duke's sexual virility was a positive virtue, proof that the son of the King was a red-blooded male: 'it is the first time I ever heard it imputed to a soldier as a crime'.<sup>87</sup> But the fact that sex and corruption were so intermingled in the scandal made this position difficult to maintain. Pamphlets such as *A Letter To His Royal Highness, Or A Delicate Inquiry Into The Doubt Whether He Be More Favoured By Mars Or Venus* (1807) connected the Duke's sexual mores with what was widely perceived to be his military incompetence and cowardice, a popular theme in satires on his character since the 1790s, portraying him as a weak-willed and effeminate fop.<sup>88</sup> Publication of the Duke's honeyed love letters during the scandal did little to dispel doubts about his manliness. Their drivelling sentimentality made him the target of ridicule, occasioning several poetic parodies which stressed the extent to which he was mastered by his desire for a woman:

*My dearest, dearest, dearest Dear;  
My pretty, pretty, pretty Dove;  
My Darling, Darling, Angel, Love;  
With thanks by millions and by millions  
Far better he had said NONILLIONS;  
I feel sore vex'd, and long my face- is;  
You did not go to Lewes Races*<sup>89</sup>

Still more suggestive is an imagined bedroom scene in *The Miss-Led General* (1808). The Duke becomes a literally impotent figure, obsessed with the military details of 'breastworks and breaches, mines and trenches – attacking, assaulting, battering, mounting, driving in, sallies, retreats, and burying under the works', but unable to have sexual intercourse with his wife:

"I have lost my *cuisse*s"  
"Your senses, you mean," said the lady Frederica, raising herself up, and directing her eyes full towards the place.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, *The Bonne Bouche of Epicurean Rascality*. *Op. cit.* p. 30.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous ('An Englishman'), *A Letter To His Royal Highness, Or A Delicate Inquiry Into The Doubt Whether He Be More Favoured By Mars Or Venus With Hints About Dunkirk, Holland, The Army, The Case And Treatment Of The Hon A C Johnstone, Remarks On General Fitzpatrick's Consistency*. London: James Piper, 1807. The nursery rhyme 'The brave old Duke of York' is one of many popular satires on this theme, see I Opie and P Opie *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951 repr. 1997, p. 550.

<sup>89</sup> Anonymous ('Sam Satiricus'), *The Cyprian Of St Stephen's, Or Princely Protection Illustrated, In A Poetical Flight To The Pierian Spring*. Bath: John Browne, 1809, p. 8.

“I ask for my *culottes*, Madam”

“Oh, Sir, you know I nebber wear dem; it ish very seldom of late I have had any ting to do wid dem.!

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends”-

(The lady Frederica fell back in the most defenceless attitude, as if she intended no resistance)

“Or close the wall up with the English dead.”-

“Dead eno;” said the lady Frederica, turning away from him.<sup>90</sup>

But it was not just the Duke’s antagonists who represented him in terms which questioned his masculinity. The loyalist concerns about publicity and the emergence of a mass audience, discussed in the last section, led some of York’s defenders to argue that, in the face of a culture of scandalous publicity, a royal celebrity was as powerless as a woman. For example, the author of *The Rival Dukes* lamented the tendency of scandal to become more sensational in proportion to the social elevation of its subject, arguing that in an ideal world, royal figures like the Duke should be free from suspicion, ‘like Caesars wife’, rather than like Caesar himself.<sup>91</sup> Not only are the gender terms of the reference odd, but the actual story of Caesar’s divorce utterly negates the author’s argument: his wife, Pompeia, was not ‘above suspicion’ in the sense that her behaviour was assumed to be irreproachable and thus above investigation; rather, she was divorced from Caesar without any investigation at all into her alleged transgressions, because he argued that her public character had to be spotless. Where Edgeworth’s heroine, Leonora, referred to Pompeia to argue that scandal operated as a kind of masculine despotism, which sidestepped the proper processes of investigation, this author uses it, rather oddly, to argue that investigation is utterly inappropriate to the character of royalty. Similarly, in an early speech on the Clarke affair, Canning implicitly analogised Wardle’s charges with the allegations of anonymous libellers (while disingenuously disclaiming any intention of drawing a comparison), to argue that anyone attacking a royal personage exhibited

a cowardice... of the basest kind, participating of the most depraved and odious qualities, deserving of that execration which the best feelings of

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<sup>90</sup> Anonymous (attr. E S Barrett), *The Miss-Led General; A Serio-Comic, Satiric, Mock-heroic Romance*. Second Edition. London: H Oddy, 1808, pp. 81-3.

<sup>91</sup> Anonymous, *The Rival Dukes*. *Op. cit.*, p. iv.

humanity would pronounce on the base assailant of female weakness, because to direct unfounded attacks against those in high authority, was nearly similar to an attack on an undefended woman.<sup>92</sup>

To further complicate matters, Canning then went on to castigate the libellers as ‘unmanly’ traducers. What is significant in both these cases is the fact that the press is seen as an overwhelmingly powerful force, particularly when set against a royal family viewed as individuals rather than a collective institution. Like Staël’s *Léonce*, the Duke is unmanned by scandal because it reveals the hollowness of his pretensions to masculine self-dependence by demonstrating the limited extent of his personal agency. However, whereas in *Delphine* such gender instability had an explicitly radical, Rousseauvian resonance, referring to the inauthenticity of a life lived in the eyes of others, here it suggests the power of an unscrupulous press, ready to tear apart the identity of any public figure. As a prominent target for abuse, the Duke becomes unable to defend himself from anonymous attacks and impotent to produce and insist upon an ‘official’ narrative of his character and actions.

The international dimension of the scandal meant that arguments about the Duke’s effeminacy were also extended into concerns about the masculinity of the army. The Third Coalition had collapsed in 1807, leaving Britain isolated against the French on the international stage, and resulting in a continental embargo on British trade. Furthermore, British campaigns on the continent had suffered recent defeats, and the bombardment of the neutral port, Copenhagen, in order to seize the Danish fleet following reports that it was a potential target for Napoleon, had outraged public opinion.<sup>93</sup> Then came the debacle of the Convention of Cintra, which had already created an enormous wave of public concern about the competence and the political motives of those conducting the war.<sup>94</sup> Some contemporaries regarded the Clarke affair as a deliberately

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<sup>92</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, col. 200.

<sup>93</sup> For more information, see Christopher D. Hall, *British Strategy In The Napoleonic War 1803-15*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992.

<sup>94</sup> Instead of sending aid directly to the Spanish troops who had petitioned England for military help in 1808, troops were commanded to Portugal. When they achieved an important victory over Napoleon’s forces at Vimiera, the widespread public rejoicing amongst the British public was soon quashed by rumours that the terms of the subsequent armistice were extremely unfavourable to British interests. A public outcry followed, which was scarcely diminished by the subsequent whitewashing of the Convention’s signatories. As Schneer has shown, the



orchestrated distraction from the fiasco of Cintra: 'this Inquiry has so exclusively occupied the attention of the Public, that the one-and-twenty millions of money, and the thousands of valuable lives thrown away, in that ill-judged, ill-planned, and truly disastrous, Expedition to Spain, seem totally forgotten'.<sup>95</sup> Others, however, pointed to the similarities which the two scandals shared: both involved high-level corruption, both appeared to impact on the success of British campaigns on the continent, and both called the honour of the British army into question. Most importantly of all, both could be interpreted as evidence of the triumph of private interests over the public will.

Wardle's very first speech in the Commons focused less on the Duke's adultery than on the effect of his corruption upon the army, arguing in overtly gendered language that his selfishness was emasculating the soldiery, and thus reducing the nation's strength. Arguing that he was compelled by duty to concern himself with the welfare of his country enabled Wardle to submerge the personal element of the attack on a member of the royal family, which might have seemed suspiciously 'Jacobin' to some, beneath an explicit, British patriotism:

The conviction of my mind is, and for some time has been, that unless the system of corruption that has so long prevailed in the military department be done away, this country may fall an easy prey to the enemy. Consistently, therefore, with any rational feeling of solicitude for my country which involves my own connections and my family, it is impossible that I should sit silent, and allow the practices which have come to my knowledge, to be any longer concealed, from those who are so much interested in their character and tendency.<sup>96</sup>

Wardle makes his own private connections the foundation of his right to violate the Duke's privacy, arguing that some degree of investigation is actually

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government had a concealed rationale for sending troops to Portugal and for signing quickly at Cintra: they feared that 'nationalist and popular guerrilla forces' would 'consummate the nationwide revolutionary upheaval generated by the French occupation', and establish a libertarian government. See Richard M. Schneer 'Arthur Wellesley and the Cintra Convention: A New Look at an Old Puzzle'. *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 19: No. 2, Spring, 1980, pp. 93-119, this citation p. 108.

<sup>95</sup> Anonymous, *The Horns Exalted Over The People: Or A New And Complete Book Of Chronicles Of The Bishop And His Clarke*. London: J Bailey, 1809, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, January 27 1809, Col. 180.

necessary if private interests are to be adequately protected. As the energetically masculine defender of the domestic realm, he can argue that the Duke's intimate sexual affairs are a matter of legitimate public interest because they impact upon the strength and vigour of every man's interests. Other pamphlets were more explicit. *The Cyprian Of St Stephen's, Or Princely Protection Illustrated* (1809) portrays Clarke's influence over military commissions as a form of sexual potency:

Your Col'nels, Majors, 'neath her hand,  
Become subservient to command  
And like their privates, when at drill  
Subjected own her potent will.<sup>97</sup>

Not just the Duke, but the entire army become Clarke's bedfellows, feminized by their subservience to her wishes. This is neatly encapsulated in the pun on 'privates', which stand and fall to her command. As a device which relies on the interchangeability of one meaning for another, *double entendre* reflects at a linguistic level Clarke's ability to make sexual exchange stand for military influence.

Finally, in some pamphlets, ambivalent gender responses were compounded by uncertainties about class. Not only was Clarke accused of pocketing the proceeds from the sale of commissions, but she was attacked for promoting individuals who were not generally regarded as appropriate candidates for the military ranks that they were given. The fact that she elevated her footboy, Samuel Carter, to a rank in which he would be mixing with gentlemen, caused particular outrage: domestic servants, a class often portrayed as idle and luxurious, were not seen as subjects likely to possess martial valour. The presence of such 'effeminate' figures in the nation's military service was seen as a direct threat to the manliness of the army, as the author of *The Miss-Led General* argued:

Let the *men* serve their country by fighting its battles; let the  
*hermaphrodites* (the street-loungers and men-milliners) serve their

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<sup>97</sup> 'Sam Satiricus', *The Cyprian of St Stephens*. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

mistresses and masters, by softening bits of paper, and behaving obligingly behind their counters; and let the fair sex serve the common cause by increasing the population, which is the real strength of a country.<sup>98</sup>

Manly men and feminine women possess strength and power enough to contribute to the commonweal, and the role of women as mothers is given as much importance as the role of men in public defence. It is those in between these two poles of sexual activity who pose a threat to the nation - the 'hermaphrodite' servants and shopkeepers, who are always threatening to transgress the accepted boundaries of gender and class.

In gender terms, the Clarke scandal illustrates the uncertainty which surrounded use of the terms 'public' and 'private' in early nineteenth-century England, demonstrating the way in which debates about the role of publicity as a tool to check the abuse of private interest overlapped with concerns about the effects of exposure on private life. Neither a fully public woman, nor a completely private figure, Mary Ann Clarke's ability to translate sexual intimacy into financial gain led to intense and anxious debates about the role of the courtesan, which complicated the way in which scandal polarized people along lines of political allegiance.

#### *IV*

#### *Backlash*

Though the Duke was cleared by the parliamentary vote on the Clarke affair, in the early months of 1809, the scandal was seen as something of a radical triumph. The narrative that the radicals had constructed of the Duke's misconduct was widely accepted, reinforced by the fact that he resigned over the affair, which also contributed to the collapse of the Portland ministry.<sup>99</sup> However, the latter half of the year saw a significant diminution in the confidence and the popularity of the reformers. Partly, this was due to a resurgence of loyalist feeling: as Colley points out a woman named Mrs Biggs

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<sup>98</sup> E S Barrett, *The Miss-Led General. Op. cit.*, p. 13

conceived of the idea of celebrating the royal jubilee as a way of counteracting the effect of the scandal. She wrote:

In the early part of the summer when Colonel Wardle's popularity and the meetings for reform appeared likely to become inimical to the peace and happiness of the country, it occurred to me that the ensuing October would be his majesty's fiftieth anniversary and that if the idea of a jubilee or general festival could be successfully suggested it might excite a spirit of loyal enthusiasm well calculated to counteract the pernicious efforts of Mr Wardle.<sup>100</sup>

As I have argued, the allegation that the radical cause was in some way anti-monarchical runs against the weight of the evidence. Radicals made painstaking efforts to emphasize their loyalty to the Crown as a central part of the English constitution. However, Mrs Biggs's attitude was part of a wider loyalist tendency to associate reformist constitutionalism with revolutionary sedition, which actually increased as the year went by. Why were the reformers less able to shrug off this charge of being disloyal revolutionaries in the second half of 1809 than they had been in at the beginning of the year?

One explanation is that in the wake of the parliamentary investigation, the radicals began to become entangled in their own narrative logic. Firstly, after the parliamentary investigation had ended, Mary Ann Clarke herself turned against the reformers, alleging that they had promised to pay her for her evidence but had failed to meet their obligations once the affair had blown over. Not only did this give impetus to charges that the radicals were as corrupt as those whom they were criticizing, but it threw serious doubt on the openness and the fairness of the investigation that Wardle had instigated. Secondly, having criticized the Duke's sexual immorality, radicals found that their own private lives were being subjected to close scrutiny. A series of allegations about the sexual incontinence of Wardle and Francis Burdett dented the credibility of the reformers, allowing their opponents to claim that they were rank hypocrites. Finally, the involvement of distinctly unrespectable radicals in

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<sup>99</sup> According to Denis Gray, *Spencer Perceval: The Evangelical Prime Minister 1762-1812*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963.

<sup>100</sup> Mrs R Biggs to the Earl of Dartmouth, 14 October 1809, Staffordshire Record Office D (W) 1778/L/ii/1737, quoted from Colley, *Britons*. *Op. cit.* p. 218.

Wardle's cause was exposed in a mini-scandal which helped to destroy the sense of distance between Jacobinism and constitutional reformism so sedulously cultivated by the reformers.

Clarke herself was a crucial figure in this shift of opinion. After the parliamentary investigation had ended, she began to allege that Wardle had promised to remunerate her for giving evidence, a charge only strengthened when an upholsterer sued him for the price of some furniture which Clarke had purchased.<sup>101</sup> The court was deeply unsympathetic to the radical cause and its decision against Wardle seriously damaged his creditworthiness. The radicals now found themselves in the embarrassing position of having to insist that the woman whose truthfulness they had upheld in parliament was a liar whose word could not be credited. But the most damaging thing about this *volte face* was the fact that it called into question the radical argument that free investigation would inevitably produce truth. Here were two very different trials, conducted very much in the public eye, which seemed to have produced very different conclusions *based on the very same logic*. If Clarke's testimony was reliable in the Commons, then it should be reliable in court, and yet treating it as equally creditworthy in both situations had produced results that were diametrically opposed in their political tendency.

Then, in 1810, came the publication by Mary Ann Clarke of her own account of the scandal, *The Rival Princes*. Writing in a light, sharply vituperative style, Clarke represents herself as a practical, avaricious woman of business. She pours scorn on the radical claim that her involvement in the trial was motivated by a burning, righteous desire to reveal the truth, ridiculing the notion that '*I incurred the exposure of myself, children, and family, together with abuse, anxiety of mind, and fatigue of person during my examination in Parliament, from a pure PATRIOTIC ZEAL TO SERVE THE PUBLIC*'.<sup>102</sup> As a rhetorical strategy, this hard-headed, common sense realism was deeply transgressive in gender terms, but it allowed Clarke to draw a distinct boundary

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<sup>101</sup> See Anonymous, *Proceedings In The Court Of King's Bench, On The Trial Of An Action Brought By F. Wright, Upholsterer, Against Colonel Wardle*. London: T. Gillett, Sherwood, Neely & Jones, 1809.

between herself and Wardle, contrasting her own unvarnished openness with the ‘hypocrisy’ of the radicals, who claimed that they had only the purest motivation in public, while scheming against the Duke in private. By exposing even the nastier details of her tale, Clarke established a discourse which allowed her as a prostitute, whose unsupported word was regarded as suspect, to claim superior truthfulness to a gentleman and an MP. The very imperfections that she acknowledged helped to establish the veracity of her story, making it seem far more ‘real’ than the elevated sentiments expressed by Wardle in parliament.

Clarke argued that the entire scandal was the result of an aristocratic conspiracy by the Duke of Kent to discredit his brother.<sup>103</sup> According to her narrative of events, far from being a disinterested party in the investigation, Wardle was actually in the pay of this faction, and had been promised the office of Secretary of War once York was removed.<sup>104</sup> Turning radical claims to patriotic virtue on their head, Clarke maintained that Wardle’s motivations were as corrupt as those of the Duke of York:

I always entertained an indifferent opinion of *democratic virtue*, or what is fashionably called *Patriotism*, but I must confess my acquaintance with Colonel WARDLE, and his associates, has convinced me, that the garb of patriotic ardour conceals the most destructive passions and principles that can possibly animate the bosom of a social being;—passions and principles that have no end but in *self advancement*, power and honours<sup>105</sup>

This claim was jubilantly repeated in other loyalist tracts. The author of *Adultery and Patriotism* (1811), for example, claims that Wardle operated ‘in partnership with an army tailor while he abused government contracts, and contractors; that he aimed to be Secretary at War while he despised placemen’.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes. Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 72. Italics in original.

<sup>103</sup> For the rivalry between York and Kent, see A D Harvey, *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century. Op. cit.*, pp. 233-240.

<sup>104</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes. Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. viii. Italics in original.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 3-4. Italics in original

<sup>106</sup> Anonymous (‘An Elector Of Westminster And One Of His Constituents’), *Adultery And Patriotism: A Short Letter To Sir Francis Burdett, Bart., MP, With A Long Postscript*. Third Edition. London: C Chapple, 1811, p. 9.

Clarke's cynical tone allowed her to say a good deal of things that a woman constrained by the need to maintain her respectability (and therefore to respect boundaries of polite discourse) might find difficult to articulate. For example, she was able to offer a number of suggestive details in support of a claim that Wardle was as sexually profligate as the Duke himself, keeping a mistress as well as a wife. Denying that she had ever slept with Wardle herself, Clarke affirmed that:

Our acquaintance was merely of a political nature, and only had for its object the business which came before the House of Commons. Indeed Col. WARDLE was too much absorbed in love of his *fair mistress* and the great work in which he had embarked, to think of anything *besides* her and the Duke of YORK's destruction; and I doubt not, but the reader will think with me, that between *love and war*, he had quite enough to engage the *tender* as well as the *malignant* passions of his soul.<sup>107</sup>

Clarke's worldly tone and the substantial charges that she made are picked up in Sarah Green's Minerva Press novel *The Reformist!!*, published in 1810. It describes the career of Percival Ellingford, a country gentleman turned social reformer, on his first visit to London. At the beginning of the novel, Ellingford is a fanatical Methodist, but he loses his faith when he learns that his religious mentor, Mr Tyler, is a sexually profligate hypocrite who has fathered an illegitimate child. Making what now seems an inaccurate and misleading analogy between the two main movements which involved the working classes in early nineteenth century England, Green argues that both radicalism and methodism involve precisely the same kind of Jacobinical, anti-constitutional, anti-monarchical feeling. When he arrives in London at the time of the jubilee, Percival is as outraged by the loyalist illuminations as he will later be scandalized by old corruption: 'What is an *earthly* King to thee? Make thy peace with the King of Heaven, before whom thy age and infirmities will shortly cause thee to appear'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 61-2.

<sup>108</sup> Sarah Green, *The Reformist!! A Serio-Comic Political Novel In Two Volumes*. London: Minerva Press, 1810, Vol. 1, p. 182.

In society, Ellingford meets 'Sir Frederic Burrett' and 'Mr Rawdell', fresh from the Clarke affair, and is soon converted to political reform. Green has little time for the radical scandalmongering in which these figures are involved, arguing that it evidences an inherently unrealistic faith in the perfectibility of human institutions:

when a man purposely involves himself in a maze of doubt and perplexity, he is sure to lose himself- especially if he expects to find perfection in erring, mutable man; and when he imagines he shall find any church or state void of corruption, bribery, and abuse, he will certainly be disappointed. The constant idea that things might be better if there was a thorough reform, is an egregious mistake; for no *human* plans or institutions, were ever *perfect*.<sup>109</sup>

Those seeking to provoke moral outrage by drawing attention to corrupt behaviour are simply deluded idealists, who do more harm than good in their frenzy to reform. Green resolutely refuses to be shocked by such claims, instead arguing that all ranks in society have their own problems: the lower ranks are idle, the middle are hypocritical or privately profligate, and the aristocracy, openly dissolute. Nor can moral leadership be expected from the royals:

Those who find fault with the conduct of princes, entertain a much higher opinion of them than *I* do: they seem to expect to find them *more* than men, and that they are to be entirely free from error; whereas, from the education they receive, and which never will be administered to them free of adulation by their preceptors, they become self-willed and opinionated; they then rush early into the world, in the most ardent season of youth, have passions and inclinations in common with other men, and they naturally ask themselves- '*To what purpose am I a prince, if I cannot indulge those propensities of nature, or experience a few of those pleasures, the meanest of my father's subjects can enjoy uncontrouled?*'<sup>110</sup>

In the notion that princes are actually rather less laudable than the ordinary man there is clearly no attempt to excuse or palliate the failings of the Duke. But Green is equally cutting about radical claims to moral superiority, arguing that Wardle has been the 'companion of a notorious woman; and not only culpable in his *connexion* with her, but he had acted worse- he had

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 19.



promised to befriend her- he had broken his word!'.<sup>111</sup> Like Clarke, Green argues that the moralism of the radicals concealed the fact that they were nothing more than a self-interested faction, grasping for political power. In her eyes, 'Sir Frederic Burrett's' patriotism is motivated by concealed interests: 'there was something sly and sinister in his eye, which looked as if hidden and *selfish* designs had some share in his proceedings, as well as his country's good'.<sup>112</sup> Later on, it becomes clear that the radicals simply aim to gain for themselves the emoluments they strip from others, as Green repeats a now-familiar claim: 'when Rawdell gets to be at the head of the War Office, he will not only save the government some thousands, but he will bestow those spare thousands – aye, and many more too, amongst his own friends'.<sup>113</sup>

Green's loyalism is grounded upon the argument that any project to alter the status quo stems from quixotic idealism. Her novel sets itself against scandal, counselling a resignation to the flawed state of the world which denudes exposure of its sensationalism. In fact, the only people guarding moral standards in Green's London are middle class women who are not directly involved in the web of corruption. Ellingford's moral fall can be measured by the extent of the repugnance he inspires in his first love, Charlotte Pembroke, and he is only saved from the consequences of his involvement in reform by the intervention of another woman, Charlotte Tyler. When he tries to blow his brains out the pistol misfires, but rather than wounding him fatally, *à la Werther*, the report brings Miss Tyler running to his room. Unlike Goethe's Charlotte, who is beautiful, this girl is plain, but her self-sacrificing, morally upright nature and her real common sense soon win Percival's heart. When the pair retire to the country together at the end of the novel, they take Charlotte's father's illegitimate child with them, in token of their newfound resignation to the imperfections of the world, and their future resolve never to meddle with dangerously innovative schemes.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 194-5

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 232.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1., p. 230.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 149.

Other attempts to besmirch the radical cause worked from the premise that the radicals were Jacobins, rather than the tools of an aristocratic faction. *Adultery and Patriotism* connects the philandering of Wardle and Francis Burdett with their politics: ‘your patriotism...not only goes to ameliorate the condition of the people, but to encrease their number; and, not content with being the *friend* of the whole population, you seek to be a *father* to half of it’.<sup>114</sup> An indecorous degree of identification with the people leads directly to sex scandal. Furthermore, in the eyes of this anonymous author, Burdett’s hypocrisy, in failing to uphold the moral standards that he and his party had used to criticize the Duke’s behaviour signalled deeper inconsistencies in his political doctrine

Adultery, Sir, is not more unlike Matrimonial Fidelity than your pretended Reform is dissimilar to Revolution; but, while in domestic life you preach up the one and practice the other, why may you not be just as hypocritical in your political career?<sup>115</sup>

Hidden, scandalous sexual transgressions signal hidden, seditious political motives.

Such charges were given added weight by the evidence of Clarke. With some inconsistency, she alleged that the radicals were not only secretly involved in an aristocratic conspiracy involving the Duke of Kent, but were also a deadly serious band of revolutionary conspirators, who aimed at nothing less than the total subversion of the status quo. Seizing upon the radical language of scandalous revelations, she promised her public

a complete exposure of those political Impostors, who, *under a mask of public virtue*, have aimed at nothing but the subversion of that *constitutional fabric*, which has for ages afforded *more freedom* to the human character, than any other nation in the known *Universe!*<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Anonymous ‘An Elector Of Westminster And One Of His Constituents’, *Adultery and Patriotism*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>116</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. xi. Italics in original.

However, whereas the author of *Adultery and Patriotism* relied on the relationship between sexual and political hypocrisy to accomplish this, Clarke focused her attention on expounding the more concrete connections between Wardle's cause and a group of unrespectable radicals, including blackmailers, hack journalists, and radical pamphleteers, some of whom were already known to the government.

Iain McCalman's meticulous historical detective work has uncovered the fact that figures from the radical underworld were deeply involved in the Clarke affair. McCalman focuses particularly on the contribution of Jacob Rey, a.k.a. 'Jew' King, a notorious moneylender and blackmailer, who was involved in publicizing and financing Wardle's case.<sup>117</sup> However, the wealth of empirical detail in McCalman's book leaves no room for him to consider the very different levels of public awareness accorded to different types of ultra-radical activity. For example, Rey's activities in 1809 were not known merely to a circle of government spies; rather, Clarke herself recognized that raising awareness of his relationship with Wardle could have a powerful negative impact on the reception of the reformer's arguments:

Colonel WARDLE was *greatly pushed for money*, and as I have since understood from good *authority*, was raising the *circulating medium* through the influence of all the *celebrated* money-lenders in London, particularly the *Jew King*, who *prides himself*, as I shall presently shew, in *bringing his friend* Colonel WARDLE, into *public notice!!!*- by the *force and energy* of his *writings*, in a Sunday Paper, called *The British Guardian*, which is honoured by the editorship of that *virtuous*, but *notorious* gentleman!!!- of whom many persons in town would have the *confidence* to say-

“Oh, Mr King! libel me with all things but, thy *praise!!!*”<sup>118</sup>

As Clarke's account makes very clear, King's respectability was in doubt, and Wardle's reliance on him as the provider of two types of 'circulating medium' – a newspaper and economic capital – was bound to damage the M.P.'s

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<sup>117</sup> McCalman, *Radical Underworld*. *Op. cit.* pp. 31-42.

‘creditworthiness’ in both senses of the term. Wardle’s reliance on the notorious ‘Jew King’ transforms him from disinterested patriot to the servile dependent of a dangerously subversive individual. Furthermore, the Wardle-King connection helped Clarke to connect the 1809 affair with dubious evidentiary methodology. King was the proprietor of scandal sheets, which were associated with blackmail, unscrupulous methods of investigation, as well as a titillating form of publicity serving prurient public interest. By relying on similar methods to establish his case against the Duke, Wardle had collapsed the boundaries between scurrilous journalism and parliamentary politics. Furthermore, by asking his wife to handle and arrange the evidence gathered in this manner, Wardle had confused the proper boundaries of public and private spheres, and male and female roles within them:

Mrs. Wardle’s dwelling became a repository for a *mixture* of all kinds of *truth* and *falsehood*, which *misery*, *malice*, and party *furor*, could rake together for McCullum, the foreman of these Political Scavengers, who, depositing his load at the feet of his mistress, she began to *sort* and *separate* the *rubbish* for its different *intended purposes*.<sup>119</sup>

The gender ambivalence which circulated around Clarke and the Duke is here transferred to the reformers, as the domestic home becomes the sphere of public work, and the non-working wife becomes the lowest kind of labourer, a dustheap muck-raker, sifting her way through all of the sexually suggestive ‘rubbish’ that the radicals can gather.

But King was not the only disrespectable radical whose connection with the Clarke affair was exposed in *The Rival Princes*. Far more damaging to Wardle were the persistent rumours that two pamphleteers, Pierre McCallum and Peter Finnerty, had gathered material for the trial. McCallum was best known for a volume of travel writing, *Travels in Trinidad*, published in 1805, which, motivated by the ‘hatred which a FREE-BORN BRITON must ever bear towards a system of tyranny’, exposed the brutality and misconduct of Thomas

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<sup>118</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. *Op. cit.* Vol 1, pp. 163-4. Clarke’s mentioning the *British Guardian* in her 1810 memoirs suggests that the paper was founded before 1811, the date when McCalman suggests that its run began. See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*. *Op. cit.* p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. *Op. Cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 34. Italics in original.

Picton as governor of the island.<sup>120</sup> His interest in using exposure to counter corruption was clearly longstanding: in 1810, he published *Le Livre Rouge*, one of many 'Red Books' designed to provoke public indignation by giving details of the way in which public money was being spent on civil list pensions. Quoting the 1790s radical author of *The Jockey Club*, Charles Piggott, in his introduction, McCallum argues that scandal was a politically legitimate weapon to use against adversaries, since, in the wake of the American wars, Parliament itself had sought to publish details of places and pensions: 'in the attempt to regulate the civil list and prevent the same from being in arrear for the future, it was endeavoured to obviate the excess of such grants, by limiting their amount and their abuse, *by giving publicity to them*'.<sup>121</sup>

Clarke's *The Rival Princes* refers explicitly to McCallum's radical past, reminding the reader that he is 'the *American Spy*'.<sup>122</sup> In her account, after writing a pamphlet supporting the Duke of Kent, McCallum was employed as a jack of all trades against the Duke of York, and had personally undertaken the task of spying on the Prince's conduct at the house of another of his mistresses. However, according to Clarke, McCallum was not above blackmailing those who paid him: she stated that he had expected her 'to make him a *handsome reward, as he first found me out*, which if I neglected to do, he was *determined to prevent me* from having the annuity- that he would BLOW UP THE WHOLE SET OF US; that it was an *infamous* plot, and THAT HE WAS ACQUAINTED WITH THE WHOLE AFFAIR!!!'.<sup>123</sup> In his posthumously published, autobiographical rejoinder to *The Rival Princes*, *The Rival Queens* (1810), McCallum completely denied all of these charges, arguing that his threat to expose all the circumstances of the affair had been motivated by Clarke's unfeminine behaviour, and had been later twisted to suit her thesis that the radicals were involved in a sinister conspiracy:

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<sup>120</sup> Pierre F McCallum, *Travels In Trinidad During The Months Of February, March And April 1803 In A Series Of Letters Addressed To A Member Of The Imperial Parliament Of Great Britain*. Liverpool: Printed For The Author, 1805, p. ix.

<sup>121</sup> Pierre F McCallum, *Le Livre Rouge; Or, A New And Extraordinary Red-Book; Containing A List Of The Pensions In England, Scotland And Ireland*. London: J Blacklock, 1810, p. vi.

<sup>122</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. *Op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 10. The pamphlet's derision of McCallum makes McCallum's claim that he actually ghost wrote this text for Clarke rather difficult to credit. See McCallum, *Radical Underworld*. *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

on inquiry, I was informed you had, in a variety of instances indulged your wit maliciously at my expence. That you kept me out of charity, and gave me £10, to keep your name out of the newspapers, in a trial you had in the Court of Common Pleas, together with other circumstances equally false and disgusting to my feelings; on hearing such reports, I stated to Sir Richard Phillips, that I thought your conduct not only extraordinary, but ungrateful, and on that account, *public justice would oblige me to publish everything that came within my knowledge, respecting the late Investigation.*<sup>124</sup>

A second figure, whose involvement in the scandal did much to support the claim that Wardle was involved with Jacobinism was Peter Finnerty. Though largely forgotten today, Finnerty was something of a minor radical celebrity in the 1800s, famous enough to be condemned along with other radical luminaries by the author of *Adultery and Patriotism*: ‘may all such Patriots be consigned, like Mr. William Cobbett, Mr. Gale Jones, and Mr Peter Finnerty, to the care and custody of the keepers of his Majesty’s prisons, or their deputies’.<sup>125</sup> In 1797, when living in Ireland, Finnerty published *The Press*, a national newspaper started by Arthur O’Connor. After an article appeared on the case of William Orr, a farmer accused of administering the United Irish Oath, Finnerty was tried for seditious libel. He refused to name the writer of the piece, and, as a result, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment and a period in the pillory, which he served on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1797, surrounded by a gang of his admirers. These exploits made him a reputation as a republican journalist, which caused James Gordon, author of *Thoughts on Libels*, to attack him as one of the ‘*Chiefs of the Pandemonium*’ of the scandalous press, an evil spirit, who had been ‘raised (it was, indeed for a short period) to a very conspicuous station, under the Irish Government.... *he stood in the Pillory, in Dublin*’.<sup>126</sup> Finnerty would find himself in the dock for libel again in 1811, when he accused Castlereagh of torture. On that occasion, he defended himself with an eloquent, head-on attack on the rationale of the law, repeatedly insisting that he should not

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<sup>123</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 64.

<sup>124</sup> Pierre F McCallum, *The Rival Queens, Or Which Is The Darling? Containing The Secret History Of The Origin Of The Late Investigation In Answer To Mrs Clarke’s “Rival Princes”*. London: Blacklock 1810, p. 54. Italics in original.

<sup>125</sup> Anonymous ‘An Elector Of Westminster And One Of His Constituents’, *Adultery and Patriotism*. *Op. cit.*, p. 31

<sup>126</sup> Gordon, *Thoughts on Libels*. *Op. cit.* p. 41 and p. 54 respectively. Italics in original.

be punished for his words, because they were true: 'I ask you in the name of all that is sacred, how can you reconcile it to yourselves to send me to a prison for uttering the truth?'.<sup>127</sup> Though the court impatiently rejected this plea, the fact that Finnerty's case aroused considerable public sympathy suggests that, by 1811, the tide was already beginning to turn against definitions of libel based on sedition, in favour of arguments based on truth or falsity.

Finnerty's involvement in the Clarke affair was at least as well publicized as McCallum's. His name was mentioned in parliament at an early stage of the proceedings, and on February 9<sup>th</sup>, a petition in which he asked to be called as a witness was placed before the house. In this document, he argued that:

in the course of the examination now carrying on before the hon. house, relative to h.r.h. the Commander in Chief, his [Finnerty's] name has been frequently introduced, and that questions have been put, implying suspicions which may produce an impression injurious to him, upon a prosecution instituted against him, by his majesty's Attorney-General, and which is expected to be very shortly brought to trial.<sup>128</sup>

Clarke alleged that his participation dated back to his employment as ghost-writer of Hogan's pamphlet, and that he had abused his influence with the *Morning Chronicle* to insert material favourable to the radical cause.<sup>129</sup> By suggesting that he was a longstanding friend of Wardle (though the M.P. had desperately tried to deny the acquaintance in public), she was able to argue that the logic of debate and investigation espoused by the reformers was nothing more than the revolutionary scandalmongering of old blackguard Jacobins, eliding the difference between arguments against 'old corruption' and gradual parliamentary reform on the basis of upholding the constitution, and Jacobin

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<sup>127</sup> Anonymous, *Report Of The Proceedings In The Court Of King's Bench In The Case Of The King Versus Peter Finnerty For A Libel On The Right Hon Lord Viscount Castlereagh, Thursday Feb 7 1811...Extracted From The Statesman Feb 8 1811*. Bristol: Philip Rose, 1811, p. 5. Interestingly, this report contains a speech by Finnerty which connects his work with that of McCallum in exposing Picton: '... I well remember, when Mr Dallas was defending the tortures of Picton in Trinidad, on the precedent of those inflicted in Ireland, the Judge stopped him, by the assertion, that there was no punishment inflicted in that country but by court-martial', p. 8. Unfortunately this incidence of the court being incorrect on a previous occasion did not help Finnerty.

<sup>128</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 12, February 9 1809, Col. 441.

attacks on the social order, which aimed at sudden revolution.<sup>130</sup> It had proved simply too difficult to distinguish a ‘constitutional’ use of publicity to demand gradual reform from a Jacobin manipulation of scandal against the upper orders for the purposes of revolution.

### *Investigation Concluded*

However, one other factor helped to prevent radicals from channelling the energy generated by the scandal into parliamentary reform. The very fact that there had been an investigation into the affairs of a prominent member of the royal family, the proceedings of which were heard publicly and widely reported in the press, seemed to prove that the unreformed British parliament was already well equipped to deal with corrupt practices, and to protect the interests of the people against the encroachments of the ruling class. Earl Temple, praising the system as it existed, quoted Lord Burleigh’s apothegm: ‘England can never be ruined while its parliament continues to do its duty’.<sup>131</sup> While the model of publicity that the radicals espoused proved very effective at the beginning of the scandal, ensuring that full and frank public investigation occurred, towards the end, it created a sense of complacency which deprived the surge of radical activity of much of its momentum.

Not only was the investigation designed, like Bentham’s trial, to produce a clear, unambiguous narrative of the Duke’s real behaviour, but it had itself become a narrative, structured around the interplay of obstruction and disclosure, questioning and response, mystery and unveiling, enigma and resolution, with its own internal structure and dramatic incidents, occurring over a defined time period as the result of the actions of a group of parliamentary ‘characters’. Despite the ‘story’ which the parliamentary enquiry had revealed, when the narrative framework provided by the investigation had reached a point of closure, it became difficult for radicals to maintain the same degree of pressure on similar instances of corruption elsewhere in the system. Once there

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<sup>129</sup> Clarke, *The Rival Princes*. Vol. 1, pp. 95-6.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 25-7.

<sup>131</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 13, March 15 1809, Col. 577.



were no more juicy revelations for the public to sink their teeth into, public interest in the Clarke affair faded rapidly.

The fate of the radicals who sought to expose the Duke of York's misdeeds in the Mary Ann Clarke affair is an excellent example of the way in which scandal could work as both a highly effective, and an extremely treacherous political tool. Bringing the abuses within the system to light allowed the reformers to develop a compelling argument connecting Old Corruption with the unreformed state of Parliament in a manner which was readily comprehensible to the general public. For a brief moment, it also allowed them to establish themselves in the popular gaze as a party who were untainted by the pursuit of personal interest, and superior to the factional strife of parliamentary politics.

However, when the Duke's supporters counter-attacked, scandal also proved a formidable weapon in their hands. Most obviously, by alleging sexual misdemeanours against Wardle and Burdett, those against reform cast the radicals as hypocritical political opportunists, which gave credibility to the suggestion that a Jacobin conspiracy lurked behind their charges. However, there was also a sense in which scandal polluted Wardle by mere association. Regardless of the truth or falsehood of his assertions, the very fact that he had stooped to soil his hands with the muck of Old Corruption rendered him a suspicious character. When this was apparently confirmed by the revelation that his campaign had been aided by disreputable ultra-radicals, the sense that there was a difference between the 'disinterested' motives of the radical and the malign pursuit of interest that he was criticizing began to evaporate. Yet again, scandal had evidenced a troubling tendency to collapse the general into the particular. The abstract, radical case for a reform of Parliament started to buckle as the specific details of the Clarke affair dried up, and the revelation of way in which Wardle engineered and managed the scandal defeated his attempt to cast himself as a neutral MP with the people's best interests at heart.

However, when the nation was gripped by royal scandal again in 1820-1, the Clarke affair of 1809 provided a valuable reference point for radicals.

Several radical pro-Carolinean pamphlets referred to Wardle's campaign to highlight the longstanding problem which corruption had posed, while the prominence of the Duke of York amongst the supporters of the Prince of Wales led to a revival of the charges against him. In *A Frown from the Crown* (1820), the brow of one of the heads of the 'hydra' of Old Corruption is emblazoned with "Mistress C—".<sup>132</sup> The poem *The Magic Lantern, Or Green Bag Plot Laid Open* (1820) criticizes the Duke for showing the Queen no mercy, despite the fact that he was hardly untarnished by scandal himself.<sup>133</sup> As counsel for the Queen, Brougham made a similar point in Parliament on August 17 1820, the occasion of the second reading of the Bill of Pains and Penalties, using the Clarke affair to demand why a bill of degradation had not been passed against the Duke of York after he had openly confessed to committing adultery.<sup>134</sup> However, as I shall show in the next chapter, while the scandal of 1820-1 mobilized a tremendous amount of radical energy, it proved just as difficult to convert interest in the outcome of the scandal into a campaign for reform as it had been to transform interest in the investigation concerning the Duke of York into a wider radical movement.

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<sup>132</sup> Anonymous, *A Frown From the Crown Or The Hydra Destroyed*. London: John Fairburn, 1820, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> Anonymous ('A Wild Irish Woman'), *The Magic Lantern, Or Green Bag Plot Laid Open; A Poem*. London: S W Fores, 1820, p. 32.

<sup>134</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 2 (New Series), August 17, 1820, col. 646.

Chapter Four:

'A Plot Improbable And Without Unity':  
Publicity, Politics and Narrative in  
The Queen Caroline Scandal

George IV's attempt to divorce his wife, which precipitated what is now referred to as the Queen Caroline scandal of 1820-21, triggered perhaps the greatest mobilization of anti-establishment feeling in the early nineteenth century. For years before the Queen's trial began in 1820, scandal had been circulating about Caroline. In 1806, her behaviour had been the subject of a 'delicate investigation', which returned to haunt everyone concerned in 1813-14, when, in the context of arguments between George and Caroline over access to Princess Charlotte, Caroline's Whig supporters published 'The Book', a report written by Ellenborough, Erskine and Grenville substantially exonerating the Princess of Wales from the accusation of adultery.<sup>1</sup> Further, for several years before the trial really began in August 1820, George IV had been gathering evidence clandestinely against Caroline. He had established the Milan Commission especially for this purpose, and had laid papers about her behaviour before his government in January 1818 and again July 1819. By January 1820, he had managed to get his law officers to agree that a Parliamentary Bill for Divorce could be an appropriate instrument to use against the Queen, and shortly after the death of his father in January 1820, he went on a public offensive against her, removing her name from the Liturgy. After a period of bargaining to keep the Queen out of the country failed, Caroline departed for England in early June, and was greeted enthusiastically by the people on her arrival. Shortly afterwards, it was proposed that a Secret Commission should once again investigate the evidence, this time to see if it was sufficient to proceed with a more public trial. After this controversial tribunal decided that there was enough information to proceed against Caroline, she was put on trial before Parliament in August 1820.

Large and socially mixed crowds thronged the streets of London to cheer the Queen when she travelled to the Houses of Parliament, forcing illuminations in her favour, smashing the windows of her antagonists, and occasionally even attacking innocent individuals whom they suspected of being witnesses against

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<sup>1</sup> The publication 'The Book' was instigated by Spencer Perceval and suppressed by the Prince of Wales in 1806. For a good discussion of these earlier episodes see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London 1795-1840*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988 repr. 1998, pp. 41-2 and Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the*

her. More formal processions, organized by individuals from all quarters of the kingdom, assembled to wait on Caroline in order to deliver public addresses expressing support for her cause. These were often elaborate spectacles, mixing the traditional symbolic culture of the guild and the rituals and iconography of popular protest (e.g. the cuckold's horns, white favours for purity, and the burning in effigy of the Queen's enemies) with a well-established radical visual idiom (for example, laurel crowns and banners to 'Liberty').<sup>2</sup> As Theodore Hook pointed out in the loyalist *John Bull*, the overall effect could be confusing, both visually and ideologically:

what argument can be used with those, who, in their zeal, mingle in the Queen's procession to St. Paul's, bearing *horns* upon which are tied *white* ribbands? What effect can reasoning have with people, who, having printed handkerchiefs- in commemoration of the Queen's innocence, representing on them the House of Peers, as it appeared during the late proceedings, place a colossal portrait of Bergami over the throne of England?<sup>3</sup>

Hook was unwilling to read the jumbled emblems of guilt and innocence which could be seen on the streets as evidence of the participation of diverse social groups in the affair. Instead, he preferred to argue that the Queen's supporters were nothing more than an uneducated mob, whose ignorance about the real distinctions between virtue and vice could be seen in the chaotic visual imagery they employed. Furthermore, their inclination to place a representation of the Queen's lover over the throne indicated a dangerous, latent revolutionary energy in their protest, which, if left unchecked, threatened to overturn legitimate succession. By associating Caroline's cause with the lower orders, with radicalism, and with an inability to distinguish between right and wrong, Hook

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*British Constitution*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, especially pp. 177-207.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed contemporary account of the iconography of popular protest see Robert Huish *Memoirs of Her Late Majesty Caroline, Queen of Britain*. London: T Kelly, 1821. For a good historical account see John Stevenson 'The Queen Caroline Affair' in *London in the Age of Reform*. Ed. J Stevenson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, pp. 117-148 Iowarth Prothero's *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London: John Gast and His Times*. Folkestone: Dawson, 1979 is also very informative. Flora Fraser's biography of Queen Caroline gives an excellent detailed narrative of the whole scandal, see *The Unruly Queen: The Life of Queen Caroline*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> *John Bull*. December 17 1821, No. 1, p. 4.

was endeavouring to reduce its respectability, thus dissuading the middle classes from lending the Queen their support.

In number seventy three of his '*Common Places*', published in the *Literary Examiner* in the autumn of 1823, William Hazlitt tried to explain why the Queen Caroline scandal had been able to excite a thoroughly popular feeling throughout the country, at a time when acts of flagrant oppression could arouse only a transient and impotent indignation. Just as Hook noted the muddled visual imagery of the Caroline protests, Hazlitt remarks that the discourses swirling around the Queen's cause are an odd mixture of 'the cant of loyalty, the cant of gallantry, and the cant of freedom'. However, rather than explaining this 'inextricable confusion' in terms of working class stupidity, he argues that Caroline was able to mobilize such crowds because she represented several things to several different groups of people:

She was a Queen – all the loyal and well-bred bowed to her name; she was a wife- all the women took the alarm; she was at variance with the lawful sovereign- all the free and independent Electors of Westminster and London were up in arms.<sup>4</sup>

The popularity of Caroline's cause was not, therefore, the expression of a 'general will', which could only emerge when particular interests were put to one side. Rather, it was the result of her appeal to several different groups, all of whom saw in the Queen an embodiment of their own grievances.

Whereas Hook saw organized conspiracy in the confusion, Hazlitt suggested the very opposite. The ultimate result of the coming together of these different parties with their different agendas was not a genuine extension of libertarian sympathies into new social groups, but the creation of a reactionary counter-theatre of royalty. Caroline's familiarity in deigning to receive addresses from people who would ordinarily have had no contact whatsoever with the royals ultimately encouraged enthusiasm for the monarchy, which, in turn, upheld the values of the status quo:

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<sup>4</sup> 'Common Places' in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*. Centenary Edition. Ed. P P Howe. London: J M Dent, 1933, Vol. 20, all quotations p. 136.

The spirit of faction was half merged in the spirit of servility. There was a rag-fair of royalty- every one carried his own paints and patches into the presence of the new Lady of Loretto- there was a sense of homage due, of services and countenance bestowed on Majesty. This popular farce had all the charm of *private theatricals*.<sup>5</sup>

For Hazlitt, the Queen Caroline scandal encouraged a kind of ‘cockney’ loyalism. Rather than criticizing royalist discourse, radicals played at being courtiers. If the Queen’s followers bestowed ‘services and countenance’ upon her, they also lost their independence, personal as well as intellectual, in seeking validation from her. They humbled themselves before all of the paraphernalia of power, submerging their reaction to everyday oppression in favour of an artificial outrage on behalf of the Queen. Not only did this uphold the value and the dignity of monarchy, it also negated radical autonomy from the court and the Crown. Even the truly ‘doubtful’ nature of the Queen’s case was lost in the enthusiasm, as guilt and innocence, truth and falsehood became confused in a surge of sympathetic public feeling.<sup>6</sup>

In ‘On Public Opinion’, published in the *London Weekly Review* in 1828, Hazlitt reworked the terms of this critique, developing the notion that public opinion was a type of trivializing theatre. The essay begins with a discussion of the malign effects of public opinion on individual relationships. Hazlitt argues that it is almost impossible for most people to sustain friendship with a person whose reputation is damaged in the opinion of the world, even when they know him or her to be innocent. As the essay progresses, this discussion is contextualized in an increasingly explicit political framework, as Hazlitt begins to argue that public opinion is the result of social coercion rather than the workings of intellect or individual judgment. The vast majority of people, he states, believe what they think to be acceptable opinions, whether they think that they are truthful or not:

It is the loudness of the organ with which it is pronounced, the stentorian lungs of the multitude; the number of voices that take it up and repeat it,

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 137, italics in original.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 136.

because others have done so; the rapid flight and the impalpable nature of common fame, that makes it a desperate undertaking for any individual to inquire into or arrest the mischief that, in the deafening buzz or loosened roar of laughter or of indignation, renders it impossible for the still small voice of reason to be heard, and leaves no other course to honesty or prudence than to fall flat on the face before it as before the pestilential blast of the Desert, and wait till it has passed over.<sup>7</sup>

The way that words tumble over one another in this enormously long and syntactically complex sentence, suggests the unstoppable, inexorable power of public opinion, which is able to bury the phrase ‘the still small voice of reason’ two thirds of the way through the paragraph. Public opinion encourages a state of affairs in which one’s status in the eyes of others becomes far more important than one’s actually being correct. Just as the radicals in the Caroline affair gave up their beliefs and their sense of independent selfhood to kiss the hand of the monarch, public opinion encouraged people to abandon individual judgment for social conformity. Hence Hazlitt’s complaint, ‘Public opinion is not seldom a farce, equal to any acted upon the stage’, which signals his continued indebtedness to Rousseau’s attacks on the theatricality of the modern city, but also looks forward, in its criticism of the anti-individualistic tendency of conformity, to Mill’s onslaught against conventionality in *On Liberty*.<sup>8</sup>

Where Bentham placed his faith in the ability of the press to act as a progressive social force, disseminating knowledge and thereby improving the public’s judgment, Hazlitt voices scepticism, arguing that newspapers and journals simply provided their readers with ready-made opinions, which their inherent laziness made them all too ready to accept without question. Worse still, because the press was controlled by the powerful, this process of spoon-feeding the public had an inevitably disempowering and reactionary political effect, constructing a public that was quiescent and uncritical. Where scandal was concerned, this was particularly problematic, because the inability of the vast majority of people to question what they read, combined with the cautiousness of the candid when it came to challenging a false rumour and the malevolence of those ready to believe anything against anyone, meant that

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<sup>7</sup> ‘On Public Opinion’ in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt. Op. cit.*, Vol. 17, pp. 303-8, this citation p. 305.



reputations were effectively placed in the hands of hireling writers. Hazlitt singles out the scandalmonger Theodore Hook as the archetypal example of a Grub Street scribbler in the pay of Tories who played on public nervousness about social status:

They [the public] know that the John Bull, for instance, is a hoax, a humbug, an impudent imposture, got up, week by week, to puff whom it pleases, to bully whom it pleases, to traduce whom it pleases, without any principle but a hint from its patrons, or without a pretence to any other principle. Do they believe in the known lie, the gross ribaldry, the foul calumny, the less on that account? They believe the more in it... The greater the profligacy, the effrontery, the servility, the greater the faith. Strange! that the British public (whether at home or abroad) should shake their heads at the Lady of Loretto, and repose deliciously on Mr Theodore Hook!<sup>9</sup>

Like a bubble stock, scandal can circulate, gaining credit, without any reference at all to the gold standard of truth. As belief becomes a matter of social mores, rather than of evidence and justification, even exposing the financial and political interests behind the lying journal is no longer an adequate defence against defamation. The reference to the 'Lady of Loretto', which links both of Hazlitt's essays under discussion here, allows him to suggest that faith in the press has become a modern and peculiarly Protestant form of old Catholic superstition, as reason is bypassed in favour of a reverence for the printed word. Just as the Queen Caroline affair enabled the substitution of a glittering, but ultimately reactionary form of theatre for true radicalism, in this essay the public reading-room ceases to be a site for resistance to authority, and a space for intellectual self-development, and becomes an analogue to the Catholic church, which Hazlitt associates with superficially showy forms and ceremonies which serve to fill up 'the void of the mind', instead of encouraging more searching and politically dissident forms of self-exploration.<sup>10</sup>

However, radicals had great difficulties in sustaining the momentum which the Caroline affair had created. When the scandal imploded in 1821, the energy of popular fervour rapidly trickled away, leaving the movement for

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 305.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 307.

reform fragmented and weak. In an attempt to explain this change, Thomas Laqueur has turned to Hazlitt's complex argument about the problematic tendency of public opinion to be seduced by forms of popular theatre.<sup>11</sup> However, Laqueur ignores the Rousseauvian inflection of Hazlitt's references to theatricality, which allows the term to refer to social forces tending towards artificiality and inauthenticity as well as actual dramatic representations, instead taking his allusions to drama literally, to argue that that it was the transformation of the Queen Caroline affair into theatre which allowed the triumph of 'dramatic but ultimately trivial narratives' over 'potentially more dangerous discourse' in the early 1820s.<sup>12</sup> His argument relies heavily on the three main assumptions: firstly, that aesthetic representations are, by and large, reactionary in tendency; secondly, that the aesthetic genre which dominated aesthetic representations of the scandal was melodrama; and thirdly, that melodrama constituted an *especially* reactionary, though highly appealing genre, which denuded Caroline's story of its radical tendency, transforming it into narratives that were capable of containing the threat that the scandal might otherwise have posed to the political system.<sup>13</sup>

There is much that is perceptive about Laqueur's assessment of the Caroline affair. It is certainly true that the scandal was frequently compared to a drama by contemporaries, and that melodramatic elements can be discovered in many of the poems and pamphlets, as well as the dramas written about the affair. However, there are also major problems with his thesis. Firstly, the assumption that aestheticization is a generally reactionary process is highly dubious. As I shall show, many of the pamphlets that explored the affair as a kind of theatrical drama were *explicitly radical* in their tone, and used dramatic metaphors to link the Caroline scandal to a wider raft of radical measures. Secondly, subsequent historians have questioned the idea that melodrama was a peculiarly backward-looking form. Both Anna Clark and Iain McCalman have

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 307.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas W Laqueur, 'The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV', *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 54: No. 3, September 1982, pp. 417-366.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 418.

<sup>13</sup> Laqueur's description of melodrama as a form full of 'ironic comedy in which it is difficult to take either virtue or vice seriously' is highly questionable and suggests that he makes the mistake of bringing modern sensibilities to the form. *Ibid.*, p. 439.

explored the idea that the ‘fictional aesthetic’ of the affair actually ‘immeasurably increased’ the popular appeal of Caroline’s cause, the former making the salient point that the struggle between good and evil forces which was fundamental to melodrama was easily politicised to convey even the most ultra-radical of messages.<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, Laqueur tends to ignore the anti-establishment tendency of many of the straightforwardly populist representations, because they are not explicitly radical, and even ignores many of the radical pamphlets because they are not ultra-radical. Like Hazlitt, who ridiculed reformers who ‘hold up a paper Constitution as their shield, which the swords pierce through, and drink their heart’s blood’, he marginalizes the involvement of the constitutional reformers and their use of the scandal to highlight the need for parliamentary reform, instead exploring the scandal through the lens of ultra-radicalism.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Laqueur is drawn into making statements such as ‘the underlying issue of monarchy’s legitimacy was swept away in a tidal wave of gossip and bathos’, which miss the important fact that constitutional radicals combined their support for the Crown with a coherent and powerful challenge to the status quo in the form of demands for parliamentary reform and an end to Old Corruption.<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter, I want to suggest that there is a connection between the striking contemporary tendency to use theatrical metaphors to describe the scandal, and the tendency to regard the events of 1820-21 in Manichean moral terms (frequently associated with melodrama). However, I shall argue that this link is far more complicated than Laqueur suggests. In case after case, contemporaries describe the trial as drama as a way of drawing attention to the fact that it had been artificially engineered by the government. In other words, rather than diverting public attention away from a ‘radical’ message, much of the dramatic rhetoric surrounding the scandal was used to mount a

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<sup>14</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld. Op. cit.*, p. 176. Anna Clark ‘Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820’, *Representations*. No. 31, Summer 1990, pp. 47-68.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Common Places No. 81’ in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Op. cit.*, Vol. 20, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> Laqueur, ‘The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV’. *Op. cit.* p. 439. Jonathan Fulcher argues that the labelling of the episode as an ‘affair’ has led to an erroneous impression that its concerns were divorced from those of the main reform movement. See ‘The Loyalist Response to the Queen Caroline Agitation’, *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 34: No. 4, October 1995, pp. 481-201, especially pp. 481-3.

scathing, and explicitly radical critique of the government. To give just one example of this, *Modern Anecdotes of the New Green (Bag) Room* (1820) describes the Caroline affair as a stageplay in order to condemn those responsible for its 'production':

The critics who have sat in Judgment on this extraordinary production are filled with wonder that it was ever brought forward as it reflects neither credit or taste on the Readers of it, who ought to have too much judgement ever to have allowed a single representation of such obscene trash, but to have equally condemned it and its author to obscurity<sup>17</sup>

If the Queen Caroline affair was being played out on a stage, then it was bad theatre, which revolted the audience rather than entertaining them. As the above extract makes clear, the drama is so obviously 'obscene trash' that it should never have been licensed for performance. Criticizing the poor aesthetic judgment which could create or display such a drama becomes a way of censuring the poor political judgment of the government 'Readers', who, unable or unwilling to see the hollowness of the piece, insist that the investigation should go ahead.

The longstanding association of the stage with artifice and falsehood was a valuable tool for Caroline's adherents.<sup>18</sup> By describing the investigation as a drama, they could emphasize their belief that the whole scandal was an attempt by the King and the government to create a fictitious narrative of the Queen's guilt, to engineer a show-trial to condemn her. Theatrical rhetoric was able to deal with the spectacular, public elements of the scandal while avoiding the Benthamite suggestion that such publicity was necessarily truth-revealing. Indeed, time and time again, dramatic metaphors are used to suggest the very reverse: that the public were being deceived into believing that the investigation was frank and fair by sinister forces at work 'behind the scenes', stage-managing the drama in order to achieve a particular outcome. Radicals were not

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<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, *Modern Anecdotes Of The New Green (Bag) Room, Representing A List Of The Pieces Performed and Now Performing At The Theatre Royal, Cotton Garden*. London: Langham, 1820, p. 11

<sup>18</sup> See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1981 and Julie Carlson, 'Impositions of Form: Romantic Antitheatricalism and the Case against Particular Women', *ELH*. Vol. 60: No. 1, 1993, pp. 149-179

distracted by the superficial elements of theatre, as Laqueur suggests; rather, they used metaphors of surface to draw attention to hidden depths, suggesting that there was more to the scandal than met the public eye. In short, theatrical rhetoric gave a tremendous impetus to the argument that the Queen Caroline affair was an example of Old Corruption in action, as placemen and an unreformed parliament secretly endeavoured to blacken the reputation of a virtuous woman, violating truth and the wishes of the public in the process, in order to serve their own interests.

Instead of the investigation being a Benthamite process which removed obstacles in the way of truth, this discourse argued that it was a façade which was designed to obscure the real narrative of events of the case. Arguments about the theatricality of the scandal thus became arguments about plotting, in the dual sense of the term. Behind the narrative of events played out before the public was a conspiracy; the real story behind the scandal was that of a self-serving faction, constructing narratives which emphasized Caroline's guilt to serve their own interests. Brougham exploited this when began his defence of the Queen on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, accusing the government of 'getting up a story' against Caroline.<sup>19</sup> In a similar vein, *A Letter To The People Of England On Passing Events*, written during the course of the trial, argued that the disorganized state of the government's narrative not only made it impossible to commend at an aesthetic level, but indicated deeper political intrigue at work:

It is hardly a passing event, it is a passed one; a plot improbable and without unity; incidents disjointed and incredible; actors base and infamous, leave little doubt of the ultimate fate that awaits this eventful drama. It ought to have no second representation; I trust it will not.<sup>20</sup>

The language of aesthetic criticism, which allows the author to censure the gothic disjointedness and tortuous complexity of the government's narrative is here explicitly politicised to carry an overtly radical message.

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<sup>19</sup> See T C Hansard, *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time* (hereafter *Hansard*). London: T C Hansard and others. New Series. Vol. 3, October 3 1820, col. 114

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, *A Letter to the People of England Upon Passing Events*. London: T Dolby, 1820, p. 5.

So common did such rhetoric become in 1820-21, that it is possible to talk of antiestablishment feeling taking the form of a popular ‘prejudice against plot’. As I hope to show, the argument that the government was constructing convoluted and complex narratives to ensnare the Queen in a web of guilt was often harnessed to a Manichean moral reading of the scandal, in which the Queen figured as the embodiment of persecuted virtue. Melodrama as a form was peculiarly well suited to expressing both this sense of a struggle between absolute good and evil, and the sense of a vile conspiracy at work, since it had a well-established tradition of depicting villains who endeavour to coil compromising narratives around the virtuous heroine. And while the government and/or George IV were cast as evil schemers, Caroline became a figure who embodied a type of virtue that was resistant to narrative. Since she was good, there was simply nothing to tell about her; her ‘true’ story was static and uneventful. The strength of this rhetorical strategy was that it assumed the truth of Caroline’s innocence from the outset. If, as Peter Brooks has argued, the Manichean moral structure of melodrama lent the genre a sense of cosmic seriousness, depicting evil and virtue locked in a transcendental struggle for mastery, then very often, this struggle was played out as a battle between veracity and mendacity.<sup>21</sup> In a melodramatic framework, Caroline’s professed readiness to expose her conduct to the public gaze, her courting of publicity, and, above all, the attempts of the government to generate ‘alternative’ representations of her conduct could stand as irrefutable proof of her innocence, making further investigation unnecessary and thus closing down the ‘narrative’ of government persecution.

What follows is a detailed exploration of the ‘politics of plot’ which emerged during the Queen Caroline scandal. The first section explores debates about the mechanics of narrative construction, looking particularly closely at debates about the way evidence should be used, and the role of publicity in guaranteeing that a truthful account would emerge. The second discusses the relationship between virtue and plotting in more depth, exploring the manner in

which Caroline's cause became associated with a suspicion of narrative, while the third investigates the impact of the popular prejudice against plot on representations of the press in the scandal, focusing particular on its effect upon Benthamite discourses about the need for critical debate. Finally, the last segment looks at way that all of these issues combined to encourage an extraordinary degree of female participation in the scandal by legitimating affective responses to political debate, in a manner that allowed private feelings to ground political action.

## I

### *Evidence, Secrecy and the Construction of Narrative*

This long history of claims and counter-claims that surrounded Caroline meant that by 1820 her cause was already surrounded by sophisticated arguments about the conditions which needed to be met for a 'true' narrative of her guilt or innocence to emerge. Longstanding debates about the reliability of different types of evidence, and the proper degree of publicity which was needed to ensure fairness, helped to establish the parameters for discussion of the affair in 1820.<sup>22</sup> For example, one of the most pressing objections to the 1806 investigation was that a Secret Commission had been appointed to investigate the charges, with the result that the examinations were kept strictly private. This, combined with the fact that the Princess was kept in ignorance of the charges levelled against her for some time, led many writers to insist that that the affair was a conspiracy to gain the Prince an easy divorce, without allowing Caroline a say in the matter. For many of her supporters, the whole investigative procedure was unBritish, unmanly and unconstitutional, less fair even than then open, public trial granted to criminals before a court of law. As the author of *The Prince Of Wales: A Second Plain Letter To His Royal Highness* (1806) argued:

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<sup>21</sup> See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, passim

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, that such continuity could exist in spite of a major shift in the Prince's political allegiance between the 'delicate investigation' and the Queen's trial, so that Caroline's tended to be identified more with the Tories in 1806 and more with the Whigs in 1820, is testament to the strengthening of arguments about the value of publicity as a tool for overseeing government, but of the importance of public opinion as a force protecting truth.

Can her exalted rank, as your wife, elevate her above the laws, or deprive her of their sacred and unerring operation? Should it substitute in their place a mode of inquiry alike repugnant of the spirit as to the security an Englishman thinks he has, when he believes that every investigation of moral obliquity or civil wrong is openly made, fully examined, and freely discussed, in the face of the country? When moral turpitude- or moral rectitude is to be shewn, have we any process so fancifully worded, as to talk of a “delicate investigation?”<sup>23</sup>

In Benthamite fashion, the author points to the secrecy that enshrouded the investigative procedure as evidence that it was designed to construct a winding and false narrative of the Queen’s guilt, achieving the outcome required by sinister interests rather than truth.

Similar concerns about secrecy and publicity were echoed particularly vehemently in the first half of 1820. The debates on the establishment of the Secret Commission were laden with concerns about lack of publicity that would attend the workings of such a tribunal. The Earl of Liverpool, who first proposed a secret tribunal, argued that the ‘delicacy of the case’ necessitated private hearings,<sup>24</sup> but the Queen repeatedly addressed letters to both houses, demanding ‘an open investigation’, objecting to a secret tribunal as ‘a proceeding unknown to the law of the land, and a flagrant violation of all the principles of justice’.<sup>25</sup> Castlereagh endeavoured to assuage her anger, defending the idea of a secret commission on the grounds that it was designed not to reach a verdict on her guilt or innocence, but to determine whether there was adequate material for a prosecution.<sup>26</sup> However, the fact that Caroline herself was excluded from the Commission’s debates, and given no chance to air her side of the story, combined with the fact that its decisions clearly impacted upon public perceptions of her guilt or innocence, did little to answer accusations that the proceeding was unjust. In the Lords, concerns were expressed about the negative impact that would be produced in the public mind by a secret investigation. The Marquis of Lansdowne argued that public

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<sup>23</sup> ‘An Englishman’ (attr. James Paull), *The Prince of Wales. A Second Plain Letter to His Royal Highness*. London: privately printed, 1806, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 887.

<sup>25</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 906, see also col. 1329-30.



indignation would be inflamed by this ‘inconsistent mode of proceeding’ against the Queen,<sup>27</sup> while Lord Holland pointed out that such measures had led to the enactment of such repressive legislation that ‘a green bag and a secret committee were considered by the public as the prelude to the most monstrous displays of injustice, harshness and tyranny’.<sup>28</sup> By 1820, the Benthamite association of secrecy with clandestine wrongdoing was apparently well-established in the public mind.

While the establishment of a Secret Commission was viewed with trepidation in some quarters, private negotiations did not arouse the same degree of concern. Through most of June, it was hoped that an amicable settlement between the parties might be reached, as the potential of any investigation to generate an enormous amount of scandalous publicity was a concern never far from M.P.’s minds. In an elaborately rhetorical speech in the Commons Brougham referred back to the effect of the Clarke scandal, arguing that, as neither the King nor the Queen could back down, parliament must not listen to the arguments of those who were urging inquiry because of a ‘morbid desire’ for ‘vulgar private scandal’.<sup>29</sup> While the Queen believed her interests to be bound up with an investigation, as an M.P., he argued, he was bound to draw attention to the potentially damaging effect of publicity on:

the wives and daughters of all who loved decency, morality, and who recollected when, but a few years since, the opening of a newspaper was regarded with fear and disgust by the father of every modest and well-conducted family- he called upon the House to pause- only to pause, to ascertain if it were yet possible to escape from this threatened calamity.<sup>30</sup>

Brougham’s speech raised the possibility that discussion of the Queen’s transgressions would spread moral contagion, via the press, into every household, setting off a chain reaction, which would jeopardize the innocence of decent women everywhere. A quiet adjustment of matters between the King and Queen would save this disruption to thousands of domestic establishments. Less

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<sup>26</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 909-10

<sup>27</sup> *Hansard* Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 891.

<sup>28</sup> *Hansard* Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 897.

<sup>29</sup> *Hansard* Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 942.

surprisingly, Wilberforce, who had tried to prevent publicity in the Clarke scandal, argued for private compromise 'on account of the public morals, which would not then receive any taint from the disgusting details which the papers then on the table of the House in all probability contained.'<sup>31</sup> Even when the first phase of private negotiations failed in 19 June, he desperately tried to fend off any form of investigation by arbitrating between the parties.

Of course, once the trial before the whole House began, objections against the secrecy of the procedure vanished, and debate about publicity shifted towards a discussion of the investigative methodology to be employed. Attacking the way that evidence was handled in the trial became a classic strategy of pro-Caroline poems and tracts. While the government endeavoured to create a picture of a Queen whose disruptive sexual appetite was apparently insatiable, Caroline's supporters pointed to procedural irregularities to argue that the charges against the queen were proof of the Ministry's inability to control their own desire for promotion and place. Many Queenite tracts pointed to the discreditable way that evidence was gathered and presented, arguing the government had deliberately confused the normal narrative of the trial: whereas the ideal enquiry worked from allegation, through a free, untrammelled investigation into the evidence, to the production of a true narrative of events and subsequent judgment, the ministers had begun with condemnation, and worked backwards, manufacturing evidence incriminating the Queen to suit a prearranged outcome. Thus, where the government insisted that the Queen's unruly desires had prompted the investigation, the Queen's supporters argued that ministerial power and interest were invested in a predetermined ending, short-circuiting the proper process.

These radical arguments were particularly powerful because they built on an existing controversy surrounding the government's use of *agents provocateurs*. One of the main reasons for the public outcry against the actions of the notorious spy Oliver was that his preventative methods were believed to have fostered conspiracies that would not otherwise have existed, encouraging

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<sup>30</sup> *Hansard* Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 941-2.

individuals to ensnare themselves in a web of treason, then turning them over to the authorities to be punished for doing so.<sup>32</sup> Now, Queenite propagandists suggested, such methods were turned against Caroline. *Plots and Placemen* (1817) a radical mock-drama represents ‘Callouswretch’ (Castlereagh) suggesting that Oliver should collect evidence against Caroline. What the ministry requires, he argues, is:

One, who, with shew of reason and smooth tongue,  
Can lead men’s minds to contemplate the means  
Of throwing off our yoke by force of arms  
And thereby furnish us with powerful proofs,  
To justify the deeds we must perform.<sup>33</sup>

Just as spies create a fictional disorder in order that very real repressive methods can be enacted against radicals, a fictional narrative of guilt was to be created about the Queen in order to serve the needs of the King.

Indeed, part of the reason that the ‘Green Bag’ took on such a prominence in Queenite propaganda was that it neatly symbolized this topsy-turvy narrative logic. It was often imagined as an object which pre-dated the trial, its existence standing for the government’s decision to condemn the Queen long before the trial began. When it had been filled with evidence procured for this purpose, it stood for the government’s willingness to use any method, however low, to achieve its end; hence, as Laqueur has noted, its contents were frequently depicted as slimy, reptilian, excremental, or even monstrous.<sup>34</sup> Nor was its filth confined to the bag alone. In the Commons on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1820, Brougham attacked the Milan Commissioner, wondering how he could have been induced:

to collect the tittle-tattle of coffee-houses and alehouses; the gossip of bargemen on canals, and ferrymen on rivers, and porters of chateaus, and

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<sup>31</sup> *Hansard* Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 981-2.

<sup>32</sup> A F Fremantle, ‘The Truth About Oliver The Spy’, *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 47: No. 188, October 1932, pp. 601-616. See also E P Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin, 1963 repr. 1980, pp. 726-7.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous (‘Zachary Zealoushead Esq’) *Plots And Placemen, Or Green Bag Glory, An Historical Melo-Drama In Two Acts*. London: privately printed, 1817, pp. 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> Laqueur ‘The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV’. Op. cit. p. 436

cast-off servants dismissed with dishonour by their mistresses; and to employ himself month after month, in taking down calumnies of a class of human beings so degraded, that their appearance in any court of law, was always stamped with infamy, and in collecting from such polluted sources a mass of evidence to fill a green bag for the noble Lord opposite!<sup>35</sup>

Broadsides dwelt with a mixture of disgust and relish on the spectacle of high ranking individuals soiling their hands in order to work against the Queen. One, dated September 10 1820, was made up to look like a notice addressed 'To Scavengers, Nightmen and Others' advertising for individuals to come forward with solutions to a public health problem created by the evidence that Sir John Leach had accumulated:

vast quantities of Filth and Nastiness lately imported from various parts of the Continent for exhibition before the First Families in the Kingdom, having become by *fermentation, close confinement and too much use*, highly noxious to the Public, the SCAVENGERS GENERAL, Messrs. L—H and Company, at the Sign of the "*Horse-without-a-Crown*," are ready to receive Proposals for the immediate removal of the same.<sup>36</sup>

While there is an element of the topsy-turvy world of carnival in the picture of the leading government officials and aristocrats as dust-heap muckrakers, a serious point was also being made about the methods that were acceptable when it came to gathering evidence. Just as their association with ultra-radicals in 1809 compromised Wardle and his colleagues, too much scraping together of proofs from disreputable sources on the part of the ministers made the case against Caroline look far more like fiction than truth.

Then there were the witnesses themselves. The fact that many were Italian meant that references to bravos, banditti, and midnight assassins were a staple of Queenite propaganda. Not only was this a vivid, popular way of representing the dubious methods used by the Queen's enemies, tapping into a vein of melodramatic gothicism, but it enabled Caroline's supporters to draw on a potent vein of patriotic xenophobia and anti-Catholicism. In particular, the popular misconception that confession and absolution allowed Italian witnesses

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<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 1 (New Series), June 7 1820, col. 932-3.

to sin with impunity was used to cast doubt on the value of their oath to swear to the truth in the trial. *Kouli Khan; Or The Progress Of Error* (1820) a poem published by Benbow, condemned the trial on the grounds that the government's witnesses came from:

the land of hypocrisy, lying, and fraud;  
Where the midnight assassin, the vilest of men,  
May receive absolution and murder again;  
Where all crimes may be pardon'd, and money will buy  
A full dispensation to perjure and lie.<sup>37</sup>

Broadsheets and polite pamphlets echoed similar sentiments. For many of Caroline's supporters, Catholicism simply gave the Italian witnesses too much narrative freedom. Without the guarantee of an oath taken before God which bound them to tell the truth, they could fashion detrimental fictions about the Queen's behaviour, thus damaging her reputation.

In addition to these concerns about the quality of evidence, Caroline's supporters complained that the procedural structure of the trial was designed to prevent the Queen from resisting the ending which the government sought to impose. In particular, the fact that Caroline was not given details of the specific charges against her, and was not provided with a complete list of the ministry's witnesses, aroused indignation. The author of *The King's Treatment of the Queen* (1820) complained that Caroline was

denied an advantage which every defendant has – the knowledge of the witness produced against him- the knowledge of his previous character- his habits of life, and the possible motives which might have brought him forward. The daily practice of our Courts of Justice shews the inestimable value of this advantage- shews how essential it is to the protection of innocence.<sup>38</sup>

On July 14, Lord Erskine tried to rectify the situation by petitioning the House of Lords on behalf of the Queen for a list of witnesses, but his motion was

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<sup>36</sup> Anonymous, *To Scavengers, Nightmen and Others*. London, September 10 1820.

<sup>37</sup> Anonymous *Kouli Khan; Or The Progress Of Error*. Fourth Edition. London: William Benbow, 1820, pp. 9-10.

defeated.<sup>39</sup> The major reason that was given for this resistance to opening up the trial was that cross-examination was seen as a potent weapon in the hands of a defence lawyer. As the Lord Chancellor complained: 'It was frequently possible for counsel, by obtaining a previous knowledge of the witnesses names and residence, completely to blast their evidence- reduce it to ashes- and that too merely by a cross-examination.'<sup>40</sup>

For Caroline's supporters, however, this was precisely the point: like Bentham, many argued that cross-examination had an ability to reveal contradictory aspects of a story, even when it initially appeared to be watertight. When, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, Brougham demolished the first prosecution witness, Theodore Majocchi, in the first of a series of spectacular cross-examinations that threw doubt on the veracity of several key government witnesses, their view of the matter appeared to be confirmed. After Majocchi was forced to reply 'Non mi ricordo' ('I don't remember') over eighty times in response to Brougham's questioning, the phrase was triumphantly adopted by Caroline's supporters as a kind of shorthand for the tendency of the government's narrative of events to crumble under the slightest pressure. Again, Brougham's talents appeared to have exposed not just the tenuousness of the testimony itself, but the desperation of the ministry in placing such feeble witnesses on the stand in the first place. If the Green Bag was full of filthy refuse, then the Queen's lawyer was cleaning up the mess: the author of *Modern Anecdotes of The New Green Room* (1820) punned on his name to praise the discovery of 'a Broom of wonderful searching and sweeping qualities', able to detect 'dirt and filth in every lurking corner'.<sup>41</sup> On October 3 1820, Brougham referred to his success in Parliament, crediting Providence with the revelations, but also modestly casting himself as the prophet Daniel in order to analogise Caroline's case to the apocryphal story of Susanna, the wife of Joakim, who was accused of committing adultery by two

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *The King's Treatment of the Queen Shortly Stated To The People of England*. London: William Hone, 1820, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> See *Hansard*. Vol. 2 (New Series), July 14 1820, col. 428-472.

<sup>40</sup> *Hansard*. Vol. 2 (New Series), July 14 1820, col. 441.

<sup>41</sup> Anonymous, *Modern Anecdotes Of The New Green-Bag-Room, Representing A List Of The Pieces Performed, And Now Performing, At The Theatre Royal, Cotton Garden*. London: Langham, 1820, p. 5.

elders in revenge for her refusal to sleep with them.<sup>42</sup> She is tried and condemned for this crime, until God inspires Daniel to intervene on her behalf. Separating the two accusers, Daniel cross-examines them individually, asking them what the species of tree was under which they saw the alleged act of adultery taking place. When one replies that it was a mastick tree, and the other says that it was a holm tree, he knows that they are not telling the truth. The tale points up the dangers of accepting even the most straightforward narrative at face value, and is thus compatible with Benthamite notions of examination, in that the truth is not self-evident, but needs to be exposed by careful cross-questioning. But at the same time that it allowed Brougham to claim credit for his forensic skills, the story's emphasis on Providence meant that he did not have to negate the popular sense that the trial was a cosmic struggle between injured virtue and scheming vice, or a true, orderly story and a false and twisting plot.

## II

### *Plotting against Virtue*

The Book of Daniel appears to have been a particularly popular source for comments on Caroline's case. Its themes of exile, intrigue, false accusation, exemplary piety and trial by ordeal probably seemed peculiarly appropriate to the events of 1820.<sup>43</sup> However, while Brougham compared Caroline to Susanna, identifying himself with Daniel, others appeared to have forgotten about the mediating influence of the lawyer, instead imagining the Queen herself as the truth-revealing prophet:

She entered even the Lion's Den;  
There met th'accusers face to face,  
And filled the oppressors with disgrace.  
TRUTH lifted high th' Ilthuriel [sic] spear,  
And Guilt and Falsehood shook with fear-  
In vain her arts vile Slander tries,

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<sup>42</sup> *Hansard*. Vol 3 (New Series), October 3 1820, col. 204-5

<sup>43</sup> See Shemaryahu Talmon 'Daniel' in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. London: Fontana Press, 1987 repr. 1989, pp. 343-356.

Down fell the fabric filled with lies;<sup>44</sup>

Like Susanna, Daniel is an individual of faultless conduct. However, while Susanna is simply falsely accused, Daniel's enemies are more creative: unable to find any genuine cause for complaint against him, they decide to invent a law which they know that he will have to break. They induce King Darius to proclaim himself a divinity, forbidding all forms of prayer to other Gods for thirty days, in the full awareness that the pious Daniel will refuse to cease praying to the 'true' God. He is caught, and thrown into the Lion's Den as punishment, but is protected from harm by the God to whom he has been faithful. The contrast between the story of Susanna and the story of Daniel in the context of the Caroline affair is that whereas the former stresses the need for human agency as well as divine inspiration to uncover the real narrative of events, the latter emphasizes the way in which God underwrites truth. If Susanna's tale emphasizes the need to sift through testimony to reach the true narrative of events, highlighting the dangers of accepting events at face value, Daniel's miraculous escape suggests that inexorable truth will prevail, stressing its immanence in the actions of the individual.

In Queenite propaganda of 1820, these two models of truth revelation are often in implicit tension, and the battle between them was essentially about the relationship between narrative and virtue. The former, the 'Susanna model', stressed the complexity of human moral relations, arguing that nothing could be taken at face value; the latter, the 'Lion's Den model', emphasized a simpler, Manichean conflict between embattled virtue and oppressive iniquity, in which the two sides were easily identifiable. The former insisted that virtue had to be ratified by a process of critical debate, which would uncover the truth; the latter that such a process of investigation was unnecessary to establish proof of moral uprightness, since truth was self-evident. In the former model, all evidence has to be heard in order to construct a truth-revealing narrative; in the latter the act of creating narratives is associated with the intrigues of the villains, who 'plot' against the heroine in both senses of the term, conspiring to create a version of

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<sup>44</sup> Anonymous *Jack and The Queen Killers or The Giant of the Island, A Tale for the Times*. Second Edition. London: T Dolby and J Fairburn, 1820, p. 29.



events that obscures her truth and virtue: she is simply not an appropriate subject for story, because there is nothing to tell against her, and to attempt to enmesh her in the toils of narrative is to intrigue against her. Whereas Benthamite arguments about critical debate were used to challenge the methodology of the enquiry, utilitarian arguments were based on subtle and sophisticated distinctions between different types of investigation and different approaches to evidence. By contrast, the ‘melodramatic’ framework allowed for a far more wholesale condemnation of investigation on the grounds that it was not as a truth-revealing enquiry but a sinister effort to obscure the truth of the virtuous Queen’s circumstances, without abandoning the basic assumption that openness and publicity were positive political forces. As an exasperated Theodore Hook noted: ‘So much has been said about a *Conspiracy* against the Queen, that many worthy people fully believe in its existence, and are persuaded that to this cause alone is to be attributed every stain upon Her Majesty’s character’.<sup>45</sup>

As Hazlitt suggested, the ‘doubtfulness’ of the Queen’s case frequently disappeared in radical and populist tracts about the scandal. The melodramatic idiom in which radicals cast the trial was largely responsible for this, as the Queen’s supporters cast her as the embodiment of absolute virtue. Her readiness to undergo a thorough investigation was seized upon by her followers, who argued that such fearlessness proved that a full enquiry was entirely unnecessary. Her demeanour made her innocence manifest, short-circuiting the narrative which the government had tried to foist upon her: ‘Never did a guilty woman act as she acted; there was no management – no concealment- no shuffling about her- open and ingenuous, she behaved herself like a woman conscious of innocence, having no guilty object whatever in view’.<sup>46</sup> Her innate purity was frequently contrasted not with the malevolence of her enemies, but with the dirtiness of their methods. *Albion’s Queen, or the Sufferings of Innocence* (1820) uses a rhyming couplet to insist:

Nor shall false scandal its vain strength employ,

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<sup>45</sup> *John Bull*. No. 3, Sunday December 31, 1820, p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Anonymous, *A Letter to the King, On The Situation And Treatment Of The Queen*. London: Robert Stodart, 1820 p. 22.

Our noble Queen's bright honour to destroy;<sup>47</sup>

Others used still more elaborate and vehement rhetoric: Charles Phillips rhapsodised about the Queen having 'a vestal's faith and a virgin's purity', characterizing the charges against her as a 'foul conspiracy' against an unprotected woman.<sup>48</sup> In *The Queen and the Mogul* (1820), a mock drama which casts George IV as an Eastern despot, 'Goodwood' (Matthew Wood, a prominent radical supporter of Caroline, who had brought her back to England) urges radicals to place their faith in the transcendental power of truth to overcome the forces which would endeavour to distract Caroline and her radical supporters away from their straight and uncomplicated narrative of innocence:

Here hold we on, tho' thwarting fiends alarm,  
Here hold we on, tho' devious cyrens charm;  
In Heaven's disposing power events unite,  
Nor aught can happen wrong to *her*--- who acts aright!<sup>49</sup>

In some cases, this sense of the immanence of truth led directly to political quietism, as writers preached resignation to the will of providence rather than direct action on the Queen's behalf. One of Fairburn's threepenny broadsheets published in 1820 reassured the Queen and her supporters that God would inevitably ensure that the truth would out:

If you are innocent,- and that you *are*  
Your prompt appearance plainly does declare.  
Heaven's on your side, and man you need not fear:  
The *God of Truth* will make the *truth* appear.<sup>50</sup>

However, such acquiescence in fate was by no means a necessary consequence of belief in Caroline's absolute innocence. Imagining the scandal as a fight between Queen's virtue and transparency and the devious methods of her

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<sup>47</sup> M Bryant, *Albion's Queen; Or The Sufferings Of Innocence*. London: E Cartwright. 1820, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Phillips, *The Queen's Case Stated*. Fourteenth Edition. London: William Hone, 1820, p. 9 and p. 15 respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *The Queen and the Mogul; A Play In Two Acts Adapted for Theatrical Representation As Performed At A Theatre-Royal*. London: William Benbow, 1820, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, *To The People Of England On The Return Of Their Queen*. London: J Fairburn, 1820.

antagonists could also lead to strong criticism of the government's methods, which linked the scandal to wider radical complaints against Old Corruption. Time and time again in pamphlets that employ the melodramatic idiom, the Queen's enemies are pictured as serpents, who, not content with attacking her directly with their poisonous fangs, also use their sinuous ability to twist coils of 'false' narrative around her. *Albion's Queen* imagines Caroline combating 'reptiles' alone and undaunted,<sup>51</sup> but *Salve Regina* (1820) calls on the people to aid the Queen in her struggle:

Though beset by serpent snares,  
Yet shall filial hearts and arms,  
As the stork a parent bears,  
Bear thee safe from plotted harms.<sup>52</sup>

If the Queen's enemies were snakes, associated with Satan and sinuous 'plotting' then the people become a 'stork', a bird popularly believed to kill reptiles on sight, which was also associated with Christ and truth.<sup>53</sup> Charles Phillips inflects the snake metaphor with a still more explicitly radical reading: Old Corruption, in the form of the 'sun of patronage', he argued was responsible for awakening 'the serpent brood of slanderers' to create scandal against her.<sup>54</sup> In other texts, the folkloric associations of serpentine metaphors were replaced by classical allusions to snake-like creatures in order to make a similar point. For example, the frontispiece to the poem *A Frown From the Crown* (1820) (below), depicts Caroline assailed by Old Corruption, imagined as a hydra with hundreds of snake-like heads.<sup>55</sup> The largest is clearly that of George IV, but others are inscribed 'tyranny', 'injustice', 'priestcraft', 'bishops', 'soldiers', 'secrets', 'perjury', 'sinecure' and 'taxes', while vermin labelled 'Post', 'Courier' and 'New Times', all government newspapers, crawl around the legs of the monster. Fighting against the beast, in the role of Hercules, is the British

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<sup>51</sup> M Bryant, *Albion's Queen*. *Op. cit.* p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, *Salve Regina! Or A Lay of Sympathy and Royal Homage to A Persecuted Woman and a Legitimate Queen Caroline of England*. London: John Fairburn, 1820, p. 10

<sup>53</sup> See *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Ed. A Room. Fifteenth Edition. London: Cassell, 1959 repr. 1996. The emphasis on 'filial' protection in this passage may refer to the stork's status as a symbol of filial devotion; the bird was believed to feed its elderly parents.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Phillips, *The Queen's Case Stated*. *Op. cit.* p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, *A Frown From the Crown Or The Hydra Destroyed*. London: John Fairburn, 1820.

press, personified as a figure dressed in shining armour. The hydra metaphor enables the poem to convey the difficulty of conquering corruption (for every snake that is killed, two spring up in its place), and casts the Queen's radical supporters as heroes, actively combatting a formidable enemy.<sup>56</sup>

Yet while the melodramatic idiom developed a politics of plot which connected the Queen Caroline scandal with the radical campaign against Old Corruption, and encouraged people to campaign in her favour, there was a degree of tension between this activism and the assumption that she embodied a truth, the emergence of which was guaranteed by Providence. In the frontispiece to *A Frown From The Crown*, the dramatic fight between the hydra and Hercules is juxtaposed with a picture of Caroline, who looks oddly self-reliant, scarcely in need of the aid of Hercules. She watches the battle between the British press and the hydra without any expression of emotion, confidently leaning against a pillar inscribed 'TRUTH'. This lends an odd ambivalence to the image: if Caroline is an improper subject for narrative because her truth is immanent and self-evident, then direct action on her behalf should be unnecessary. This point is made more clearly in another image. On payment of a shilling at the Bloomsbury Assembly Rooms in London, the public could gain admittance to an entertainment entitled 'Her Majesty Queen Caroline's Wheel of Fortune' which represented this popular suspicion of plot in visual terms. Traditionally, the image of the wheel of fortune made sense of sudden reversals of luck, precipitating the subject down into the depths of destitution, or elevating her to the heights of fame and wealth. In this case, however, the young lady dressed as the Queen who occupied the centre of the wheel remained completely still, while the machinery turned around her. The tableau was designed to represent

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<sup>56</sup> The body of the poem tries to deal with the incongruity of converting a Herculean labour into the rescue of a damsel in distress by adding the figure of Perseus (in the shape of Matthew Wood), who battled the Medusa, with her snake-like hair (corruption), and then used her head to save Andromeda (Caroline) from the sea-monster. Another anonymous pamphlet also uses the figure of Hercules to embody radical opinion, suggesting that the work facing the reformer is a Herculean labour: 'What stables of Augean kind/ The cleansing labourers still might find!', Anonymous, *Jack and The Queen Killers or The Giant of the Island, A Tale for the Times*. Second Edition. London: T Dolby and J Fairburn, 1820, p. 6.



Figure 2. George Cruikshank, *Frontispiece To A Frown From the Crown* (1820). Engraving, 12 cm x 21 cm. The British Library.

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the triumphant situation of Her most gracious Majesty; who, notwithstanding the constant and malignant attempts to precipitate her into the gulph of infamy, still stands erect, and all the whirlings of malice serve only to bear her gloriously like a wheel beneath her feet, over her conquered and prostrate enemies.<sup>57</sup>

The movements of this wheel of fortune represent plots deliberately set in motion against Caroline's honour as malevolent human action replaces the random, cosmic forces which afflict the subject in the traditional image. The Queen's unequivocal innocence is signalled by her static position, untouched by the mobile narratives of her persecutors. While melodrama provided Caroline's supporters with a potent narrative of her innocence, which could be used as the ground for further action, it could also invest her with a degree of power that diminished the sense that agitation on her behalf was necessary. While this did not pose radicals with too great a problem during the trial itself, as I hope to show later in this chapter, it did become an issue when the investigation came to a close.

### III

#### *Public Opinion and the Press*

The polarized moral and narrative structure which dominated Queenite tracts tended to go hand in hand with a two-tier account of social relations: the interested efforts of George IV and his ministers to impose a false narrative on Caroline was opposed to the disinterested zeal of the general public, who had managed to grasp the 'truth' of the situation. This 'us and them' model was highly amenable to radical political readings, because it emphasized the unequal distribution of power. The 'real' scandal for the radicals was that a small faction, whose interests were tightly bound up with the corrupt system of patronage and places, were fighting against the opinion of the entirety of the people, who had no concealed motive for backing Caroline, and were therefore able to grasp the truth. In *Kouli Khan*, a pamphlet printed by Benbow, George IV laments the incorruptibility of the people: 'there's a "stubborn virtue" in those wretches/That

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<sup>57</sup> Cited from the broadsheet advertising this entertainment, 'Her Majesty Queen Caroline's Wheel of Fortune'. London: C Baynes, hand dated 3 October 1820.

won't be tamper'd with',<sup>58</sup> while a broadsheet compared the genuine love of the people to the questionable loyalty of hireling courtiers and a standing army:

For what avails the tinsel'd pride of power,  
The royal state, the playthings of an hour,  
Gay lines of troops, - whole hosts of servile slaves,  
Poor "wretched Kernes, who're hir'd to bear their staves!"  
What are they all?- Weak must the contrast prove,  
When balanc'd with a faithful's [sic] People's love.<sup>59</sup>

If the loyalty of soldiers and courtiers was bought and sold, public opinion was produced by the free feelings of individuals. The author of *Salve Regina*, printed by Fairburn, imagines public opinion as a kind of electric spark transmitted through the entire body of the people in an instant:

What is this mastering spirit, say?  
This "God within us?" whence this fire,  
That, like lightning on its way,  
Kindles a loyal people's ire?  
'Tis zeal for Justice' wonted sway,  
The zeal of British breast to shame  
An injured woman's foes, and vindicate her fame!<sup>60</sup>

Involuntary, powerful and disinterested, the terms in which public opinion is here described are reminiscent of Rousseau's general will, though the poem's emphasis on the essentially 'British' quality of the indignation, and on the demand for 'Justice' *wonted* sway', rather than a new utopian social order, help to mute the Jacobin connotations of the passage.

This emphasis on the unanimity of the public voice led to strengthened demands that the unrepresentative political system should respect the voice and wishes of the people. Hone's *The Right Divine of Kings To Govern Wrong*, published in 1821, argued that the King could no longer claim to rule by birthright, when the narrative of royal descent was so snarled by sex scandal and illegitimacy:

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<sup>58</sup> Anonymous, *Kouli Khan*. *Op. cit.*, p. 17

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous, *To The People Of England On The Return Of Their Queen*. London: John Fairburn, 1820.

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous *Salve Regina!* *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

Look on once more – the tangled *line* survey,  
By which kings claim to *bind* men to obey.  
In the right line they say their title lies;  
But if it's twisted? - then the title dies.  
Look at it!- knotted, spliced in every place!  
Closely survey the intersected race-  
So full of violations, such a brood  
Of false successions, spurious births, and blood!<sup>61</sup>

The history of the royal family is permeated by scandal, therefore it has a tortuous gothic plot full of violence and deceit where it should have just a straightforward story. Exploiting the prejudice against plot, Hone sets the tangled web of royal heredity against the incorruptibility of public opinion, arguing that the Crown must derive its authority from the consent of the people. At face value, this was scarcely a controversial position to adopt in 1820: 'divine right' arguments had been all but untenable a century earlier.<sup>62</sup> However, the type of 'consent' that Hone has in mind is not that provided by the houses of Parliament, the conventional source of popular authority in constitutional arguments. Rather, he uses what had become a commonplace dictum of political theory after 1688 to make the much more radical argument that the King should consult extra-parliamentary public opinion on every subject.<sup>63</sup> Even the private behaviour of the monarch, which could cause such a tangle in the lines of heredity, was not to be excluded from this scrutiny.

Only when the Crown paid attention to the public voice could the problems of Old Corruption be avoided, since placemen were unlikely to criticize their source of income and potential preferment:

A thousand years before Christ, Nathan, a priest in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, knew that David the Lord's anointed, had not only worked

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<sup>61</sup> William Hone, *The Right Divine Of Kings To Govern Wrong! Dedicated To The Holy Alliance*. London: William Hone, 1821, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> Gerald Straka has identified the final phase of divine right theory as the late seventeenth century. See 'The Final Phase of Divine Right Theory in England', *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 77: No. 305, October 1962, pp. 638-658.

<sup>63</sup> By the nineteenth century, the notion of the 'divine right' of kings was firmly connected in the popular mind with absolutist politics, despite the fact that the two were actually by no means synonymous. See Glenn Burgess, 'The Divine Right of Kings Reconsidered', *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 107: No. 425, October 1992, pp. 837-861.



*folly* in Israel, by committing adultery with a beautiful woman, but had committed *crime*, by causing her husband to be put to death. The honest priest charged both the folly and the crime upon the king!... Three thousand years after this, a priest, sent into an English House of Lords by the nomination of the king, affirms there, that “he had ‘high authority’ for stating, that the king could not commit *folly*, much less *crime*.”<sup>64</sup>

The tale of David and Bathsheba allows Hone to suggest the disruption which such royal vice can create (rape, murder, filial rebellion and ultimately civil war are the result of David’s wrongdoing), while remaining safely within a constitutionalist idiom (the line of David continues, and Bathsheba’s child, Solomon, succeeds David, inaugurating an era of affluence). However, as George IV conspicuously lacks a ‘Nathan’ to act as the mouthpiece for divine denunciation, thanks to the corrupt state of the Church, he must look elsewhere for the moral counsel which can save the nation, to ‘The *Public Will*, the ONLY *Right Divine*,’<sup>65</sup>

Other supporters of the Queen reversed Hone’s argument, divorcing the right to govern from morality, to argue the offices of King and Queen were not granted conditionally:

The ministers said, we must un-queen your wife, because she is immoral. Now, if they had succeeded in that attempt, what would prevent a wicked faction the next year, or sooner, from saying, we will dethrone George the Fourth, because he is immoral.<sup>66</sup>

The anonymous author mischievously suggests that the ministers behind the affair were really Jacobins, attempting to overturn the constitution of the country: ‘Sire, the proceeding against the Queen, from its commencement, has borne the complexion of a revolutionary proceeding.’<sup>67</sup> He even goes so far as to compare their behaviour to ‘the recent and horrible cruelties of Robespierre’, using the assumption that the enquiry into Caroline’s virtue was no real exploration of the facts to argue that the government aimed to destroy British liberties and to institute a reign of Jacobin justice. Just as the law of 22 Prairial

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<sup>64</sup> Hone, *The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong*. *Op. cit.* p. 5

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, *A Letter to the King on the Situation and Treatment of the Queen*. London: Robert Stodard, 1820, p. 9.

denuded French trials of process, ignoring the weighing of evidence and the arguments of defence counsel to focus on inner guilt or virtue, those offending against the state in Britain were now to be judged 'without any investigation-without any trial whatever'.<sup>68</sup> However, this argument, with its emphasis on the need for full investigation which is reminiscent of the radical propaganda circulating in 1809, goes hand in hand with a far more uncertain attitude towards Caroline's guilt or innocence than many of the pamphlets written in her support. By divorcing morality from authority, the author builds a case which will stand whatever the verdict on her conduct, but he also undermines his own attempts to satirize George IV on the grounds of his terrible public reputation. If a King held the Crown independently of public opinion, what did it matter that 'no King of England has ever been spoken of so irreverently as your Majesty, at least since the death of Harry the Eighth'?<sup>69</sup> Indeed, this reference to the Tudor monarch sums up the difficulties with pursuing a line of argument which hinges on the notion that dethroning a Queen would set a dangerous precedent in an 1820s context, since it immediately refers the reader back to an example of a British King who managed not only to divorce but also to decapitate several of his consorts, without apparently weakening the position of the Crown.

Few pamphlets seem to have taken such an uncompromisingly Benthamite view of the role of the press; indeed, in 1820, it is hard to find many examples of the argument that newspapers set in motion a process of critical debate, which eventually produced the truth. Initially, this seems surprising. Technological improvements, including the invention of new presses and paper-making processes, improved distribution networks, a rise in literacy, a growth in the number, the availability and the cheapness of the journals published, and the growth of the financial independence of the newspaper, all contributed to augment the power of the press between 1800 and 1820.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7-8

<sup>70</sup> For technological improvements, see Philip Gaskell *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1972 repr. 1995. For a good general outline of developments in literacy see Lawrence Stone 'Literacy and Education in England', *Past and Present*. No. 42, February 1969, pp. 69-139 and Thomas Laqueur, 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', *Past and Present*. No. 64, August 1974, pp. 96-107. For a classic study of the rise in press power see

continued dominance of the upper classes in parliamentary politics had added weight to the status of newspapers and as organs of middle class opinion. As I argued in the last chapter, concerns about the power of the press were already being voiced by supporters of the Duke in 1809, who argued that individual reputation was powerless against the onslaught of an influential journal. On the other side of the question, in tandem with these developments, Benthamism and utilitarian rhetoric had also grown in influence since the 1800s, to constitute a major language of extraparliamentary political debate.<sup>71</sup> So why, in 1820, did Benthamite rhetoric about critical debate play such a surprisingly negligible part in arguments about the role of the press in the scandal?

One hypothesis is that Benthamism made the revelation of truth a matter of process and procedure, thus bringing the press into uncomfortably close proximity with the logic of investigation employed by the government, at a time when popular objections to plot were being voiced very forcefully. This would help to explain why appeals to the press in 1820 often take a much cruder form than in 1809, presenting newspapers as a source of obvious truth, rather than as a sophisticated educative social force. Whereas the Clarke scandal focused on the importance of the *investigation* of truth, and trumpeted the value of the press as a source of debate, the most dominant strand of argument in the Caroline scandal was that the whole affair was an unjust investigation into a Queen who was as pure as the driven snow. Pictures of the printing press were a staple of Queenite propaganda, but the machines that tended to be represented were the small hand presses used by radicals to produce small numbers of journals, not the new, steam powered machines which symbolized the ‘march of mind’. Of course, it is important to remember that, at a representational level, the older

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Arthur Aspinall, *Politics and the Press c.1780-1850*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1973. A more recent assessment is provided by Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth Century England*. Brookfield: Scolar Press, 1996. For studies of the interaction between newspapers and their audience see Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences 1790-1832*. Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. For a study of the relationship between economics, technology and audiences see Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing 1800-1850*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996. For newspaper circulation see A Aspinall, ‘The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century’, *The Review of English Studies*. Vol. 22: No. 85 January 1946, pp. 29-43

machines were a familiar popular symbol, connoting the independence of the fourth estate, while, at a practical level, much Queenite propaganda was still produced on such devices.<sup>72</sup> However it may well be that the older hand press was also useful as an image because it could represent the role of the press as an institution without referring to critical debate. Because printing on one of these machines was a relatively slow, multistage process, it was difficult to capture the moment of newspaper production in a single picture. In an era when the power of steam to increase the speed and the volume of production was regarded as formidable and perhaps even disturbing, most representations of the hand press showed the machine in a static state.<sup>73</sup> Thus, instead of showing the labour of printing and the process of production, many of these representations presented the machine as if it were the material object itself that radiated truth, not its productions. Truth, in these representations, was immanent in the very grain of the wood of the press.

For example, in Hone's *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, the picture accompanying the verse for 'PUBLICATION' shows George IV's actions overseen by an eye in the sky, the pupil of which has been replaced by an image of the old-fashioned printing press.<sup>74</sup> The press is credited with an omniscient, divine perspective, which, while it does not seem to daunt George IV from unlocking the door behind which the green bag lies, is capable of seeing into the truth of the matter immediately. Similarly, in the smaller image which forms just one part of Hone's famous picture of the whole 'matrimonial ladder', George IV cowers before energetic lines, labelled with the names of leading opposition papers, which emanate from a beacon-like press. The truth of the Queen's innocence emerges straight from the machine, not from a discursive

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<sup>71</sup> For the 'march of mind' see Howard M. Wach, 'Culture and the Middle Classes: Popular Knowledge in Industrial Manchester', *The Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 27, No. 4., October 1988, pp. 375-404.

<sup>72</sup> By no means was all Queenite material produced on handpresses: *The Times*, which was virulently pro-Caroline, had been using a cylinder machine since 1814. See Philip Gaskell. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. *Op. cit.* p. 252

<sup>73</sup> For a discussion of representations of steam power see Julie Wosk, *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts In the Nineteenth Century*. New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

<sup>74</sup> William Hone, *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder, A National Toy*. London: William Hone, 1820 in *Radical Squibs and Loyal Ripostes Satirical Pamphlets of the Regency Period 1819-21*. Ed. Edgell Rickword. Bath: Adams and Dart, pp. 167-192, this illustration p. 180.

clash between different perspectives, a point further emphasized by the fact that Caroline herself sits passively just in front of the press, in a posture that reflects its shape, the stasis of both press and Queen stressing the self-evidence of their form of truth.<sup>75</sup> These representations stressed instantaneity of communication over informed debate, the immanence of truth over its stubbornness, placing the press firmly on the side of the Queen's virtue rather than associating it with the submerged truths and the plotting of her enemies.

#### IV

##### *Empathetic Connections: Women, Narrative and Politics*

Robert Huish's contemporary account of the Caroline agitations notes the presence of women in the crowds gathered to support Caroline throughout 1820-21, from the Queen's arrival in London to her funeral procession. When Caroline's trial began on 17<sup>th</sup> August, Huish notes that the wagons for spectators were filled with 'persons of respectable appearance, and the majority of them, perhaps, of the softer sex',<sup>76</sup> while on the 24<sup>th</sup> 'the females especially seemed to set no bounds to their enthusiasm' in cheering the Queen as she set out for the House of Lords.<sup>77</sup> During the trial, several groups of women gathered to present the Queen with addresses as proof of their support.<sup>78</sup> Nor did this feminine enthusiasm for her cause die away after the trial had ended. On the occasion of Caroline's thanksgiving service at St Paul's following her acquittal late in the autumn, 'crowds of elegantly dressed ladies' had seats along the line of procession through the city, while sixty women all dressed in white, with white veils, sat in the choir during the service.<sup>79</sup> One anonymous 'Englishwoman', writing on the loyalist side of the question, commented on the tendency of the

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<sup>75</sup> However, Bentham's sense that a free press was the guardian of the general interest, capable of combating the interested 'plots' of those in office, was more compatible with the melodramatic idiom. Contrasts between radical/independent journals and the ministerial press abounded in Queenite propaganda, as Caroline's supporters launched scathing attacks on journals in the pay of government, castigating 'hireling' writers (just as they had castigated 'hireling' courtiers and 'hireling' soldiers) for endeavouring to pervert the true course of public opinion with false narratives.

<sup>76</sup> Huish, *Memoirs of Her Late Majesty Caroline, Queen of Britain*. *Op. cit.* p. 533

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 557

<sup>78</sup> According to Laqueur, there were at least seventeen addresses from women. See Laqueur, 'The Queen Caroline Scandal'. *Op. cit.* p. 442.

<sup>79</sup> Huish, *Memoirs of Her Late Majesty Caroline*. *Op. cit.*, p. 650 and p. 658 respectively.

scandal to encourage women to participate in politics, describing the times as ‘a season when every woman is called upon to examine the events of the day, and when so great a number think it incumbent upon them to *speak* also’.<sup>80</sup>

What was it about Caroline’s cause which spurred so many ordinary women to participate in the male world of public politics? Hazlitt argued that it was the Queen’s ability to become all things to all people: if the electors of Westminster supported her because she was at variance with the King, women supported her because she was an ‘injured wife’. The melodramatic idiom in which her griefs were expressed placed her outside of the ‘plots’ of government as a static emblem of virtue prevented a precise identification of her sufferings with one particular group, allowing her to become an empty signifier of oppressed virtue, which different groups were able to fill with projections of their own woes. Indeed, her responses to addresses from different groups suggest that her advisors, with Cobbett notable amongst them, rather cynically exploited this openness, by identifying the radical line of argument which would be most likely to cement the co-operation of each. To the printers she spoke of the power of the press to right wrongs,<sup>81</sup> to the middle class citizens of London who could not vote, she spoke of the importance the need for King, Lords and Commons to bow to the authority of the people,<sup>82</sup> and to the Spitalfields Weavers she complained of excessive taxes, and promised to consume articles of British manufacture.<sup>83</sup>

To the women of Britain, she spoke of her trials and tribulations as a grieving mother and a deserted wife, constructing a narrative of her unmerited wrongs as a mother and a wife, which stretched back almost to the moment that she had met George IV:

I was hardly married before my circumstances became more desolate than those of widowhood, and I seemed to have become a mother only to

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<sup>80</sup> Anonymous (‘An Englishwoman’), *An Englishwoman’s Letter to Mrs Hannah More On the Present Crisis*. London: J Hatchard and Son, 1820, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> See *The Printers’ Address To The Queen And Her Majesty’s Tribute To The Press In Answer*. London: William Hone, 1820.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Huish, *Memoirs of Her Late Majesty Caroline*. *Op. cit.* p. 573-4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 542-3.

be tortured by the privation of that intercourse with my child, which was hardly ever denied to any mother but myself.<sup>84</sup>

Though such sufferings might be exceptional, Caroline's addresses stressed that they were within the comprehension of all women. Female supporters, Caroline argued, had a special insight into her case:

The same spirit of devotedness to the fair fame, to the lawful rights, and to the general interests of a persecuted Queen, which animates the Female Inhabitants of Nottingham, is, I trust, diffused through a large majority of their countrywomen. They will consider the honour of her MAJESTY as reflected upon themselves- they will best know how to appreciate the slanders by which I have been assailed, and the indignities by which I have been oppressed.<sup>85</sup>

Her situation was as a comment on the status of most women, pointing up the fact that married females had no legal status, drawing attention to the problems that separated women faced in obtaining access to their children, demonstrating the vulnerability of all women to the caprices of their husbands, showing the ease with which women could be divorced, and representing the unfair victimization of women under a sexual double standard which condemned sexual transgression in them as an irrecoverable fault, while men could sin with relative impunity. However, her connection with her female supporters was not solely based on a rational comparison of Caroline's woes with the circumstances of all women. Rather, the polarized rhetoric of virtue and vice, and the narrative framework of the scandal allowed women to find their support for Caroline on the fact that they felt sympathy for her difficulties.

Many of the female addresses to the Queen begin with an expression of empathy, using affective rhetoric to ground the claim of women to a public voice on the matter of Caroline's divorce. The intensely private, involuntary palpitations of sympathy which identification with the Queen's situation provoked allowed the manifestation of physical sensibility within the female body to become an appropriate response to political events. The women of Marylebone stated that their feelings about the Queen's situation were

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<sup>84</sup> 'Address from the women of St Mary-le-bone', quoted in Huish, *ibid.*, p. 583.

<sup>85</sup> See the broadside 'Address Of The Female Inhabitants Of Nottingham With Her Majesty's Answer'. London: G Harvey, July 26 1820.

indescribable, arguing that their empathetic connection with the Queen dated back over many years, and was so strong that the news of the death of Princess Charlotte had killed some of them with grief. Similarly, the women of Nottingham proclaimed that it was impossible for anyone to feel a stronger connection with the Queen than they did: ‘amidst this general glow of beating hearts, none are more loyal, none love you better, and none pray oftener for your present and future happiness than the Females of Nottingham’.<sup>86</sup> Caroline responded with gratitude to such effusions, stressing the extent to which her own feelings had been touched by the enthusiastic support of women:

To be conscious that the hearts of so large a portion of my own sex are vibrating with emotions of affection for his Majesty’s Royal Consort, that they are sympathising with her sorrows, and deprecating her wrongs, and that her happiness is the object of their pious supplications, cannot but awaken in my breast the most pleasurable sensations.<sup>87</sup>

A collective pulsation of empathy, running from the Queen to her female supporters and back again, supposedly united them by a ‘natural’ bond at a basic physiological level. Not only were the difficulties that they faced similar, but they were connected by a common bond of sympathetic identification.

Female sensibility thus created space for women to enter the masculine world of politics and voice their opinions. The women of Marylebone excused their address by stating that it was condoned by their male relations who were much more actively involved in the defence of the Queen, and by arguing that the emotions they were experiencing constituted an involuntary response beyond their rational control. They were not trying to encroach on the male world of politics; they simply could not help commiserating with Caroline’s sorrows:

although we must leave to them [husbands], and to our Sons and Brothers, who have stouter hearts, and stronger heads than ourselves, to pourtray the iniquitous proceedings of your Majesty’s enemies, in the course they are pursuing, we trust we may be permitted to give utterance to our thoughts, in all that calls up our tender solicitude and the finer working of our nature in behalf of your Majesty.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Address Of The Female Inhabitants Of Nottingham. Op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



Not all of the addresses from women were so cautious, however. The women of Nottingham were more pointed in their language, actively condemning Caroline's accusers on their own behalf, without asking the permission of their menfolk: 'we never for a moment believed their slanders, but felt at every charge, as we are sure we shall always feel, a more than common indignation'.<sup>89</sup> As popular perceptions of the need for investigation, for careful weighing of evidence and debating of arguments were replaced by a faith in the absolute innocence of the Queen, space was created for women to suggest that their natural feelings actually constituted a superior moral response to the Caroline affair, offering a privileged perspective on her sufferings and her innocence. The supposedly 'rational' male political world, from which they were excluded on the grounds that they were unable to conquer their desires with sufficient judgment, rationality and firmness, had been exposed as a world of faction and corruption, far more governed by interest and desire than the world of women. The spontaneous emotion that a narrative of Caroline's wrongs inspired, which was more available to women than men, was a far better political guide than the calculating and self-serving idiom of male politics, and could provide a salutary corrective to the political manoeuvrings of the government: 'All who would not immolate the best impulses of our nature on the altar of modern policy will rally round their Queen, and save her alike from foreign emissaries and spies, and domestic persecutors'.<sup>90</sup>

Caroline's disagreement with George IV was an explicit example of the difference of interests between men and women, which could be used to challenge the notion that female interests (social, economic, legal and political) could be represented by their male relatives. However, the melodramatic idiom which made it possible for women to identify Caroline's cause with their own hampered the development of such overtly feminist arguments in a convincing fashion, since it tended to identify the Queen's cause with a type of truth and virtue so pure that they were more an absence of interest than a different type of interest. However, this should not obscure the fact that, in the context of 1820,

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

claims to disinterestedness were capable of becoming powerful claims to political authority. The self-sacrificing qualities inherent in female 'nature', Caroline's addresses contended, contrasted sharply with the corruption which permeated political society. Instead of familial affections being a barrier to women's involvement in politics, on the grounds that they would prevent them from identifying with the universal good, the sacrifices of the mother and the wife became a sign of their freedom from the self-interest that dominated the unreformed political system. This may be why Caroline's charitableness was held up so often and so vehemently as a praiseworthy quality by her supporters. Indeed, the Queen's own addresses took pains to display her benevolence, particularly when she was speaking to women. For example, in response to the Marylebone women, she asked her female supporters to unite with her 'in admiring that wise constitution of the moral world, which makes the most exquisite satisfaction, and the most permanent happiness to arise out of the addition which we make to the gratification of others, and to the general stock of human felicity'.<sup>91</sup> Charity was an activity which allowed women to exercise influence in the public sphere on the basis of their 'natural' ability to empathize with the sufferings of others, but in the context of a political system permeated by corruption, the pleasure in good done to others could become part of a wider critique of political selfishness. Far from being creatures of ungovernable desire, women had an inbuilt principle which allowed them both to limit and govern overly narrow attachments.

This sense that women were capable of transcending the interested world of male politics is given an explicitly republican inflection in an extraordinary broadsheet entitled 'Glorious Deeds of Women'. After asking the reader to 'Reflect on glorious and virtuous Rome', where women rewarded successful generals, it goes on to list a number of events in classical and modern history which confirm the proposition that 'All the Grand Events were brought about by WOMEN':

Through a WOMAN Rome obtained Liberty.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Huish, *Memoirs of Her Late Majesty Caroline. Op. cit.*, p. 583

Through WOMEN the mass of the People acquired the rights of the Consulship.

A WOMAN put an end to the oppression of the *ten tyrants*.

By means of WOMEN, Rome, when on the brink of destruction, was screened from the resentment of an enraged and victorious outlaw.

France was delivered from her Invaders and Conquerors, in the fourteenth century, by a WOMAN

It was a WOMAN that brought down the bloody tyranny, Marat.

A WOMAN nailed the tyrant, Sisera, to the ground.

A QUEEN caused the cruel Minister, Haman, to be hanged on a gallows fifty cubits high, of his own erecting.

And a QUEEN will now bring down the corrupt Conspirators against the Peace, Honour and Life of the Innocent.<sup>92</sup>

From the Biblical figure of Esther to the heroines of the Roman republic (including the self-sacrificing Lucretia), to French revolutionary Charlotte Corday women here become key figures in the fight against despotism and the project of founding and protecting a republic. In an argument far more extreme than that of Rousseau or Staël, Queen Caroline, the ‘innocent’ is cast as the last in a long list of virtuous, patriotic and bloody females, capable not only of gentle intercession for the greater good, but also of murderous violence.

### *Nuance and Loyalist Counter-Narratives*

Unsurprisingly, several loyalist writers reacted strongly against both the ‘politics of plot’ and the lack of moral gradation that were associated with the melodramatic idiom. Hazlitt’s argument that the radical response to the ‘doubtful’ case of Caroline lacked nuance and subtlety tended to be associated with the government side during the trial. One of the most interesting expressions of this argument is contained in the anonymous pamphlet *An Englishwoman’s Letter to Mrs Hannah More On the Present Crisis*, which discusses the involvement of women in the agitations on Caroline’s behalf. The writer is particularly alarmed by the way in which the polarized rhetoric of the Queen’s supporters was able to unite all kinds of women in Caroline’s defence, irrespective of differences of age, class, religiosity, morality and respectability:

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<sup>92</sup> *Glorious Deeds Of Women!* London, 1820

One universally interesting – in fact, overwhelming, subject, engrosses all companies, affects every individual, and, as by an irresistible spell, induces people of the most opposite character and description to concur in the same sentiment and utter the same language. “Our injured and innocent Queen,” are words proceeding alike from the lips of the young and enthusiastic, the grave and experienced: married women form processions to evince their attachment to her whom they consider an injured wife; women “professing godliness” lament over the Queen as a suffering martyr; and open profligates espouse her cause with that ardour which gives effrontery the semblance of honest zeal and faithful attachment.<sup>93</sup>

For this anonymous woman writer, the discursive homogeneity surrounding the trial was the direct result of a radical conspiracy which had strengthened over the course of the year. Under the advice of radicals, the Queen, she argued, had gone from politely requesting favours of the government to unwomanly invective, encouraging her supporters to portray her as ‘a spotless lamb, a suffering angel, an heroic martyr’.<sup>94</sup> For the author, such representations were not anti-plots but dangerous fictions, which were capable of seducing susceptible women away from virtue.

A corrective form of narrative was needed to restore a just degree of subtlety to the moral arguments of the case. The author sought this in the work of Hannah More, appealing to the elderly writer to come out of retirement to serve the loyalist cause. More’s influence would be invaluable precisely because her work was nuanced in a way that would problematize the polarized moral structure of radical argument. It could thus demonstrate to women:

how far their *violent, unmitigated* adoption of the Queen’s cause is a public error, and likely to be attended with much private misery: to tell them how many shades and degrees there are in guilt, not amenable to the law, which a wise woman will not eulogize, and a good woman cannot tolerate.<sup>95</sup>

More’s work could replace the bipolar moral structure of the melodramatic idiom with a sliding scale of moral turpitude, which would allow for a more

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<sup>93</sup> Anonymous (‘An Englishwoman’) *An Englishwoman’s Letter to Mrs Hannah More On the Present Crisis*. London: J Hatchard and Son, 1820, p. 3-4.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10 and p. 11 respectively.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

refined reading. It would no longer be necessary to establish beyond all reasonable doubt that the Queen had committed adultery; rather, her incautious and imprudent public behaviour would be enough to call her virtue into question. Not only would this allow a just judgment of the Queen to emerge, but it would protect those woman readers who were seduced by the melodramatic narratives defending her, teaching them to distinguish between true virtue and ‘those freedoms which stop only on the verge of crime (and indicate its existence, according to our Saviour’s definition of it)’.<sup>96</sup> Caroline’s female supporters would be thus saved from the dangers of trivializing transgression, which might damage their own moral fibre, reducing their homes to scenes of ‘domestic warfare or deserted loneliness’.<sup>97</sup>

The author of the *Letter* explicitly associates the defence of a sliding moral scale with the defence of a hierarchically organized society. Like the Duchess in *Leonora*, she argues that recognizing moral gradation is crucial to maintaining social distinctions:

Innocence and guilt will be mingled promiscuously, where the bounds are so slightly defined; and the gradations of society thrown into a confusion as injurious to the lower as offensive to the higher circles, will exhibit a mixture alike nauseous and deleterious, disgusting to the mind and appalling to the heart.<sup>98</sup>

If the prostitute and the respectable religious woman continue to use the same discursive structures in defence of the Queen, they will become increasingly indistinguishable in social terms. The failure to recognize the scale of guilt and innocence becomes a failure to distinguish between the lower and the upper ranks, a strategy of revolutionary levelling which will destroy the very fabric of society.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>99</sup> A more extreme association of revolutionary social intercourse, adultery and prostitution was made in a loyalist broadsheet by ‘Democritus Redivivus’:

*Distinction* is not at an end,  
Who joins the *Party* is our Friend!  
Glass-blowing Men, and Chimney Sweepers,  
With Widows, in their weeds and weepers,  
Compositors and Printers’ Devils

Other loyalist writers sought to reinforce moral distinctions amongst women in a rather less nuanced, and more unscrupulous manner. The *John Bull*, edited by Theodore Hook was launched on December 17 1821, after the conclusion of the trial, with the avowed aim of supporting the government and the King against the Whig and radical partisans of Queen Caroline. The paper's approach to this goal was twofold. First, it unleashed an onslaught on the melodramatic idiom with which the investigation had been surrounded, insisting that the Manichean moral framework was nothing more than a cynical rhetorical strategy designed to conceal the fundamentally self-interested motives of the radicals who supported the Queen. By situating the scandal in a narrative of continual radical agitation against the status quo, Hook cast the radicals as a faction who possessed dangerous, protean ability to adapt their rhetoric to the climate of the times:

These spouting, mouthing, blind devotees to disorder and riot, care as little for the Queen as they did for Hunt. She serves as the pole to hoist the revolutionary Cap of Liberty on. Burdett was the pole at one time; Wardle at another; that wretched animal Paul at a third; Hunt was the last pole before the Queen; and now her Majesty is established the *veritable* Mother Red-Cap of the faction.<sup>100</sup>

The Clarke scandal and the Caroline scandal become mere points in an ongoing narrative of Jacobin conspiracy to disrupt the peace, a rhetorical strategy that denies the particular affective claim of the Queen's cause.<sup>101</sup>

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Now hoist their flags, and join the revels  
And many a Dotard here repairs,  
Whose head the *cornu-copia* wears;  
Yet, wheedled by their *loving* wives  
Will share the zest their presence gives.  
So the frail Sisters of the Moon,  
May bring *their fond* Addresses *soon!!!*

The motley collection of individuals who support the Queen become nothing more than a disorderly rabble. Those in danger of seduction by the spectacle were not respectable wives and daughters, who were being encouraged to ignore shades of vice, but gullible husbands, whose wives were already guilty. See Anonymous ('Democritus Redivivus'), *More Loyal Addresses!!! Salmagundi Or All The World At Hammersmith, A Jeu d'Esprit For October 1820*. London: Robins and Sons, 1820.

<sup>100</sup> *John Bull*. No 2, December 24 1820, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup> However, it should be noted that Hook, like the radicals, espoused a polarized moral structure, insisting that there was no middle position between culpability and blamelessness, no grey area of impropriety which fell short of criminality: 'No trimming, no shuffling, no

Second, Hook used scandal as a highly effective weapon against the Queen's supporters, particularly those of the female gender, in order to try to convince the nation of Caroline's guilt. However, unlike modern tabloids, the *John Bull* did not specialize in the exposé, and unlike later scandal sheets of the 1820s, notably Nicholson's *The Town* and Barnard Gregory's *The Satirist*, it avoided titillating details which might arouse salacious readers. Instead, the newspaper earned most of its notoriety from the manner in which it manipulated details that the public already knew. The most infamous articles in early editions of Hook's newspaper were contained in a series entitled 'The Queen's Female Visitors'. In this column, Hook listed the names women who had visited the Queen, and then provided a paragraph of compromising personal information about each of them. The idea was stolen from the loyalist *Courier*, and Hook was at pains to note that lists of those attending the Queen were freely available elsewhere, for example in *The Times*. However, what made this series particularly devastating in the hands of Hook was his willingness to publish details which would provoke the maximum amount of social embarrassment.

In his introduction to the first article in this series, Hook explained the reasoning behind his method:

If the Ladies of England recognize, by their society, the purity of the Queen, our list will do her and them justice. If the Ladies of England shrink back from the Queen's society, and that only a few of looser morals, or with personal interests are found to visit her- then, again, our list will do justice to her and to them.<sup>102</sup>

Ostensibly, then, Hook was exploring the credentials of the Queen's visitors, determining her exact moral status by that of her friends, hoping to find that she was neglected by her own sex, who policed the boundaries of morality. In exposing the names and characters of those who visited Caroline, he claimed that he was motivated by the 'sacred respect which every Englishman feels for

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sophistry- guilty or not guilty she must be' and the distinct treatment of guilt or of innocence she must receive'. *John Bull*. No. 4, January 7, 1821, p. 36.

the female sex, the solace, and the ornament of our existence', preventing the 'female society of the metropolis' from becoming 'infected by Bergamis'.<sup>103</sup> The women he attacked had thrust themselves forward into the public eye, and were thus exempt from the protection afforded to private characters. What was actually happening, however, was slightly different. Hook was using exposure as an instrument to create the social neglect that he purported to describe, capitalizing on the way that female reputation depended on social countenance, and exploiting the fact that women were afraid that their reputations would be destroyed by the slightest hint of publicity. As Hazlitt argued in 'On Public Opinion', Hook was producing the scenario which would have obtained had the Queen been found unequivocally guilty by public opinion as well as parliament, and doing so not by making rational arguments which could be supported by evidence, but by taking advantage of the mixture of fear and fascination with which the public responded to scandal. If Caroline's supporters imagined her story in terms of a melodramatic anti-narrative, in accordance with their own interests, Hook used publicity to construct the truth as his patrons wanted it to appear. The strategy appears to have been successful, as Hook proclaimed:

We have received so many applications from persons, denying that their female friends have visited the Queen, that we really begin to suspect that no Lady, except the Duchess of Leinster, and perhaps one or two others, have [sic] seen Her Majesty at all.<sup>104</sup>

However, impugning the characters of well known women was not without its risks. In May of 1821, the publishers and ghost editor of the *John Bull* appeared at the bar of the Commons to answer a charge of breach of privilege, but the debates on committing the editor to Newgate on this charge were used more to vent a general sense of outrage at the journal, than to comment on the alleged breach itself. Sir Thomas Lethbridge complained that 'This Paper (*John Bull*) had been for some time dealing forth its malignity in a manner disgraceful to the press and injurious to the morality of the country',<sup>105</sup> while Sir Ronald Fergusson fulminated that its staff and patrons were 'base,

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<sup>102</sup> *John Bull*. No 1, December 17, 1820, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> *John Bull*. No. 9, February 11, 1821, p. 69.

<sup>104</sup> *John Bull*. No. 6, January 21, 1821, p. 44.

<sup>105</sup> *Morning Chronicle*. May 11, 1821, p. 2.



cowardly, assassins, who, moving, in consequence of adventitious circumstances, in an elevated circle, felt themselves entitled to disgrace the society of which they were such unworthy Members'.<sup>106</sup> In an editorial purportedly written from Newgate, Hook ruefully commented that the journal had been arraigned on one charge and found guilty on another:

We now come to the charge which has been made against us of attacking females and wounding private character. This, it should appear by the newspapers, was much insisted upon as a good reason for sending us to Newgate, upon which we asked Mr Scarlet, the Barrister, whether he ever knew of a Judge condemn a man for forgery, who was indicted for sheep-stealing.<sup>107</sup>

The fact that the scandal of 1820-21 centred on the boundaries of proper female behaviour allowed women contributed to public discussions in unprecedented numbers on both sides of the question. Female addresses to the Queen claimed that women were able to feel a special sympathy with her situation, which made it imperative for them to speak out in her support. While Caroline might insist that her sufferings were exceptional and exemplary, many of these addresses suggested that the Queen was a kind of 'everywoman', whose wrongs could inspire the empathy of all, uniting women together to take collective action. Further, the fact that feminine intervention was ostensibly grounded on compassion allowed it to be pictured, in almost Staëlian fashion, as a morally superior force to the cold, interested actions of her male partisans. To counter such arguments, loyalist writers endeavoured to focus women's attention back onto the social propriety of their engagement with politics, arguing that the dangerous enthusiasm which suffused the melodramatic rhetoric surrounding Caroline's cause had lost sight of the truly doubtful nature of her cause. While the anonymous 'Englishwoman' called for Hannah More to convince these political women of their error, Theodore Hook employed the more direct tactic of spreading scandal about Caroline's female visitors, in the hope that the mere fact of public mention would discourage ordinary women from showing their support.

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<sup>106</sup> *Morning Chronicle*. May 12, 1821, p. 2.

## V

### *Conclusion*

On 10 November, after the Bill of Pains and Penalties had passed its two readings by majorities of just 28 and 9, the case against the Queen was dropped. Though this was celebrated as a great popular victory, it was actually the beginning of an onslaught against the Queen that ended only with her death in August of the next year. How was the rising tide of sentiment in Caroline's favour which occurred in the autumn of 1821, which was highly amenable to a radical political reading, quelled so quickly?

The answer may lie in the combination of the polarized moral rhetoric that surrounded Queen's cause with the suspicion of plot generated by narrative logic of the trial itself. When mixed, these two strands provided the Queen's supporters with a highly effective way of challenging the logic of investigation without abandoning the ideals of publicity and openness, while also allowing radicals to link the scandal to a wider platform of reformist measures. But the politics of plot with which Caroline's cause had become inextricably connected also meant that once the investigation to which they objected had imploded, much of the energy of Caroline's cause simply seeped away. The narrative of the melodrama had run its course: the plots against Caroline had been uncovered, the villains confounded, the heroine exonerated in spite of the verdict against her. Both *A Letter to the People of England* and *Modern Anecdotes of the New Green (Bag) Room* express a sense that the scandal had reached a point of closure with the ending of the trial, voicing the hope that the drama would have 'no second representation'.<sup>108</sup>

When Caroline's persecutions, behind which the cloven foot of Old Corruption could be glimpsed, appeared to have ceased, it became difficult to sustain the intensity of the radical critique in a more abstract form. Furthermore, after she accepted a £50,000 pension from the government in March 1821, she betrayed what had appeared to many to be a heartfelt commitment to a party that

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<sup>107</sup> *John Bull*. No. 23 May 20, 1821, p. 180.

viewed sinecures and pensions as an integral part of the machinery of Old Corruption. She had committed the very unheroine-like error of colluding with her oppressors, and her compromise collapsed the polarized moral logic of melodrama which had galvanized support in her favour. Consequently, her professions of disgust at the corrupt system began to look as hypocritical and exploitative as the 'plots' that had been laid to entrap her. It was only with her death in the summer of 1821 that her status as a victim was reinstated, allowing the spats over her funeral procession to become a brief focus for radical agitation once again.

On the one hand, the melodramatic framework of the Caroline affair allowed the scandal to become a popular sensation, dramatizing the Queen's 'oppression' in a vivid and immediate manner, which mobilized support from all sectors of society. It let the respectable radicals in charge of defending Caroline to point to ways in which her wrongs symbolized the wider evils of an unreformed system, encouraging a variety of very different groups, including women normally excluded from the public realm, to identify themselves with her cause. Further, by casting the events of 1820-21 as a Manichean struggle between virtuous innocence and vicious plotting, melodrama provided a means to challenge the government's emphasis on the need for a thorough, public investigation of the charges without abandoning Benthamite rhetoric or a commitment to exposure. It allowed radicals to argue that the trial was not the full and frank investigation demanded by utilitarian justice, but a corrupt and interested attempt to foist a predetermined course of action on the Queen and the unsuspecting public. At the same time, however, Caroline's professed readiness to undergo a less biased examination, in which her conduct would be exposed to the public gaze, was used by her supporters as a definitive sign of her innocence, which allowed them to assume, before any enquiry had actually been held, that she was not guilty of the charges laid against her.

In late 1820, however, the dynamism that had characterized the radical charge against the government began to fizzle out. If scandal had helped to

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<sup>108</sup> Anonymous, *A Letter to the People of England Upon Passing Events*. *Op. cit.* p. 5.

popularise respectable radicalism for a time, it ultimately also dealt a huge amount of damage to the cause of reform. It distracted radicals away from the more abstract arguments against Old Corruption and the unreformed system, and diverted public attention on to a narrative of oppression which, for all its intensity, had a limited lifespan. The radical cause ultimately became too intimately entwined with the particular details of the scandal, which fascinated the people of England for months in 1820, but which had begun to fade from public consciousness in 1821. Whereas at the beginning of the scandal, radicals were able to move from the minutiae of Caroline's story, to more general arguments about the state of political society, when there was no more to reveal and the tide of public favour began to turn, the theoretical case for reform which they had floated above the scandal's details, became stranded. The impetus for general reform declined as the particular narrative of the scandal, and of Caroline's life, moved towards a close.

Chapter Five:

'Publicity is the Soul of Justice':  
Scandal, Entertainment and Feminism  
in the early Victorian era

To round off this study, this chapter proposes to consider the way in which the Benthamite model of publicity continued to influence discussions about the role of the press, and the participation of women in politics, into the 1830s and 1840s. In the first section, I look at the problems which were created for utilitarian ideas about exposure when a new generation of scandal sheets began to use a kind of pseudo-Benthamite rhetoric to justify the exploitation of sensational revelations for commercial ends. I use the work of Edward Bulwer-Lytton to explore the way in which thinkers who put their faith in publicity were forced to refine their arguments to take account of the notion that scandal could operate as a form of mass entertainment. Bulwer was particularly concerned about the effect of publicity on private life, arguing that the domestic sphere was valuable precisely because it was exempt from public exposure. However, his wife, Rosina, disagreed, arguing that the despotism of husbands over wives could only be prevented by extending the protective influence of publicity into the home. The final section of this chapter explores the way in which she put this theory into practice, utilizing scandal against Bulwer to draw attention not only to her personal maltreatment at his hands, but to the legal and political disenfranchisement of women in general.

## I

### *Exposure and Mass Entertainment*

In *Radical Underworld*, Iain McCalman argues that many radicals who produced Queenite propaganda in 1820-21 turned to printing pornographic or titillating works during the late 1820s and 1830s in order to make ends meet.<sup>1</sup> A combination of heavy taxes, repressive prosecutions, a decrease in radical unrest, and technological change (which made greater amounts of capital investment in machinery necessary), meant that struggling pressmen discovered that publishing obscene texts, which were sold to a wealthy audience, was an increasingly attractive way of making a profit. However, McCalman points out that this was not an outright betrayal of ultra-radical ideals: reprints of eighteenth century libertine works, in particular, which exposed the vices of

aristocrats, were capable of carrying strong radical and antiestablishment messages. Scandal, he argues, was still a tool which pressmen could use to challenge the status quo, exposing the misdeeds of the upper classes and connecting their immorality to political corruption, in a similar fashion to Charles Piggott in the 1790s.<sup>2</sup>

However, while McCalman's argument is persuasive, it tends, at times to over-simplify the picture. There is no *necessary* connection between political radicalism and some of the pornographic works produced by some of these disreputable pressmen after 1821. Indeed, some of the examples which McCalman uses to argue that scandalmongers of the 1820s and 1830s were covertly supporting a radical agenda seem rather to negate than to support his argument. For example, McCalman cites Renton Nicholson's *The Town* (1837-42) as a prime example of a scandalous journalistic tradition that was if not explicitly reformist, then latently radical:

These periodicals were frequently prurient, often obscene and always sensationalist, but they were also populist and sometimes explicitly radical in their professed concern to expose and reform upper- and middle-class corruption and vice. Several of them supported radical franchise reform and opposed the New Poor Law, the Police Bill and of course everything related to the SSV. Nicholson's *Town* described itself as "like unto a popular representative of the people, returned to serve them weekly, and elected upon the glorious system of universal suffrage."<sup>3</sup>

In support of this argument, McCalman points out that until late December 1837, William Clarke, a radical Queenite propagandist in the early 1820s who was also known for producing a pirated edition of Shelley's *Queen Mab*, was involved with producing *The Town*. In his eyes, the paper's own apparently

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<sup>1</sup> See Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London 1795-1840*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988 repr. 1998, pp. 204-231.

<sup>2</sup> For the emergence of a new market for pornography in the early nineteenth century, see Bradford K Mudge, 'Romanticism, Materialism and the Origins of Modern Pornography', *Romanticism on the Net*, No. 23, August 2001 [accessed 20 July 2004], <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/23mudge.html>> and Lisa Z Sigel *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England 1815-1914*. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

open avowal of radical sentiments, combined with the involvement of a well-established anti-establishment figure makes Nicholson's journal an archetypal example of a scurrilous reformist periodical of the period, the existence of which is evidence of a continuing tradition of disreputable radicalism.

The problem with McCalman's argument is that *The Town* is *not* actually a radical journal. When political issues are in question in the paper (which is actually quite seldom), its convictions are clearly Tory. In the third number of the periodical, an article entitled 'The Mirror of Society, or the New Johnsonian Dictionary', which is written as a kind of 'ABC' of *The Town's* commitments, Renton Nicholson disparages a 'Radical' as 'A candidate for toryism, when fortune smiles on him. One of the "lower orders"'. The defining characteristic of a 'Whig' is that he is 'A separator of husband and wife. A patron of the new bastille. A limner who draws his own portrait, and calls it a description of a tory. A being abhorred by gods and men'. Being a 'Tory', on the other hand, means being part of 'The best of the "three denominations"'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, a series on 'Vestries' complains that local government was becoming a 'hot-bed of agitation, retrenchment, and economy; where every shilling expended undergoes the narrow scrutiny of five hundred indefatigable reformers.'<sup>5</sup> Radical arguments against high levels of taxation meet with little sympathy from *The Town*, as the journal attacks members of the party as vulgar and selfish hypocrites, in language which echoes the loyalist criticisms of Wardle's conduct in 1809: 'in speech loud, and denouncing every thing that exists as abuse and corruption; and in practice, the most zealous supporters of "every one for himself"'.<sup>6</sup> However, the 'threat' posed by the reform movement is not usually dealt with in so serious a manner, but is more frequently treated as a subject for derision. In a series of articles entitled 'The Enigmatical Poetical Correspondence Society of St Leonard's, Shoreditch', ridicules Corresponding Societies, portraying their members as amateurish and incompetent lower

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<sup>3</sup> McCalman, *Radical Underworld*. *Op. cit.*, p. 225. The strength of a journal's opposition to the New Poor Law is a somewhat odd measurement of its radicalism, given that anti-Poor Law sentiments were often strongly voiced in Tory journals.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Mirror of Society, or New Johnsonian Dictionary', *The Town*. No. 3, Saturday June 17 1838, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> 'Vestries: St Mary Newington', *The Town*. No 4, Saturday June 24 1837, p. 25.



middle class ‘cockneys’, who seek to play at politics and literature.<sup>7</sup> Radical poetry, in particular, is parodied as illiterate, vulgar doggerel, unworthy of attention.

Nicholson’s journal, then, cannot be situated comfortably in a tradition of radical scandal. Nor can Charles Molloy Westmacott’s *The Age*, which McCalman also mentions as part of his ‘underworld’ tradition because the radical Thomas Ashe was involved with its publication, though McCalman also, rather confusingly, notes that this scandal sheet was Tory in its political bent. The underlying assumption, never explicitly voiced by McCalman, seems to be that all texts which expose the misdemeanours of the upper ranks must retain a fundamentally reformist outlook; despite the fact that, under this rationale, it would be possible to include even the ultra-Tory, ultra-loyalist, anti-radical *John Bull* in the list of scurrilous ‘reformist’ texts produced in the 1820s! While the early nineteenth century certainly witnessed a strong tradition of using scandal against the establishment, as I have shown throughout this thesis, scandal also created problems for both Rousseauvian and Benthamite traditions of thinking about publicity, and was even used as a tool *against* radicals in both the Mary Ann Clarke and the Queen Caroline scandals.

Furthermore, as I shall argue in the rest of this section, while all texts emerge out of a social context, and are thus in some way political, to read *The Town* as a periodical which uses scandal, first and foremost, as a political tool, is to mistake its real project. Whereas Hook’s *John Bull* was established to serve the government, manipulating scandal to discredit supporters of Queen Caroline, Nicholson’s *The Town* uses scandal to entertain, and to include the reader in a culture of metropolitan fast life, and to voice its rabid opposition to evangelicalism. Of course, the way that it imagines society has a political charge: *The Town* creates a politically reactionary and basically consolatory picture of metropolitan society, in which each class has its own place. But its Tory political stance is far less direct, less overt, and less specific than that of

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Vestries: St George’s, Southwark’, *The Town*. No. 5, Saturday July 1 1837, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Enigmatical Poetical Correspondence Society Of St Leonard’s Shoreditch’, *The Town*. No. 1, Saturday June 3 1835, p. 7.

the *John Bull*. Indeed, Nicholson complains that: ‘it is a domestic affliction where the head, or any branch of a family, professes to be a politician; certain disputes arise with the nearest and dearest friends’, sealing his argument against overtly political engagement rather mischievously by quoting ‘John Wilks’” exhortation to apprentices to avoid political subjects.<sup>8</sup> Behind this eschewal of politics for fraternal rhetoric is a shrewd commercial decision: the repeal of stamp taxes in 1836 meant that Nicholson could exploit a new niche in the market for cheap, apolitical texts. He could sell *The Town* for just 2d (other scandal sheets of the late 1820s and early 1830s cost 6d or 7d), provided that it did not include any news or commentary on the times.<sup>9</sup>

What may have confused McCalman into thinking that *The Town* was a radical journal is the fact that Nicholson is prone to rely upon Benthamite discourses of publicity in order to justify his periodical’s use of scandalous exposure, probably because they provided him with a ready-made and robust line of defence. However, he drains this utilitarian rhetoric of its radicalism, subordinating it to a shrewd awareness of the commercial potential of scandal as a form of entertainment. For example, at first sight the reference to ‘universal suffrage’, which McCalman quotes in support of his argument that *The Town* was basically reformist provides a good example which does seem to connect periodical’s use of scandal with a very specific radical agenda. However, on closer examination, Nicholson actually uses reformist rhetoric not to express a politically partisan stance, but to imagine his periodical’s commercial appeal to the entirety of the general public. The entire passage, of which only one sentence is quoted by McCalman, reads:

we shall as much as possible endeavour to avoid personalities, or to tinge our sketches with the dark shade of indelicacy: so far, the most fastidious have nothing to complain of; but still we wish it to be clearly understood, that we are neither writing for the nursery, nor the boarding school; perhaps if we were, we might “better their instruction”. We write, and indite, and compile for the million, and not for any particular sect or division. We are like unto a popular representative of the people,

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Characteristic Sketches No. IV’, *The Town*. No. 4, Saturday June 24, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> For further information on the stamp taxes, see Joel H Wiener *The War Of The Unstamped : The Movement To Repeal The British Newspaper Tax, 1830-1836*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969.

returned to serve them weekly, and elected upon the glorious system of universal suffrage. There is something in our publication to please the senses of every body, and offend the ears of none.<sup>10</sup>

The apparently reformist language used by Nicholson comes in the centre of a passage which lurches uneasily between an admission of the periodical's disrespectable status (it is not for the nursery), and a rather contradictory attempt to persuade the reader that it is also utterly innocuous (offending 'the ears of none'). 'Universal suffrage' is used not to express Nicholson's political commitment to votes for all, but the non-factional, apolitical nature of his journal. The extension of the franchise becomes a metaphor for mass culture, a way of imagining a readership imagined as socially diverse, prior to divisions of class, religion or politics, which will 'vote' on the popularity of the magazine by choosing whether to purchase it again, week after week. Despite the high-minded, political tone of the reference, it actually draws attention to the apolitical commercial imperatives driving Nicholson's use of publicity: scandal becomes a commodity designed to appeal to a wide range of consumers.

Repeatedly, Nicholson adopts a Benthamite idiom to argue that publicity is necessary to policing the public realm, allowing the press to undertake 'a searching and fearless exposure of grievances that they can be redressed', exposing interested wrongdoing to the public gaze, in order that measures in the general interest can be adopted.<sup>11</sup> However, as his autobiography, published in 1860, makes clear, his commitment to using the surveillance which his periodical can provide is heavily qualified by his blackmailing methods, and his candid admission that he abused the power vested in him as a journal proprietor for his own gain:

Lord Bacon said "that knowledge is power;" so it is, and money is omnipotence. There is also a terrific engine exemplifying and calling into profitable action both knowledge and money: I mean the press. Let any man with his wits about him have the control of a penny rag in the publishing line, and he becomes a potentate... Oh, how popular I became a week after it was known that I was the editor of *The Town*. Sinners came forth and proclaimed their own infamy. Animated by their terrors,

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<sup>10</sup> 'Introductory Address', *The Town*. No. 1, Saturday 3 June 1837, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1

unsolicited, they unveiled their contrabands, and paid me the duty which the legitimately-constituted authorities had failed to collect... Wherever I went there was an ovation; in fact, I may say I was the idol of evil doers; and, having said that much, it will be seen that I was a universal favourite.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas for Bentham, publicity was designed to oversee institutions, ensuring that they acted in the general interest, Nicholson here depicts a very different state of affairs, in which pressmen act the secret keepers of society, revealing only what they choose to tell about an individual. Exposure is driven not by the public welfare, but by the profitability of revealing a particular piece of information. The flip-side of revelation is blackmail, as Nicholson carefully balances the gain to be had from publishing against the amount of money an individual will pay to keep him silent. Instead of being a force working against Old Corruption, the scandalmongering pressman possesses a kind of unofficial sinecure, which makes him a 'potentate' in society, surrounded by individuals suing for his favour.

Nicholson's skill at employing the language of Benthamite exposure, denuded of its radicalism, as a form of entertainment was also employed in his position as a publican and entertainer from the early 1840s. In 1841 he was proprietor of the Garrick's Head, where he established the 'Judge and Jury Society' a dramatic group who provided guests with entertainment while they enjoyed the drink and food on offer in the house. As the name suggests, they staged mock-trials, with actors playing the roles of defendant, witness and counsel, the last fully costumed in gown and wig. One of the regular actors, Henry Pellatt, was known for his mimicry of Brougham, the lawyer who defended Queen Caroline; others took on fictional roles as archetypal barristers.<sup>13</sup> The whole was presided over by the 'judge', 'Lord Chief Baron Nicholson' himself. The 'cases' were often based on famous scandalous trials of the day (often for adultery, or 'criminal conversation' as it was known) but parodies of legal procedure were as much a part of these entertainments as their topicality.

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<sup>12</sup> Renton Nicholson, *Rogue's Progress: The Autobiography of "Lord Chief Baron" Nicholson*. Ed. John Bradley. London: Longmans, 1965, repr. 1966, pp. 206-7.

<sup>13</sup> More detailed descriptions of these shows can be found in the later numbers of *The Town*.

As I argued in chapter two, Bentham was concerned about the way in which beneficial publicity (needed to ensure that the law was administered fairly) could come to serve prurient public interest in the trial, transforming the legal process into a source of risqué public entertainment. Nicholson's mock-trials represented a realization of the utilitarian's worst nightmare, as the Lord Chief Baron and his company burlesqued the forms of the law, subordinating the revelation of truth to entertainment, and using the argument that all evidence had to be heard to detail sexually sensational pieces of evidence and to engage in titillating cross-examinations. Plain and clear language was transformed into a dramatic dialogue full of puns and sexual *double entendres*, the humour of which lay in their ambivalence. Still worse, as Nicholson himself proudly noted, his shows were not divorced from the process of real trials. Not only were many of his guests lawyers or law students, but, on the occasions when Nicholson actually appeared in a real courtroom, he would transform the genuine trial into a hilarious version of his drama, subverting the seriousness of the truth-revealing process:

Even the highest judges in the land have recognized me and my office while acting judicially in their own courts. I was once called as a witness in the Common Pleas...On my being sworn, the following scene was enacted:-

*Sergeant Byles*.- "I believe, sir, you are at the Garrick's Head – Chief Baron of the Exchequer?"

*Witness*.- "Very *barren* of the exchequer, sir, I am sorry to say."  
(Roars of laughter, in which the Chief Justice, Sir John Jervis, joined).<sup>14</sup>

By turning the trial into a form of spectacular entertainment, Nicholson and his company exposed the dramatic elements inherent in the legal process, which had been a continual source of anxiety to Bentham, drawing attention to the titillating entertainment provided by courtroom revelations.

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholson, *Rogue's Progress*. *Op. cit.*, p. 252.



Figure 3. 'A.S.H.' *Interior View of The Judge and Jury Society in the Garrick's Head Tavern, Bow Street* (1841). Lithograph. Guildhall Library Print Room, Wakefield Collection, W.W.W2./BOW, no p5422585.

*The Town's* use of scandal was not designed to edify its readers politically. But nor was it supposed to titillate or arouse its audience. Instead, the ability to reveal the private truth behind the public appearance of an individual via scandalous exposure was one element in its wider ambition to mediate the experience of the metropolis to its readers, unveiling the pleasures and the dangers of London. The scandal sheet situates itself in a tradition of 'rambling' texts, the popularity of which had exploded with the sensational success of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* in 1820-21, which charts the urban adventures of Corinthian Tom and Jerry Hawthorne as they mingle with both the highest and the lowest social ranks in the capital.<sup>15</sup> While Egan used a fictional

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<sup>15</sup> Egan himself estimated that sixty-eight pirated versions had appeared, while during 1821 dramatic interpretations were performed at ten metropolitan theatres, several provincial houses and even abroad, in Ireland, Paris and America. See Pierce Egan *The Finish To The Adventures Of Tom, Jerry, And Logic, In Their Pursuits Through Life In And Out Of London*, London: Reeves Turner, 1869. For more on the urban craze inspired by Egan's work, see Charles Hindley, *The True History Of Tom And Jerry, Or Life In London From The Start To The Finish*,

framework to suggest some of the different entertainments which the city afforded the urban male, Nicholson's periodical offered more straightforward advice on how to become a savvy, male consumer in the city, giving readers details of the manners, the service and the clientele at institutions from the highest gambling clubs like Crockfords, to the lowest 'Free and Easy'. Articles on famous courtesans rubbed shoulders with articles on the women who ran more ordinary cigar shops (which often doubled as brothels), while recommendations of various licensed victuallers and glee clubs could be read alongside a series on the culture inside various debtor's prisons. However, rather than offering such advice in a condescending manner, which assumed the reader's lack of familiarity with the metropolis, *The Town* imagined its audience as figures who already knew much of the information it was purveying, picturing its readers as members of a shared culture of urban hedonism. When they purchased the magazine, individuals were not signalling their ignorance, but their membership of a particularly shrewd metropolitan clique. The periodical thus carefully concealed the ideological work it performed in constructing its readers, treating them as the possessors of a metropolitan knowingness even while it provided the very information which allowed them to seem experienced in the ways of the city, cultivating an inclusive rather than a didactic ethos.

The gift of the scandalmonger, an ability to see past surfaces, into the real heart of things, was the defining characteristic of this worldly attitude. In the very first number of the town, Nicholson describes his ideal reader, the 'man about town'. He is a detached observer of city life, who views the metropolitan world with the eye of a hedonist, not a moralist:

He is not the stiff-starched, pedantic observer of men and manners, who peeps into the diversions of mankind but to censure them. Our "Man about Town" mixes with society solely with a view to its enjoyment, and remarks upon the customs of its various grades, that he may enlighten and instruct that portion of the community who are less scrutinous, or have not the time to make observations<sup>16</sup>

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London: Reeves and Turner, 1890 and for Egan's milieu, see J C Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers: Pierce Egan and Regency England*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.

<sup>16</sup> 'Introductory Address', *The Town*. *Op. cit.*, p. 1

Driven by the urge to seek pleasure in his urban milieu and presumably possessing independent means, which allow him the time to remark his surroundings and to frequent both high and low society, the defining characteristic of the socially mobile 'man about town' is that he is 'scrutinous'. Like Benjamin's *flaneur*, he is an observer, gifted with particular insight into the nature of things, able to detach himself from the company that surrounds him to reflect upon what he sees. The street wisdom and quickwittedness of Nicholson's 'ideal' reader means that he is the master-reader of the city's semiotics, never deceived or conned by appearances, but always capable of seeing things as they are.

One of the favourite amusements of *The Town* was to take a piece of metropolitan advertising and deconstruct it, exploring its attempt to manipulate the reader. These articles read like a battle of wits between the 'man about town' and an emergent commodity culture, as marketing becomes both a challenge and a threat to the superior hermeneutic skill of the urban hedonist. Nicholson repeatedly criticizes commercial publicity for creating false consciousness and trading on sensationalism: 'Nothing but notoriety, in fact, seems to be the vogue in business; and, to obtain it, puffing, in all its phases, is resorted to', poking fun at fashionable speculative 'bubble' ventures by creating mock advertisements for them. Most often of all, though, Nicholson simply wrote about the advertisements that meet his eye as he rambled around the city, analysing their language in order to expose to his readers the rhetoric which persuades and the devices which ensnare the unwary consumer. Thus, he laughs at a poster for artificial eyes 'of superior vivacity and clearness of expression', which actually turns out to be a puff for spectacles, and analyses a 'puff' for a dress coat to examine its linguistic rhetorical elements:

what a genius must have inspired, the "pronounced the workmanship to be excellent!" How the words come swelling off the tongue! That one word "pronounced" is worth its weight in gold; and then, think of the collar attracting the attention of "the learned". What an idea is conveyed by the term. All the wisdom of both our universities, and all the



erudition of all the literati of the realm, are concentrated in the little words, the “learned”!<sup>17</sup>

Being able to ‘read’ such rhetoric, to unmask the attempt to create consumer desire, demonstrates the characteristic canniness of the man about town. Exposing the truth behind such publicity was a means of asserting his superiority, but also of stabilizing the relationship between language and the world, referring back to a reassuring reality lying behind the hyperbolic and grandiose discourse of advertising, which tried to divorce appearances from realities.

Publicity in *The Town* was fundamentally subordinated to this project of referring back, continually, to a cynical and worldly, but also a consolatory and stable, vision of metropolitan culture and the social order. While the rapidly expanding metropolis, combined with an increasingly fluid class structure, might make London seem a threatening and confusing place to many, the master reader of the city’s signs, the man about town, was able to put each thing and each individual in its rightful place. Where the magazine used scandal, it was designed not to reform, but to assert a fundamentally reactionary, settled social vision, in which each individual and each class had its place. Only the ‘man about town’ himself could escape this stereotyping: an oddly mobile, classless figure, he is able to adopt the manners of different social groups, to read the signs of all social ranks, to mix in any society. However, rather than exercising his penetrating gaze in the public interest, to correct abuses, the man about town uses his insight solely for his own individualistic pleasure. He finds his ideal type in Nicholson’s own self-image, as the editor of *The Town* uses his vision and his periodical to control the flow of information in society, striking bargains with transgressive individuals eager to part with their money and confess their sins to him in order to avoid becoming subjects of a column in his paper, able to turn his quick eye into a profitable source of income.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘The Puffing System’, *The Town*. No. 4, Saturday June 24 1837, p. 27.

## II

### *Aristocratic Scandal and the Bourgeois Press: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Concerns about Exposure*

But how did this self-constructed image of *The Town's* readers as 'men about town' reflect the real status of the periodical's purchasers? While the newspaper's ideal reader evidently bolstered the paper's sporting, gentlemanly image, as did its adoption of a fraternal tone with its readers, at just 2d, the paper was available to a wide cross-section of the population, and was certainly within the reach of the artisans and the rising clerical class of the city. Because *The Town* was unstamped at the start, it is difficult to know precisely how well it sold, but Donald Grey estimates that it may have circulated around 8,000-10,000 copies each week. Given that its circulation was predominantly metropolitan, and that many of these copies would probably have been read by more than one individual, these figures suggest a substantial audience in London. Many of its readers were probably lower middle class: artisans, clerks, shopkeepers, whose insecure and unfixed social position may well have made the notion of a classless, metropolitan observer particularly attractive.<sup>18</sup> *The Town* offered this class (a group from which many active radicals had drawn over the previous decades) a way of imagining themselves as urban males which was not overtly political, allowing them an identity which was based on their inclusion in a hedonistic city culture, not their exclusion from the franchise.

However, for other observers, this tendency to use scandal as a form of mass cultural entertainment, to denude the language of scandalous exposure of its connection with the language of political rights, represented the nightmarish flip-side of Benthamite, radical optimism about the 'march of mind'. With printer matter increasingly available to the ever more literate lower orders, the intense political anxieties of the 1810s and early 1820s about the destabilizing effects of sedition gradually gave way to concerns about the moral effects of obscene publications upon the working classes, which eventually led to the

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<sup>18</sup> See Donald Grey, 'Early Victorian Scandalous Journalism: Renton Nicholson's *The Town* 1837-42' in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*. Ed. Joanna Shattock and

Obscene Publications Act in 1857. Those who wished to defend the free press increasingly had to combat the idea that the new mass audience which was supposed to be receiving political enlightenment from newspapers, was actually consuming scandalous, titillating or even overtly pornographic texts.

One way of dealing with these concerns was to fragment the picture of a mass audience, to argue that while some members of the working class might be purchasing scandal for its entertainment value, others were driven by a more wholesome desire for practical news. For example, in his essay on the press in *England and the English* (1833), Edward Bulwer-Lytton describes a conversation overheard by a passing nobleman between his valet and his valet's brother, a Sheffield mechanic:

“Why, Tom,” said the valet, “see what lots of news there is in this paper!- ‘Crim. con. extraordinary between a lord and a parson’s wife- Jack –’s (Jack is one of our men of fashion, you know, Tom) Adventure with the widow – Scene at Crocky’s.’ Oh, what fun! Tom have you got sevenpence? I’ve nothing but gold about *me*; let’s buy this here.”  
“Lots of news!” said Tom, surlily, “D’ye call that news? What do I care for your lords and your men of fashion? Crocky! What the devil is Crocky to me? There’s much more for my money in this here big sheet: ‘Advice to the Operatives- Full report of the debate on the Property Tax- Letter from an emigrant in New South Wales.’ That’s what *I* calls news.”  
“Stuff!” cried the valet, astonished.<sup>19</sup>

Consumer desire here symbolizes wider social distinctions. The valet’s southern affectation is shown in his unsubstantiated claim that he has ‘nothing but gold’ in his pockets, and also by his social pretension, as he elides class difference to speak of Jack as one of ‘*our* men of fashion’, collapsing the gap between the scandalous upper class characters appearing in the paper and the lower ranks that read about their antics. The valet’s delight in the sensational disclosures of the paper confirms his inclusion in a culture of transgressive metropolitan pleasures. Purchasing the disreputable newspaper becomes a means of demonstrating his knowingness, as he suavely explains the winking blanks of

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Michael Wolff. Leicester: Leicester University Press and Toronto and Buffalo: Toronto University Press, 1982, p. 328.

the text to his ignorant brother. Scandal allows the man whose labour is devoted to ensuring that his master's person exhibits the correct signs of his social rank to feel that he, too, can be part of the boisterous, masculine culture of the man about town. As was the case with *The Town*, scandal sheets purported to address a fashionable audience, but their actual readers were from the lower and lower middle ranks, who aspired to be included in the culture of the fashionable or raffish world.

On the other hand is the northern mechanic, who produces tangible, solid goods, and who carries real pence, rather than affecting to possess gold. Whereas the valet looks for information about the world of fashion from his paper, the mechanic wants informative, political news. While the servant buys his periodical to signal his inclusion in the fashionable world, the mechanic's 'big sheet' seems to address a group which is already well-defined in terms of social and occupational status, and does not need to work in order to construct its readers, nor to lend them a fantasy of a classless social position. Instead, it focuses its energies on unifying individuals into a sense of their collective identity and power. Excluding the particular, individualistic transgressions that are the subject of the scandal sheet enables the paper to offer a wider social vision, which looks more to the general economic interest of an entire social group. The subject is lost in the vast and detached social vision of the political economist, made possible only when the individual recedes into the crowd, when behaviour (conformity), rather than misbehaviour (eccentricity), is the subject of discussion. An appetite for scandal, by contrast, is the outgrowth of the indolent, egotistical world of the aristocracy: 'Not engaged in the career of mere amusement that belongs to the wealthy- frivolity, scandal, and the unsatisfying pleasure derived from mere declamation, are not attractive to them [the poor].'<sup>20</sup> The operative who functions in a system based on the division of labour and whose role it is to aid the smooth running of mechanical processes of production, has no 'interest' in scandal: he has no curiosity to find out the

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Lytton Bulwer, *England and the English*. Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1834, Book IV, chapter one, 'View Of The Intellectual Spirit Of The Time', p. 200.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199

doings of upper class individuals, and no investment in the metropolitan knowingness which journals like *The Town* purveyed to their readers.

The argument of *England and the English* echoes Bentham's stance in *Political Tactics*.<sup>21</sup> A major theme of the former is the decline of aristocratic political and social influence in the 'modern' era, and the concomitant rise of a respectable middle class, and Bulwer places particular emphasis on the important role played by the press in enfranchising the middle orders. In this context, Tom's preference for his 'big sheet' does some valuable work for Bulwer, enabling him to argue that scandal sheets are relics of a decaying aristocratic society, a thing of the past, not the present:

So much for the proud cry of the aristocrat, that the papers to please the rabble must descend to pander the vulgar passions. No! this is the vice of the aristocratic journals, that are supported alone by the excrescences of aristocracy, by gambling-houses, demireps, and valets. The industrious poor are not the purchasers of the *Age*.<sup>22</sup>

Like Bentham, Bulwer uses the fact of Tom's preference for the informative paper to point to the socially improving tendency of a free press. The consolatory message is that the bulk of the modern working class will not be interested in the trivialities of upper class transgressions. Scandal is only seen in dying 'aristocratic journals' which keep up a social fantasy of the 'fast life', instead of accepting the rise of a new respectability based on self-improvement and financial and personal 'creditworthiness'.

For Bulwer, the conflict between an older, aristocratic newspaper culture and a modern, democratic press is part and parcel of a wider tendency to turn away from a culture defined by the transgressive artist, to a more useful and matter-of-fact way of viewing the world:

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<sup>21</sup> Though he follows Bentham closely in his ideas on the press, Bulwer was not a devoted utilitarian. In an essay on Bentham, printed as an appendix to *England and the English*, he praises his jurisprudence, but criticizes his moral theory, arguing that his picture of human character is too basic, and his attempt to track all human actions to a desire to experience pain and avoid pleasure, too simplistic. For Bulwer, humans are more complex beings than Bentham suggests. See Bulwer, *England and the English*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 378-388.

When Byron passed away, the feeling he had represented craved utterance no more. With a sigh we turned to the actual and practical career of life: we awoke from the morbid, the passionate, the dreaming... and by a natural reaction addressed ourselves to the active and daily objects which lay before us... Hence that strong attachment to the Practical, which became so visible a little time after the death of Byron, and which continues... to characterize the temper of the time. Insensibly acted upon by the doctrine of the Utilitarians, we desired to see Utility in every branch of intellectual labour... We were in the situation of a man who, having run a certain career of dreams and extravagance, begins to be prudent and saving, to calculate his conduct, and begins to look to his estate.<sup>23</sup>

With the passing of the archetypal scandalous poet, the spirit of the age becomes more uncompromisingly Benthamite, more orientated towards the general and collective than the individual. The labour of the press, the mechanized process of textual production, the work performed by the individual journalist, whose identity is swallowed in his metonymic representation of the public gaze (his function merely physiological: to see, not to interpret), and the hermeneutic work of the reader who searches beyond an individual journal to survey the press as a whole, all now enable the process of truth-recovery. The major casualty of the process, is the individual: 'truth' is fundamentally collective; Romantic renunciation of or rebellion against the world the sign of a misplaced Quixotism, not of genius in communion with a higher truth. The culture of artisanal self-improvement, which requires practical news rather than scandal is an offshoot of this wider change from an inherently scandalous, visionary society to a more rigidly down-to-earth system.

Like Bentham, Bulwer argues for freedom of the press on two main grounds. Firstly, he contends that newspapers are valuable because they provide surveillance, acting a check to the social and political dominance of the aristocracy, a caste which tends to abuse public institutions for private ends. They enable a regulative 'public eye' looking out for the 'greater good' to oversee otherwise closed systems:

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200

<sup>23</sup> Bulwer, *England and the English.*, Book IV, chapter 2, 'Literature'. *Op. cit* pp. 251-2,

The newspaper not only discusses questions, but it gives, in its varied pages, the results of systems;- proceedings at law- convictions before magistrates- abuses in institutions- unfairness in taxation- all come before the public eye... We have not had an aristocratic government without having had laws passed to its own advantage<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, a free press contributes to critical debate and, ultimately, to the enlightenment of the reading public. Newspapers act as the mouthpieces of different groups, enabling their interests to be represented. The very early nineteenth century witnessed considerable anxiety about the fragmentation of the reading public, and Bulwer himself notes that individual papers embody ‘the prejudice, the passion, and the sectarian bigotry that belong to one body of men engaged in active opposition to another’.<sup>25</sup> However, he argues that this ideological combativeness is tempered by the economic competitiveness of the newspaper field. Market laws ensure that influence will be meted out in exact accordance with the extent to which a journal represents popular feeling:

Newspapers being thus the organs of several opinions, the result is the influence of opinion, because that newspaper sells the best which addresses itself to the largest class; it becomes influential in proportion to its sale, and thus, the most popular opinion grows, at last, into the greatest power.<sup>26</sup>

The freer and cheaper the press, the more powerful will be the voice of the working class: ‘As the extension of the electoral franchise gave power to the middle classes, so the extended circulation of the press will give power to the operative.’<sup>27</sup> The struggle for power between different journals ensures that the voice of the majority is recognized: it lends publicity to views which might otherwise go unheard. The fragmentation of the reading public into groups with different class, political and occupational allegiances which Jon Klancher has identified as a source of anxiety in periodical writing of the early nineteenth century, becomes, in Bulwer’s view, a guarantee that all the circumstances of a particular case will be attended to: ‘As the nature of evidence is the comparison of facts, so to tell us all things on all sides is the sole process by which we arrive

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-8

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198

at truth'.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, Bulwer argues for a reduction in the 'taxes on knowledge', the duties imposed on newsprint which pushed the price of papers up, placing them beyond the reach (at least in terms of outright purchase) of the lowest orders of society on the basis that the spread of knowledge will improve the wellbeing and increase the rationality of the working classes, as well as ensuring their voices a place in public opinion. By displacing scandal onto a previous era, he is able to counter arguments that the reduction of these taxes would flood the market with scurrilous publications, arguing instead that the new working class, enlightened by the march of mind, would have no interest in scandal-sheets.

But Bulwer takes this Benthamite argument about the importance of full discussion a step further. Close-up, the tussles between newspapers might make the press as a whole look terribly discordant. But this is the product of short-sightedness. Bulwer claims that the whole field of newspapers can be observed from a more distanced, objective and ideologically neutral perspective, enabling an individual to gain an omniscient view of a far more concordant type of public opinion:

In the sublime language of a great moralist, "Errors cease to be dangerous when it is permitted to contradict them; they are soon known to be errors; they sink into the Abyss of Forgetfulness, and Truth alone swims over the vast extent of Ages." This publicity is man's nearest approach to the omniscience of his great Creator; it is the largest result of union yet known, for it is the expression of the Universal Mind. Thus are we enabled, knowing what *is* to be effected, to effect according to our knowledge- for to knowledge power is proportioned. Omnipotence is the necessary consequence of omniscience.<sup>29</sup>

To Bulwer, the revelatory power of the press was almost divine. Newspapers not only allowed a single, univocal truth, expressive of the will of all, to emerge out of the clash between different perspectives, but provided the individual with a breathtaking new, unobstructed perspective on the views of every individual in society. With such an all-encompassing perspective comes a grasp of the whole range of human knowledge and consequently a leap forward in terms of social

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<sup>28</sup> See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Bulwer, *England and the English*. *Op. cit.*, p. 218.



progress. This utopian preoccupation stayed with Bulwer until the end of his career: his last novel, *The Coming Race* (1871) picks up on the rhetoric of his argument against taxes on knowledge, describing a subterranean tribe of super-evolved beings, the Vrilya, who have developed critical debate into purely non-verbal psychic process, their minds 'quicken to a degree unknown in the waking state.. the thoughts of one brain could be transmitted to another, and knowledge be thus rapidly interchanged'.<sup>30</sup>

But Bulwer's optimistic faith in the press in this essay is continually threatened by the intrusion of private interests. Scandalous Sunday newspapers exemplify the way in which the press's noble function of providing publicity for the people can be abused for immoral ends. The result is that all journalists become suspicious characters:

men cannot avoid looking upon him [the journalist] as one who has the power of stabbing them in the dark- and the libels- the lies- the base and filthy turpitude of certain of the Sunday papers, have an effect of casting upon all newspaper-writers a suspicion, from which not only the honourable, but the able among them are utterly free- as at Venice, every member of the secret council, however humane and noble, received some portion of the odium and fear which attached to the practice of unwitnessed punishment and mysterious assassination.<sup>31</sup>

Bulwer is particularly concerned about the institutional opacity of the newspaper, which, in his eyes, casts doubt on the fairness of the publicity it provides. He criticizes the practice of anonymous reviewing, arguing that it enables journalists to damn or praise any individual from a protected position, and pointing out the absurdity of the fact that the same 'fourth estate' which ensured that the actions of the British government were exposed to the public, while the motions of the Venetian council were shrouded in secrecy, was itself unwilling to expose its own methods to the public gaze. This enabled the press to become a tool for private abuse, as its opacity concealed the extent to which corrupt interests influenced responses to a particular individual: 'The mask is worn, not to protect from the petitions of private partialities, but *to deceive the*

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>30</sup> E G E Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*. Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1871 repr. 1995 pp. 20-1.

<sup>31</sup> Bulwer, *England and the English*. *Op. cit.*, p. 210

*public as to the extent to which partiality is carried; and the very evils which secrecy was to prevent, it not only produces, but conceals, and by concealment defrauds of a remedy.*<sup>32</sup> However, Bulwer's wider framework of a shift from aristocratic to bourgeois society allows him to mute these anxieties. In his eyes, dishonesty was not a feature of the modern press, but a hangover of older forms of aristocratic interest, which would soon be wiped out: 'The rich man has no power to gain by a happy criticism, but he may have much malice to gratify by a piquant assault. Thus the aristocratic contributors to a journal have the most insisted upon secrecy, and have used it to write the bitterest sallies on their friends'.<sup>33</sup>

A still greater problem was created by the threat that the press posed to the private sphere, which Bulwer was extremely concerned to preserve as a realm sacred from the public gaze. He was outraged by the antics of the American journalist Nathaniel Parker Willis, who dined at the house of Lady Blessington in 1834, writing up his meeting with her and his encounters with those who attended her salon, for *The New York Mirror*. In 1835, Willis republished these pieces in book form for a London audience as *Pencilings by the Way*, editing out some of the more uncomplimentary references. However, this self-censorship only served to highlight the excisions, since the British periodical press were soon comparing extracts from the original American version with the English copy. Bulwer, one of the individuals who had been portrayed in a distinctly unflattering light by Willis, wrote the journalist a letter, castigating his abuse of hospitality and his invasion of a 'private' space.<sup>34</sup> While he claimed to be 'inured to publicity' personally, he complained that Willis had broken all of the rules of hospitality in exposing private character:

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215. Bulwer's attack on the scandal sheet and his concerns about the hidden workings of press culture can be read as a defensive refutation of scandalous allegations levelled against him in Westmacott's scandal sheet, *The Age*, the paper which the virtuous mechanic refuses to read outside the print shop. Westmacott accused Bulwer of deliberately cultivating the friendship of reviewers from the *Literary Gazette* and *Quarterly Review* to ensure that he obtained favourable reviews for his *Siamese Twins*. For more information see Sadleir, *Bulwer and His Wife: A Panorama*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

I look with great reprehension upon the principle of feeding a frivolous and unworthy passion of the public from sources which the privilege of hospitality opens to us in private life. Such invasions of the inviolable decorums of society impair the confidence which is not more its charm than its foundation, and cannot but render the English (already too exclusive) yet more rigidly on their guard against acquaintances who repay the courtesies of one country by caricatures in another.<sup>35</sup>

There are two separate concerns here. Firstly, Bulwer worries about the public taste for tales about the private lives of fashionable celebrities amongst a lower class readership. Gone is his confidence in the preference of the industrious lower orders for 'real' news, gone is his faith that it was only the 'excrescences of aristocracy' who were interested in scandal; instead, he speaks of the corrupted tastes of a far more general 'public' that is beginning to enjoy scandal as a form of mass entertainment. Secondly, he is troubled by the effects of revelations about private behaviour on the salon culture that he inhabits, arguing that the sociable 'confidence' between individuals which is crucial to free interchange of opinion will be destroyed by such intrusion. Whereas in the earlier writings of Rousseau and Staël the half-private, half-public nature of the salon allowed private interests to obtrude into public business, Bulwer has no concerns about the covert exercise of influence, instead arguing that these gatherings were exclusively private, and thus should be regarded as sacred from press intrusion. Such gatherings, in his eyes, simply did not raise the problematic issue of the abuse of private interest which plagued the public sphere; instead they were quintessentially meritocratic, bourgeois fora, which encouraged social interaction between people of different nationalities and backgrounds. Instead of reforming the salon by exposing it to the public gaze, Willis's revelations actually threaten to transform this space into an enclosed, exclusive and aristocratic group, as the members of the salon are forced to close their doors to strangers in order to protect themselves.

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<sup>34</sup> For more on this episode, see Thomas N Baker, *Sentiment And Celebrity: Nathaniel Parker Willis And The Trials Of Literary Fame*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 61-85.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from Michael Sadleir, *Blessington-D'Orsay: A Masquerade*. London: Constable and Co, 1933, pp. 233-4.

These anxieties about the effects of publicity upon the private sphere lead to an ambivalence in Bulwer's writings about the reforming potential of scandal. Though he insisted on the importance of publicity in the public domain, he argued that scandal about private individuals had no improving effect at all. Once again, Byron provides an illustrative example:

How are poor Byron's errors amended, by filthily groping among the details of his private life- by the insinuations and the misconstructions- by the muttered slanders- by the broad falsehoods, which filled the anonymous channels of the press? Was it not this system of espionage more than any other which darkened with gloomy suspicion that mind, originally so noble?... Slandered by others, his irritable mind retaliated by slander in return; the openness visible in his early character hardened into insincerity, the constant product of suspicion; and instead of correcting the author, this species of criticism contributed to deprave the man.<sup>36</sup>

Exposure here causes psychological disruption, which simply creates further scandal. Byronic behaviour is not the manifestation of innate genius which has a tendency to transgress and thus to *cause* scandal; but the *result* of intrusive publicity. The poet is not a naturally isolated and antisocial individual, but a fundamentally social animal at bay. Deprived of his sacred 'private life' by a 'system of espionage', Byron's internal equilibrium is shaken. Whereas Staël's Delphine was able to brave the world's opinion, scandal transforms Bulwer's Byron from an open, transparent individual into an insincere hypocrite, whose outer man misrepresents his inner self. Rather than returning the poet to the fold of conformity with his fellow man, scandal emphasizes the individual and the eccentric aspects of his character, setting him apart as an object for public curiosity. As his performance of identity becomes more theatrical, his identity is increasingly governed by a split between his public and private personae, making him an ever more scandalous figure.

Yet, while scandal might be an inefficacious tool where individual reform was concerned, when the broader social picture is considered, Bulwer argues that it played a crucial role in the shift from aristocratic to middle class society:

personal slander...has forwarded the progress of opinion against the aristocratic body by the most distorted exaggeration of the individual vices or foibles of its members. By the mere details of a vulgar gossip, a great wholesale principle of indignation at the privileged order has been at work; just as in ripening the feelings that led to the first French revolution, the tittle-tattle of antechambers did more than the works of philosophers. The frivolity and vices of the court provoked a bitterer contempt and resentment by well-coloured anecdotes of individual courtiers, than the elaborate logic of Diderot or the polished sarcasms of Voltaire.<sup>37</sup>

While Byron may not have reformed as a result of publicity, scandal about upper class individuals here has broad political ramifications, which means that it actually promotes radical social change. The 'truth' or 'falsity' of a revelation ceases to matter: the fact that tales are 'well coloured' seems only to exacerbate their power. Just as Hazlitt argued in *Common Places* that the real guilt or innocence of the Queen had ceased to matter in the scandal 1820-21, Bulwer argues that the scandals which fuelled both the French Revolution and the radical movement in England encouraged the people to react not to real aristocratic misdemeanours, but to an exaggerated image of the upper orders. His unwillingness to credit scandal with the potential to reveal truth is so great, that he is prepared to argue that the entire cultural shift which his book praises, from aristocratic to bourgeois society, is the result of a delusory and unrealistic picture of upper class moral values.

While Bulwer insists, with Bentham, that publicity is absolutely necessary to the regulation of the public sphere, he is deeply concerned about its denaturing effect on the private realm. In order to preserve the sanctity of the domestic world from the denaturing effect of exposure, he constructs the home and the salon as convivial spaces, in which there is no opportunity to abuse particular interests. However, the obvious tensions in his work between the demands of privacy and publicity created space for Bulwer's critics, his estranged wife foremost among them, to attack his arguments. Rosina Bulwer-Lytton seized upon her husband's claim that Benthamite publicity was needed to

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<sup>36</sup> Bulwer, *England and the English*. *Op. cit.*, p. 207

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216

control the workings of selfish desire to point to the self-interested nature of the exemptions he creates in favour of the private and domestic realm. Chronicling her own sufferings at his hands, she argued that the private sphere was not the realm of harmonious sociability and concord that Bulwer described, but an arena of conflict between men and women, whose interests were anything but homogeneous. By turning scandalous exposure against Bulwer, she not only offered a practical account of marital unhappiness which drew attention to the need for publicity to police private as well as public life, but also demonstrated the need for women to represent their own interests, which she used to ground an argument in favour of extending women's legal and political rights.

### III

*'Publicity is the Soul of Justice': Feminism and Scandal in the novels of Rosina Bulwer-Lytton*

The family of Rosina Bulwer-Lytton possesses a remarkable feminist pedigree. Her grand-daughter was Constance Lytton, advocate of birth control and suffragette author of *Prisons and Prisoners* (1914). Her mother was Anna Wheeler, feminist socialist and lecturer, and co-author with William Thompson of perhaps the most important feminist pamphlet of the early nineteenth century, the 1825 *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretension of the Other Half, Men, To Retain them in Civil and Domestic Slavery*. Born Anna Doyle in Ireland in 1785, she made a disastrous marriage to Francis Massey-Wheeler when she was aged just 15. She became interested in radical thought while her children were young, immersing herself in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and the works of Holbach and Diderot. In 1812, she escaped from her husband, taking refuges with relatives in Guernsey, before moving to France in 1816, where she moved in a circle of socialist Saint-Simonian thinkers. After her husband's death in 1820 she returned to London, where she met leading Owenite and utilitarian thinkers, including Frances Wright, Robert Owen, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham (the last she counted among her very closest friends). For the next decade, she continued to visit France, providing an important channel of communication between French and English socialist and

feminist groups, mediating between Owenism, utilitarianism, Saint-Simonianism and Fourierism.<sup>38</sup>

Wheeler and Thompson's *An Appeal* was an answer to James Mill's *Essay on Government*, which argued for universal male suffrage but rejected the idea of enfranchising women. Mill argued that like children, women were dependent on men, and therefore could be represented by them politically. Working from similar utilitarian premises to her antagonist, Wheeler argued that there was a fundamental contradiction between the first premise of Benthamism, that human beings are competitive and selfish creatures, and Mill's notion that men could be trusted to take women's interests into account when making political decisions. In her eyes, legal and social customs developed men into proud, selfish creatures, incapable of considering the effects of their actions on the beings around them. They were thus singularly incompetent guardians of the best interests of the women who surrounded them. To prove her point, Wheeler endeavoured to show that there were far fewer interests in common between a father and a daughter than a father and a son: male offspring often entered the same trade and inhabited the same world as their fathers, but any argument to disenfranchise them on this ground would be widely regarded as ridiculous. Why, then, should the idea of votes for women been regarded as so ludicrous, when women had far less in common with the men who 'covered' their interests than other male family members? 'Adult daughters' she concluded, 'are as fully entitled, in order to promote their own personal happiness as members of a community of human beings, to a vote in the representation and to other political rights, as adult sons can, for the same simple and unanswerable reason, be.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The best biography of Anna Wheeler is contained in Dolores Dooley's detailed and illuminating analytical study, *Equality in Community: Sexual Equality in the Writings of William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1996. For a penetrating discussion of her ideas see Barbara Taylor, *Eve And The New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Virgo Press, 1983 repr. 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Anna Wheeler and William Thompson, *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994, pp. 44-5.

Wheeler blamed public opinion for the enslavement of women, arguing that it promoted exclusively male interests, instead of the views of all. This could only be corrected when the views of women were considered as possessing equal weight to those of men. She was particularly critical of the unrepresentative nature of the judicial system, arguing that in cases involving a battle between the two sexes, an all-male panel of judges would act in the interests of their sex, rather than those of justice:

if none but men are to be the electors, if none but men are to be jurors or judges when women complain against men of partiality and injustice, is it in human nature that a sympathy from old habit, from similarity of organization and trains of thought, from love of domination, should not have a tendency to make men swerve from the line of justice and strict impartiality.<sup>40</sup>

This situation was aggravated by the '*secrecy of domestic wrongs*', which allowed men to domineer over women in private life. The solution was to enfranchise females, which would not only greatly increase the sum of human happiness but ensure that political debate would encompass a feminine perspective, enabling all interests to be heard and weighed, thus obviating the problem that exclusive government 'must be liable to errors from want of knowledge, from *false judgements*'.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, giving women a public voice would rationalize morality, putting an end to the sexual hypocrisy of a society which subjected women to far stricter restraints on their behaviour than men:

To man, unmarried and speculating on marriage, by the permission of law and of public opinion, the gratification of every sexual desire is permitted, limited only by prudential considerations as to money and health, and with some few by considerations as to the effects of their actions on the happiness of those connected with them; while to women speculating on marriage, though no law controls, yet public opinion – fruit of the selfish conspiracy of men- and *power to oppress*, arising from command of wealth and all other means of influence, being omnipotent

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 172

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174,



over her, the gratification to her of these same desires is altogether prohibited.<sup>42</sup>

Where public opinion expressed the general interest, men could no longer abuse their 'selfish' interests to maintain one standard of right for women and another for men, but would have to consider the general social good when thinking about morality. Instead, it would inculcate 'an equal system of morals, founded on utility instead of caprice and unreasoning despotism, in which the same action attended with the same consequences, whether done by man or woman, should be attended with the same portion of approbation or disapprobation'.<sup>43</sup> No longer would female misdemeanours be scandalous, while male transgressions were the norm.

However, for Wheeler, this could only happen in a transformed society, run along the lines of a co-operative:

Morality is, here [in the co-operative], just and equal in her awards. Why so? Because, man having no more wealth than woman, and no more influence over the general property, and his superior strength being brought down to its just level of utility, he can procure no sexual gratification but from the voluntary affection of woman: in proscribing her indiscretions, therefore, he must proscribe his own<sup>44</sup>

Since individual interest could not be transcended, it was only by equalizing wealth and power could a situation obtain in which selfish male interests were aligned with the good of all.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Wheeler's utilitarianism led her not

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 201

<sup>45</sup> Wheeler's attitude here is influenced by Saint-Simonian thought as well as Owenism. Banks situates Wheeler within an international socialist moment, as the mediatrix between Saint-Simonianism and Owenism, see Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism As A Social Movement*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981 repr. 1990, esp. pp. 48-60. A similar line of argument is adopted by McFadden, see 'Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785-1848): Philosopher, Socialist, Feminist' in *Hypatia's Daughters: Fifteen Hundred Years of Women Philosophers*. Ed. Linda Lopez McAlister. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. However McFadden's argument that Wheeler's brand of feminism relied on the idea of the 'exceptional woman' is dubious. For a general discussion of Saint-Simonianism, see Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984, especially chapter three and Karen Offen *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 97-100. For the difficulties that Owenites experienced in actually realizing feminist ideals in practice see Kathryn Gleadle *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 31-3.

towards individualism, but towards collectivist thought, as she worked from Benthamite premises to a socialist solution, influenced by the other three movements with which Wheeler was connected: Owenism, Saint-Simonianism and Fourierism.

Wheeler thus adopts the premises of utilitarianism and turns them against Mill's exclusion of women from public and politics life, complaining that the latter had abused the principles of his philosophy to 'cover with a mockery of pretended reason, an affectation of justice, the habitual and universal thralldom, and consequent privation of enjoyment and infliction of evil, physical, sympathetic, and intellectual, on one half the human race'.<sup>46</sup> Bentham, she argued, would laugh at such arguments: 'the philosophy of that enlightened and benevolent man, embraces in its grasp every sentient human beings, and acknowledges the claim of every rational adult, without distinction of sex, or colour, to equal political rights.'<sup>47</sup> Yet, as Dolores Dooley has pointed out, despite his friendship with Wheeler, and despite this obvious invitation to comment, Bentham actually kept silent on the issue of female political participation, refusing to refute Mill's views in public.<sup>48</sup> Despite the fact that Wheeler and Thompson had demolished arguments against the enfranchisement of women with utilitarian rhetoric, Bentham clung to the gender qualifications in his argument, and remained chary of appearing to condone feminism in public, for fear of jeopardizing his project of extending the male franchise. Feminists had to look to the second generation of male utilitarians to find in John Stuart Mill a Benthamite thinker prepared to support their cause wholeheartedly.

Anna Wheeler's unconventional ideas and her mildly scandalous lifestyle were two of the factors which led Edward Bulwer-Lytton's mother to oppose her son's marriage with Wheeler's daughter, Rosina. Rosina met Edward late in 1825, but the pair were only finally married in August 1827. From a financial point of view, the match was not dazzling, and, estranged from his outraged parent, Edward had to work hard in an attempt to support a their

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<sup>46</sup> Wheeler, *An Appeal*. *Op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> Dooley, *Equality in Community*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 131-134.

extravagant lifestyle. Tensions soon developed: Edward vented his stress upon his wife in bouts of severe domestic violence, and Rosina was increasingly suspicious of her husband's fidelity. Anna Wheeler's visits do not seem to have calmed the situation. Disraeli, who met her at the house of Rosina and Bulwer Lytton in 1833, described her as 'not so pleasant, something between Jeremy Bentham and Meg Merrilies, very clever, but awfully revolutionary. She poured forth all her systems upon my novitiate ear, and while she advocated the rights of woman, Bulwer abused system-mongers and the sex, and Rosina played with her dog'.<sup>49</sup> Yet however lacking in interest Rosina seemed to Disraeli at this time, by the end of the decade her bitter experiences of marriage had transformed her into ardent feminist, as she began published novel after novel against the lack of legal, social and political status afforded to women, drawing heavily on many of her mother's arguments.

Continual strain caused the Bulwers to separate privately in July of 1834, Edward taking chambers in the Albany, London, while Rosina lived in Acton. One night, when he was supposed to dine with his family, Edward sent a note to tell them that he was seriously ill and unable to leave town. Rosina set off immediately for London to tend to her sick husband, but when she arrived at the Albany, she found him in a blooming state of health, entertaining another woman in a state of undress. (Bulwer, it should be noted, always denied that there was any truth in this story). In 1836, a formal deed of separation was signed between the parties.<sup>50</sup> A bitter and complicated feud soon sprang up between the pair. Edward deprived Rosina of the custody of her children, and she, in retaliation, published her first novel, *Cheveley* (1839), openly ridiculing her husband and his blood relations, and detailing her mistreatment at their hands. On a number of occasions, Rosina complained, in increasingly dramatic

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<sup>49</sup> 'Benjamin Disraeli to his sister', January 29, 1833, in *Lord Beaconsfield's Correspondence With His Sister 1832-52*. London: John Murray, 1886, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> The fullest biography of Rosina Bulwer is that compiled by her friend, Louisa Devey, after her death. See Louisa Devey, *Life of Rosina, Lady Lytton With Numerous Extracts From Her MS. Autobiography And Other Original Documents*. London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Co, 1887. Michael Sadleir has also written an illuminating account of the breakdown of the Bulwer marriage, see *Bulwer And His Wife. A Panorama, 1803-1836*. London: Constable, 1933. Preston's biography of Bulwer's mother gives further details on the affair, see Jane Preston, *That Odd Rich Woman: Elizabeth Barbara Bulwer-Lytton of Knebworth House 1773-1843*. Dorset: Plush Publishing, 1998.

language, that spies had been set to watch her conduct, in order to procure evidence which would allow Bulwer to divorce her. One time, she alleged that she had been lured to a brothel in an attempt to ruin her character; another, she claimed that she had been deliberately poisoned by an emissary from her husband. In the 1840s, the rift between the parties was deepened by the death of their daughter, Emily, in a poor lodging house in Brompton, which led to mutual recriminations, as each accused the other of neglect.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, Rosina obtained first-hand experience of her powerlessness to mount an official legal challenge to her husband's behaviour. In 1839 paragraphs were mysteriously inserted into the society columns of two journals, falsely accusing her of grotesque conduct at a ball in Paris. Rosina decided to sue for libel, but the law of *couverture* dictated that a woman's legal identity was subsumed in that of her husband, making it necessary for her to obtain Edward Bulwer's consent to the proceedings had to be gained for the case to proceed. Though he gave his permission, the gap between the legal fiction that the interests of the pair's interests were 'one', and could therefore be covered by the husband, and the reality of their mutual antagonism was exposed in the speech of Rosina's lawyer, Sir Frederick Pollock. He argued that the libel had been inserted at the instigation of her husband and his family in order to exclude her from society, winning Rosina a judgement for £50.<sup>51</sup>

Shortly afterwards, while Rosina was still living in Paris, her servants informed her that two Englishmen had been seen loitering around the house and flirting with her cook, Phoebe. She decided to take matters into her own hands, instructing Phoebe to tell the men that she was away from home, and to invite them into the house. Once inside, they asked the girl to show them to Lady Bulwer's private boudoir: Phoebe obligingly led the way, and the men were soon rifling her mistress's private desk, apparently in search of a packet of compromising letters written to her by Edward. Just as they discovered the correspondence in question, Rosina, her lawyer and two gendarmes suddenly

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<sup>51</sup> See Devey, *Life of Rosina. Op. cit.*, pp. 159-168.

appeared from behind a screen, catching the thieves in the act. They were arrested and later identified as attorneys Lawson and Thackeray, the former of whom was Sir Edward's legal representative in England. Rosina decided to prosecute them, and thus to drag her husband's conduct into the public gaze. However, this time Bulwer flatly refused to allow her to pursue the action. He wrote a letter to the court, complaining that Rosina was seeking a kind of publicity which constituted an upsetting intrusion upon his private life:

I have informed myself of the facts which serve as a pretext to this process, and I feel persuaded that they have been got up with the sole purpose of provoking scandal and to prejudge the wrongs of which I have myself to complain at the hands of Lady Bulwer as a husband and a father. I must now put in my interdiction against my wife bringing such an action in a foreign tribunal.... The English courts of justice will appear to you, as to me, more capable of appreciating and judging the discussions the publicity of which is provoked, and which interest the honour of a whole family, as well as the future welfare of my children.<sup>52</sup>

Bulwer writes against the abuse of publicity, but simultaneously casts a damaging slur on Rosina's character, arguing that she is manipulating scandal to hide her own misdeeds. Abandoning his earlier faith in the surveillance provided by publicity over legal institutions, the courtroom becomes the focal point for Bulwer's anxiety precisely *because* it is a public forum, as he argues for a delicate investigation of the truth, rather than a public process in which all evidence would be heard. Despite the fact that the case was really about burglary, Edward argued that the superior value placed on domesticity in England made the English courts the most appropriate forum for the adjustment of the difficulties. In reality, however, he would have known that Rosina had no hope of bringing her case in the English system, since the doctrine of *coverture* could be invoked to prevent it from reaching court.

Countering this argument, Rosina's counsel invoked the same Benthamite concept of publicity as a force working in the aid of justice that Bulwer had employed in *England and the English*: 'It is said that we seek for scandal. Scandal, indeed! the scandal is in the protection which is given to the

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Devey, *Life of Lady Lytton*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 190-1.

guilty'.<sup>53</sup> He appealed to the fact that Britain was ruled by a Queen in support of his argument that Rosina should be allowed to bring her case: 'If I were in England, I would say to the tribunal, "In the name of the Queen of the three kingdoms, I plea for a woman whose husband has refused to her his authority to demand justice".<sup>54</sup> Exposure was not a matter of unnecessary intrusion into the private realm, but a necessary process, which was part and parcel of the administration of law. At the same time that they insisted on publicity, however, Rosina's partisans highlighted her vulnerability as a separated wife, arguing that as she lacked a male protector, the law was her only recourse against oppression:

The case was a melancholy one, the exposure to the world of one of its severest miseries and heaviest inflictions. The proceedings were nevertheless unavoidable, for even a separated wife must not be suspected; and if she has suffered wrong by a system of espionage, and the sanctity of her dwelling has been violated, she is bound to seek for protection and redress, however painful to her feelings, from the hands of justice.<sup>55</sup>

Such arguments, though convincing, were powerless in the face of a system which required a husband's permission to allow a wife to pursue a case. In the face of Bulwer's resolute opposition, Rosina was non-suited.

Realizing that official channels of complaint were closed to her, Rosina decided to take matters into her own hands, challenging Bulwer's argument about the sanctity of the private in a series of novels which publicized his misdemeanours. Effectively, she wielded scandal as a weapon, using her own personal experiences to battle against domestic ideology and the sexual double standard. Like her mother, she worked from the basic, utilitarian premise, that individuals, and particularly male individuals, were fundamentally selfish creatures, liable to abuse personal interests for private gain. The fact that she made her arguments by airing her private grievances, however, gave her novels a distinctly outrageous reputation. In 1839, shortly after the publication of her

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<sup>53</sup> Speech of M Odilon Barrot, Rosina's lawyer, as reported by the *Morning Post*, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1840, quoted in Devey, *Life of Lady Lytton. Op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>54</sup> Speech of M Odilon Barrot, quoted in Devey, *Life of Lady Lytton. Op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>55</sup> Speech of M Odilon Barrot, *Ibid.* p. 189.

first novel, *Cheveley*, Rosina received a letter from an “A.W”, suggesting that she should tone down the personal elements in her attack:

You have a right to exercise your talent and increase your income by writing books, and, fortunately, you bring great ability to your task; but for every motive that *prudence* can suggest, make your just indignation less pointed towards the individual, and more towards the general delinquency of men, their laws and institutions, which sanction them in degrading generally, and ill-treating individually, every woman *equal in intellect* and superior in moral practice to themselves. There never was a period when the *public* and the intelligent also among women were more prepared to sympathise with a work of this kind.<sup>56</sup>

The language, as well as the terms of this argument suggest that this letter is from Anna Wheeler herself. To Wheeler’s mind, the tale of individual suffering must be dignified by its transformation into an ideological attack if the reading public were not to become alienated by the pointedness of the ‘personality’. Widening the scope of the attack meant finding a public prepared to sympathize: the personal had to be transformed into an abstract political argument, if only to conciliate popular feeling. Complaining in public about private wrongs was simply too subversive, too alienating, too culturally unfeminine a strategy to succeed.

However, where Wheeler contended that a systematic social reorganization was the only solution to the problem of gender inequality, Rosina, always less radical than her parent, argued that a simple alteration in public opinion towards scandal was needed. In her 1844 novel, *Memoirs of a Muscovite*, she argued that railing against institutions was counterproductive, since they actually afforded women a modicum of protection:

George Sand... clearly proves (in spite of herself) that it is not the institutions, or rather the *Institution* against which she wages such eternal and unsparing war, that causes the misery and injustice, that one half the human race writhe and wither under; but the vile passions, and brute power of men, whose want of principle would be productive of even still greater cruelty, injustice, and oppression to women, but for the slight, the

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Devey, *Life of Rosina*. *Ibid.* p. 158.

very slight (I grant) restrictions and compulsions that *the Institution...* imposes on them.<sup>57</sup>

Public legal and political institutions are actually women's only safeguard against the ravages of male interests, and should not therefore form the focus for feminist critiques. Instead, it was the private character of men that had to be exposed to the public gaze, in order that their misdemeanours could meet with the public opprobrium they deserved.

Rosina's choice to base her general arguments in her own personal wrongs is a carefully calculated strategy, designed to draw attention to the extent to which the public were liable to overlook male misdemeanours. Firstly, it enables her to develop a strong, cynical feminine voice, used to express an angry, oppressed subjectivity, which subverts the conventional picture of modest, retiring femininity, foregrounding her difference and independence from her husband. Secondly, her conscious decision to write in a mixed form allowed her to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, vitriolic personal discourse and public polemic, creating novels which were part autobiography, part political tract, which exploded the fiction of domestic ideology by exposing the reality of the discordant private sphere. Finally, her ability to veer between fictional discourse and plain, scandalous allegations against real people, encourages the reader to remain on the watch for the real-life analogue for each of her imaginary characters, penetrating the tantalizingly opaque surface of the text to reveal its hidden truths. At a formal level, these novels establish a semantic game which is designed to render the audience complicit in the process of truth-revelation, tearing down the boundaries of the public to expose the hidden and the private.

*Cheveley, or the Man of Honour* opens with a description of the male interests which restrict a woman's right to self-determination, couched in language which is highly reminiscent of Anna Wheeler's *An Appeal*:

As most husbands appear to think, that if their wives have a second idea, the world cannot be large enough for them both, any more than two suns

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<sup>57</sup> Lady Bulwer Lytton, *Memoirs of A Muscovite*. London: T C Newby, 1844, Vol. 1, pp. 97-8.



can shine in one hemisphere. But the manner of evincing this opinion is even more offensive than the opinion itself, as they never cease to “affiché” the veto that woman [sic] have no right even to mental free will, and are as much surprised at their daring to express an opinion different to that they have been commanded to entertain, as if the ground on which they walked were suddenly to exclaim, “Don’t trample on me so hardly!”<sup>58</sup>

Men are liable to treat women as items of property, not as intellectual beings capable of independent thought or action. The novel is an extended meditation on this theme, exploring the victimization of a beautiful young woman, Lady Julia, at the hands of her tyrannical husband, Lord de Clifford. De Clifford is clearly a portrait of Edward Bulwer himself:

In politics he was an ultra-Liberal (it gives more scope for declamation); in private life (as in the general pendant to public liberality) he was a tyrannical autocrat... whatever appertained to him was always the best and most faultless in the world- all, excepting his wife: she was not of his immediate stock,- merely a graft, which accounted for all her faults; that, among the rest, of his never being able (incessantly as he impressed it on her) to get her to feel and appreciate her wonderful good fortune in being wedded to him.<sup>59</sup>

Rosina highlights her husband’s hypocrisy by placing de Clifford’s misdemeanours alongside quotations from his political speeches which make heavy use of sentimental, domestic rhetoric. Like Dickens, who is caricatured in the novel as ‘Fuzboz’, De Clifford espouses a radicalism which is affective rather than utilitarian, condemning the Poor Laws for their violation of family ties, and grounding his demand for an extension of the franchise on the domestic virtues of the people:

“Our homes and hearths are the nurseries of our virtues or our vices. The ‘boy is the father to the man’- the acorn must be planted before the oak can flourish. Are you children? So am I. Are you fathers? So am I. Are you husbands, and does your existence twine round a dearer self? So does mine... And it is by all these nearest and dearest ties of our common nature, that I appeal to you”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lady Lytton Bulwer, *Cheveley; or, The Man of Honour*. London: Edward Bull, 1839, Vol. 1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 pp. 66-7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 292.

Behind this sentimental rhetoric, which emphasizes the closeness of the great with the people, lies a troubling degree of sexual intimacy with the populace. Just as the author of *Adultery and Patriotism* connected the sexual misdemeanours of Wardle and Burdett to their patriotic reformism, Rosina argues that de Clifford's syrupy radicalism conceals his propensity to transgress sexual boundaries. His sentimental appeal to the people is revealed to be nothing more than hypocrisy when he disguises himself in order to seduce the daughter of one of his tenants, Mary Lee. When she falls pregnant, he reveals that he has no intention of marrying her:

“you are no more my wife than I am yours [sic], I being, I am sorry to say, married already; and as for your brat, thanks to the New Poor Laws, you have no claim upon me for that... I hope this may be a warning to you not to be so forward another time”<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the policy which de Clifford attacked so eloquently on the grounds of private affections allows him to escape the real consequences of his moral offences. The personal element of the attack is made explicit later in the novel, when Rosina cites one of his real-life speeches against the workhouse:

“And above all I am opposed to that peculiar vice in the present system, which contrary to all the nearest and dearest ties of nature, and the honest rights of humanity, would separate a man, often towards the painful decline of life, from the partner who has shared all his trials, and from the children who have been, perhaps, the solitary sources of comfort and hope that a long career of labour has enjoyed.”<sup>62</sup>

Juxtaposing this rhetoric with Bulwer's real maltreatment of his wife, Rosina argues that domestic ideology is nothing more than a dangerous façade for concealing brutal self-interest.

Rosina's attack is at once personal and political: the utilitarian rationale which encouraged men to saddle women with the blame for sexual offences is criticized, but it is also revealed to be less the result of Benthamism, than of a general, non-partisan conspiracy amongst men to foster sexual double standards.

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 32.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 245-6.

The fact that she focuses on the Poor Laws to make this point is especially interesting in the light of the fact that many women were heavily involved in protests against them. Jane Rendall notes that 1838, the year before the publication of *Cheveley*, saw an especially strong wave of activity, with the founding of numerous female political groups, concentrated particularly in the north of England, to oppose these laws.<sup>63</sup> Like the women who wrote addresses to Caroline, many of these female protesters grounded their claim to a public, political voice on the fact that the utilitarian policies behind the Poor Laws were inimical to domestic life. By exposing the way in which very similar rhetoric could be used to shore up private despotism, Rosina's text seems to be questioning this rationale, suggesting that such an approach to political rights ultimately negates feminine claims to participate equally in politics, playing into the hands of male interests.

Instead of grounding her claim to participate in politics on her superior relationship to the domestic, Rosina used her anomalous status as a separated wife to argue against the domestic ideology which invested the private sphere with a special sanctity, instead arguing that the home should be opened up to the public gaze. Like her mother, Rosina argued that men had used sentimental rhetoric to create a space for the unbridled exercise of particular interests, to the detriment of women. Instead of being an idyllic realm sealed off from the world of work, the private sphere, she argued, was a world of unpaid and unrecognized labour:

It is easy for the world, who view the phantasmagoria of life as they do that of a magic lantern, looking merely to the delusive effects produced by certain ugly and invisible machinery, to be dazzled and deceived by brilliant talents; but the poor drudges condemned to the care and display of the fantoccini may not be quite so charmed; and that country must be an immoral one, where the mirage of a man's public life is allowed to cast a sanctifying vapour over the plague-spots of his private character, which is treated as an Eleusinian mystery, and seems to be defended by the all-powerful *μυστήριον*, that threatens nothing short of death, or divine vengeance, if revealed.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860*. London: Macmillan, 1985.

Women are the true workers in this society: the glittering talents of men, Rosina implies, are founded on the basis of the 'drudgery' of women. Though women are portrayed here as the 'puppet-masters' of society, helping their husbands to display themselves to advantage, they remain oddly disempowered figures. Though their labour actually controls the show, they remain the slaves of their own performers, condemned to live behind the scenes, instead of performing on the stage. Their confinement is enforced, their labour kept hidden so as not to spoil the external 'show'. In *Memoirs of a Muscovite*, she analyses the force which translates women from the empowered directors of the performance into its slaves. Meinchikoff, mentor to the Russian hero, complains bitterly against:

the very immoral twaddle that exists in the world, and in England more than any other part of it, about people's *private* characters being sacred; *if they were what they ought to be*, why all this merciful mystery? but no, this *sanctity of private life*, arises from the same cause, as the curtain that was placed by the priests before the chief altar of the Temple of Isis after the death of Ptolemaeus, the altar had been despoiled of those relics which the people held sacred; the curtain was placed before it *ostensibly to make it more sacred*, but in *reality* to conceal from the multitude the total absence of those things which they deemed holy, and it being death by the law to raise or penetrate the mystery of this curtain, it served the double purpose of aiding the populace into a reverence for *supposed virtues*, while it enabled the priests to carry on their dissolute orgies behind so impenetrable a screen, and at the same time to *preach* morality with an unblushing front to the people.<sup>65</sup>

The desire to screen the private sphere from the public gaze is simply a self-interested strategy which conceals the scandalous abuse of private interest. Just as Anna Wheeler used utilitarianism to criticize Mill, Rosina employs Benthamite arguments against her husband, adopting the notion that publicity provides a necessary check to particular interests, an argument strongly identified with Bulwer after to *England and the English*, to demolish his case against submitting the private sphere to the public gaze. Rosina proves herself to be a better utilitarian than her husband, and hence, the final chapter of *Cheveley*, in which the villainous de Clifford is finally exposed, begins with a quotation from Bentham: 'Publicity is the soul of justice'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Memoirs of a Muscovite. Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 245.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 155-6

<sup>66</sup> Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Cheveley. Op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 299.

For Rosina, the most flagrant example of the selfish abuse of patriarchal private interests was the legally enshrined sexual double standard. In novel after novel, she argues that morality is not gender specific: God made no distinction in terms of sexual expectations between right conduct for men and for women. The notion that male sins should be treated more leniently than women's transgressions was a matter of linguistic casuistry rather than biological necessity- of grammar, not gender:

Oh! how many uncanonised martyrs are there in every-day domestic life, hourly warring both with the flesh and the spirit (and literally taking up their cross daily); and this must ever be the case as long as men continue to enforce the laws of God grammatically, thereby assuming a wide difference between the masculine and feminine which is nowhere to be found in the text!<sup>67</sup>

However, in arguing for equal moral standards, Rosina does not claim that women should have the privilege of being as sexually promiscuous as men. Rather, she argues that men should adopt the superior moral attitude of women. She thus avoids the charges of immorality and unnatural sexuality which had marred the reputation of Wollstonecraft, and which continued to be used as weapons of attack against George Sand. Like Anna Wheeler, while she rejected the notion that women were naturally domestic, she pointed to their superior ability to recognize the viewpoints of others as a positive political force. She aimed to rehabilitate 'that cruelly disfigured, and therefore hitherto revolting subject, called the "Rights of woman,"' which 'has never yet either been properly advocated, or rightly understood':

God forbid! that their rights should consists in the carrying into effect of the immoral and impolitic theories of a Mary Wolstencroft [sic], or the disgusting saturnalias of a George Sand. No, according to my idea, the *real* rights of women consist, not in *their* receiving the masculine immunities, of being able, unmolestedly, to transgress the Laws of God, but in *men* being *restricted* in those infamous privileges, which they now both exert and abuse with such cruel impunity.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Cheveley*, Vol. 1, p. 2

<sup>68</sup> Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, *Memoirs of a Muscovite*, Vol. 1, p. 204-5

Delimiting the manner in which selfish interests could impinge on the happiness of others would allow women to achieve legal, social and political rights.

However, in Rosina's eyes, Bulwer's inclination to sentimentalise about domestic ideology, does not merely represent a defection from the strict logic of utilitarianism. It is also a sign that he has fallen under the pernicious counter-influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For Rosina, Jean-Jacques was the originator of separate sphere ideology, whose promotion of sensibility substitutes theatrical expressions of emotion for genuine expressions of feeling in an endeavour to conceal the pursuit of masculine self-interest:

As for morality, most of what is falsely so called, is a sort of flimsy *expedient*, superstructure, one sided at the best; reared upon such shifting and transferable base, that even the few who see the error, have not the courage to break through the barriers that *politics, prejudice, tyranny, and self-interest* have erected on every side; therefore, instead of *truth*, every profligate who can wield a pen, from J. J. Rousseau downwards, substitutes in his writings, a profusion of tinsel ornaments, and *false* sentiment, wherewith he bedecks a poor plaister idol called style; to which the ignorant offer the worship of their wonder!... But the root of the evil lies in selfishness; for people however fearfully agitated or deeply interested, by whatever touches *themselves* are for the most part immoveably indifferent to all that concerns others.<sup>69</sup>

Rousseau's parade of sensibility was nothing more than a form of 'cant' devised to conciliate the private sexual interests of men, at the expense of women. Far from being a thinker who advocates pursuit of the general good via social transparency, in Rosina's eyes, he actually erects superficial facades to hide the self-interested, masculine nature of his gender politics, substituting surface for substance, an 'idol called style' for real morality.

Rosina's attitude towards Staël, however, is more ambivalent. In *Cheveley*, she ridicules some of the Frenchwoman's eccentricities, but also lionizes Staël, along with Edgeworth, as a shining example of female achievement, arguing that a woman with 'esprit de corps', who wished to defend 'the depreciated intellect of her sex' should bring to her defence 'the names of

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 158-9

an Edgeworth, a De Staël, a More, a Carter, a D'Acier, a Montague, a Bailey, a Martineau, a Gore, &c. &c.'<sup>70</sup> Her main objection to Staël's work is not her Rousseauvianism, but her Anglophilia, which, in Rosina's eyes, evidences a reprehensible blindness to the wrongs committed against women in English society: 'Poor Madame de Staël! in a fit of monomania she talks of the "moral air of England!"'.<sup>71</sup> In response, Rosina simply reverses Staël's argument that French society was inferior to English, praising the opportunities which the former opened to women. Where Staël complained in *The Influence of Literature Upon Society* that both Old Regime and revolutionary society in France tended to depreciate the intellect of women, Rosina claims that it is 'Englishmen' who 'politely banish rational conversation in female society, as being beyond the comprehension of their pro-tempore companions'. For Rosina, France is a kind of feminist utopia, in which conditions allow women to become leaders of society:

From Moliere's old woman up to a Roland or a De Staël, they are made umpires in literature, politics, and the fine arts; and if France has produced more heroic women than England, it is not because they have naturally nobler natures than English women, but because patriotism is not with them, as with us, exclusively inculcated in as a masculine virtue, or set apart as one of man's many unshared privileges. Women in France are allowed to feel as great an interest, because they have as great a stake, in their native country, as the sons of the soil.<sup>72</sup>

Rather than being condemned to domesticity, every Frenchwoman has a role to play in the public sphere. However, whereas Staël's feminism was limited to the exceptional woman, Rosina's idealized version of Gallic patriotism includes everyone on an equal basis, allowing all women to stake a claim to an 'heroic' political identity. Staël, in this reading, could achieve her status as an exceptional woman *because* of well-established traditions in French society, not *in spite of* social conventions.

Rosina Bulwer was not the only woman to turn to Staël's feminism in the late 1830s and 1840s. Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848)

<sup>70</sup> Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, *Cheveley*. Vol. 1, pp. 272-3

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 40.

represents a far more Rousseauvian reading of the Frenchwoman's thought, using Staël to argue that women need to step outside of the conventional boundaries of an idealized domestic existence in order to achieve a psychologically fulfilling life. The novel contrasts the plight of the respectable and legitimately born Alice, who makes a safe, but unfulfilling bourgeois marriage with an industrialist, with the life of her illegitimate, Italianate half-sister, Bianca, a successful actress whose professional independence is purchased at the cost of her social respectability. Alice has been educated to value conformity, living an inauthentic life in the eyes of others:

She had not confidence enough in her own yearnings to make a way for herself; she did not sufficiently believe in her own aspirations to incur the comment, and censure, and want of sympathy of those around her; she endeavoured, instead, to make herself like to them, to feel satisfied with what satisfied them; she was haunted by a dull sense of self-reproach, she was divided against herself, weak, helpless, and dissatisfied.<sup>73</sup>

The Rousseauvian overtones of this passage are brought out via the work of Staël. When Alice reads *Corinne*, the power of the novel over her is so great that she unconsciously neglects social decorum:

Seated in a cleft of rock so narrow, that she could scarce see the sky above her for the ivy that hung across, she was quite unconscious how the time flew by. The first reading of "Corinne" is an epoch a woman never forgets, and Alice never lifted her head till she had come to the last line in the last page of the volume, and then it struck her she had been away a long time; on looking at her watch she found, with dismay, it was long past the dinner hour.<sup>74</sup>

However, Alice's education makes her incapable of committing transgression for the sake of maintaining a whole and undivided sense of selfhood, not by inculcating solid principles, but by rendering her too weak to survive the shock of risking the loss of her reputation. She actually decides to embark on an extra-marital affair, but her fear of scandal brings about her death before she can even consummate the relationship. As Lord Melton argues later in the text, women who pay too much attention to the dictates of society, rather than following their

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* vol.1 pp. 274-5

<sup>73</sup> Geraldine Jewsbury, *The Half Sisters*. Ed. Joanne Wilkes. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 109-10



own internal convictions of right and wrong, are doomed to stray from the path of morality:

arbitrary enactments, no matter how surrounded by a *chevaux-de-frise* of social excommunication, unless they recommend themselves to the heart and conscience as *in themselves* right and true, will fall down like houses of cards at the first breath of a strong temptation.<sup>75</sup>

By contrast, Bianca follows her vocation as a female genius despite the fact that her profession compromises her social standing. Acting teaches her to become independent of the conventions of society and instead to follow her own internal convictions of right and wrong behaviour:

We must all of us learn to lead our own life, according to the best of our ideas, and the best manner in which we can realise it, whether we have to encounter good report, or evil report “The favour of man bringeth a snare,” as wise King Solomon declared, long ago.’<sup>76</sup>

Like Delphine, Bianca is suspicious of following worldly approbation, preferring to trust to her internal moral convictions. Jewsbury contrasts this attitude favourably with the pragmatic views of women on the marriage market. Mrs Lauriston, a kind of 1840s version of Staël’s Madame de Vernon, argues that women should defend themselves from male selfishness by continually performing their identities for men: ‘A woman must *never* trust a man: she may *seem* to do so as much as she likes, but woe to her! the instant she really lets him see or know any thing about her, except just as it *suits* her that it should be seen and known’.<sup>77</sup> Such an existence, Jewsbury argues, is far more deceitful and unnatural than that of the actress, crushing women down under ‘a composite of fictitiously-tinted virtues, and artificial qualities’ so that ‘the physiology of their minds is as warped by the traditions of feminine decorum, as that of their persons is by the stiff corsets which, until very recently, were *de rigueur* for preventing them “growing out of shape”’.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Whereas in the *Lettre a M. d'Alembert*, Rousseau argued that the theatre was a detrimental influence upon society, encouraging selfish interests rather than the general good, Jewsbury not only argues that Bianca's acting is a form of holistic self-effacement, but suggests that it could be used in a public capacity, as a force capable of aligning the sensibilities of the people in a general will.<sup>79</sup> In the theatre, she argues, her versatility as a performer allows her to exercise total sway over her audience, bonding the entire house in one surge of emotion:

You do not know the sense of power there is in seeing hundreds of men and women congregated together, and to know that I can make all that assembled multitude laugh, weep, or experience any emotion I please to excite:- there is positive intoxication in it, and I would not change that *real* power to become a queen, and have to work my will through the cumbrous machinery of a government. I act directly upon my subjects, and the EFFECT follows instantly upon my effort.<sup>80</sup>

Jewsbury's actress not only coerces the people into unity, she wields her influence over that collective herself, instead of passing the reins to a male legislator. Her power is all the greater because it is unmediated, exerted directly on the people, rather than applied through the complex mechanisms of government. Where Rosina remained fundamentally opposed to the idea of scandalous authenticity, instead using Staël as an example of what women could achieve when they were no longer restricted to the domestic sphere, Jewsbury is far closer to Staël, grounding psychological freedom and political power in the ability of the exceptional woman to act independently of social conventions.

Rosina's suspicion that Bulwer's sensibility entailed a partisan commitment to a reactionary gender ideology is apparently confirmed by *Lady Cheveley, or the Woman of Honour* (1839), a poem by one of his anonymous supporters which describes Rosina's novel *Cheveley* as 'libel, in three vols. post octavo', criticizing it for 'its immoral tendency, its false and hollow sentiment,

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<sup>79</sup> In this, she is contrasted with the Italian singer, La Fornasari, whose passion for the stage is driven by sheer egotism: 'She had a passion for subjugating all who came within her reach, for the gratification of her own vanity' *Ibid.*, p. 345

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 254.

coarse and flippant attempts at wit, and its illiterate composition'.<sup>81</sup> But the main thrust of the attack, which was couched in deeply sentimental rhetoric, used her sympathy for French culture to criticize her attempt to publicize domestic wrongs as fundamentally unEnglish. Her scandalmongering was not just injurious to Bulwer's personal reputation; it was a matter of national concern:

Is this the land to which all nations turn,  
A moral lesson from our homes to learn?  
Is this the boasted island, where the wife,  
In holy beauty leads her spotless life!

... Where, should wild passions lead man's heart astray,  
She, weeping, wins him back to virtue's way.

... Is this the land where woman's heart is true?  
Daughters of England, blush! for upon you  
Shall fall some share of her undying shame,  
Whose falsehood would defile a husband's fame!<sup>82</sup>

As if to confirm Rosina's argument that men supported the sexual double standard because it was in their own interests to do so, the poet asks his male readers to stand together in defence of English masculine values, warning them that their own domestic peace would be endangered were they to indulge in any 'mistaken chivalry of heart':

And when a bosom-serpent stings *your* breast,  
With *maudlin* sonnets, lull *yourselves* to rest,  
While round *your* household gods base reptiles rise,  
*Then* talk of tears in feeble woman's eyes!<sup>83</sup>

Unashamedly partisan in its xenophobic masculinist rhetoric, *Lady Cheveley* does not engage with Rosina's comments on the legal and social position of women, but uses her arguments about exposure to present her behaviour as unBritish, unfeminine and unnatural.

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<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, *Lady Cheveley, or The Woman Of Honour*. London: Edward Churton, 1839, p. xi and xi respectively.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-23.

#### IV

##### *The Madwoman at the Hustings*

In 1856, Rosina completed perhaps her most forceful attack on Edward Bulwer-Lytton, a novel entitled *Very Successful!* However, her publisher, alarmed by the reaction it might provoke from her increasingly powerful husband, now colonial secretary in the Derby government, abandoned the novel.<sup>84</sup> Undaunted, she decided to publish it by subscription, issuing a pamphlet, *Lady Bulwer's Appeal to the Justice and Charity of the English Public*, asking for the sympathy and the financial donations of prospective readers, and promising to dispatch a copy of her novel on receipt of £1 11s 6d. The pamphlet begins with a statement of her straightened circumstances, followed by a comparison between aristocratic Regency society and bourgeois mid nineteenth century Victorian culture which turns Bulwer's argument in *England And The English* on its head. Comparing the behaviour of her own husband to the actions of Queen Caroline's spouse, she argues that the bourgeois gentleman is actually morally inferior to the aristocratic libertine:

for even George the 4<sup>th</sup>, the "first gentleman!" and most infamous husband of the age,- his age,- did not have his wife dragged from her child's death-bed;- on the contrary, when her mother died- "The Lady Augusta"- he even had the human feeling to order that her child, the Princess Charlotte, should go to see her;- while mean as he was in the paltriness of his general persecutions, his constant assertion was, that he did not wish her to be without money; whereas, this, is the great sin of his Bourgeois imitator; knowing full well, that there is not only no fetter like it! but that it also comprises ever other torture, and humiliation.<sup>85</sup>

In an attack which resembles *The Age's* accusation that Bulwer had abused his position to secure good reviews, she voiced scepticism about the ability of newspapers to reveal the truth, arguing that her husband's political and literary status meant that he exercised despotic power over the press, subjecting his wife to the literary equivalent of the Terror:

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26 and p. 28 respectively

<sup>84</sup> See Rosina Bulwer Lytton, 'Preface to the Second Edition of *Very Successful!*' appended to *Lady Bulwer Lytton's Appeal To The Justice And Charity Of the English Public*. Sheffield: Isaac Ironside, 1857.

he has only to give minutes- (as he does for the aforesaid puffs) of the ingredients- he wishes,- the sneers,- slanders- and outrages to be composed of,- which his Press-gang have orders always to pour down *en mitraille* on his wife,- from falsifying- whole passages of her books,- with one chop of their critical guillotine,- down to coolly--- first asserting, and then arguing upon her insanity!<sup>86</sup>

Rather than allowing the public to examine the evidence, and decide for themselves, Bulwer's methods were designed to impose his own version of the story on the public, ensuring that Rosina's side was unheard or discredited.

In 1858, a general election was called and, with her husband out canvassing, Rosina decided that it was time to seize the opportunity to gain publicity for her grievances. Therefore, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1858, she turned up at the hustings in Hertford where Bulwer was making his speech in order to denounce him. According to her own, triumphal account, she swept through the crowd, mounted the platform, and began to address the crowd:

Sir Edward George Earle Bulwer Lytton, as I am not in the habit of stabbing in the back, it is to you, in the first instance, that I address myself. In the step your cruelty and your meanness have driven me into taking this day, I wish you to hear every word I have to say; refute them if you can; deny them if you dare.<sup>87</sup>

Hearing this opening, Bulwer ran from the hustings, with his hands before his face. His wife remained to complete her address, detailing her wrongs before launching into an attack upon the Derby Administration, of which he was a member. If she is to be believed, the crowd responded with enthusiasm, cheering her on. But, much to Rosina's chagrin, the national newspapers ignored this bold, feminine intervention in the masculine world of politics, though local papers gave long accounts of the affair. It looked as if this firecracker of scandalous publicity was destined to become yet another damp squib.

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<sup>85</sup> Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Lady Bulwer Lytton's Appeal To the Justice And Charity Of The English Public*. Third Edition. Sheffield: Isaac Ironside, 1857, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Devey, *Life of Rosina*. *Op. cit.*, p. 351

However, a few days later on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, Rosina received a visit from two men, Mr. Hale Thomson and Dr Woodford. They explained that they were both doctors, and produced a letter that she had written to ‘Sir Liar Coward Bulwer Lytton’ and one of the placards that she had used to advertise her presence in Hertford, asking if she recognized them. They then subjected her to a thorough examination, and questioned her landlady and servants were questioned about her behaviour. Finally, after around seven hours of interrogation, Rosina was pronounced to be in good health. She took the opportunity of their visit, however, to send a message back to Bulwer. If he did not send her £4,500 immediately, and give her £500 a year in allowance, she threatened to make Downing Street ‘too hot for him...[and] his whole set’.<sup>88</sup> On the 21<sup>st</sup> June, she set off for London to hear his answer. However, on arrival at his house, she found the entrance hall filled with people. Edward was accompanied not only by his attorney, but also by two ‘mad doctors’ and two ‘keepers’. At the prompting of Edward, the doctors certified her to be insane, and she was carted away to Inverness Lodge, Brentford, a private lunatic asylum.

But Bulwer had made a serious miscalculation. While Rosina’s angry diatribes against her husband’s misconduct had attracted comparatively little notice, her incarceration grabbed public attention, filling columns in most of the major national journals. Wrongful confinement inspired something of a public panic in 1858, and Rosina’s was one in a line of several high profile cases of doubtful medical decision making. While the notion that the domestic sphere was riven by particular interests which created conditions which allowed the victimization of women, was highly controversial in the 1850s, the notion that the institutional opacity which surrounded the private asylum could cloak scandalous abuses was far easier for the majority of people to credit. The fact that private asylums which were run on fees paid by monied individuals, combined with the lack of publicity given to their procedures, made allegations

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 294.

that they engaged in a ‘trade in lunacy’, colluding with mendacious relatives to institutionalise perfectly sane individuals, easy to believe.<sup>89</sup>



Figure 4. Anonymous. Frontispiece to *Extraordinary Narrative of An Outrageous Violation of Liberty and Law in the Forcible Seizure and Incarceration of Lady Lytton Bulwer in the Gloomy Cell of a Madhouse!!!* London: W James and Co, 1858. Woodcut.

<sup>89</sup> By contrast, public asylums were peopled largely by the lower orders and financed by the rates: releasing an inmate was seen as not as a loss of income, but as a saving.

Therefore, despite the fact that Reginald Hill, proprietor of the Brentford asylum in which Rosina was confined, was a pioneer of humane methods of treatment, the press used the fact that the public gaze was unable to penetrate the walls of the asylum to insist that she had been incarcerated in a gothic dungeon. Thus, one popular pamphlet advertised a narrative account of the scandal with a woodcut (above) depicting a dishevelled Rosina, clad in the white drapery of the heroine, in a gloomy cell, complete with a skeleton in a corner alcove (though whether these are the bones of an individual whose body has been left to medical science, or the remains of the previous occupant of the room is unclear). Another figure, presumably representing Bulwer, starts back in guilty horror from the confrontation with his wife, his hat tumbling onto the floor in his surprise. The image locates the scandal in the Manichean moral framework of melodrama, suggesting a confrontation between passive, victimized female innocence and masculine guilt, while the accompanying complaint of an 'OUTRAGEOUS VIOLATION OF LIBERTY AND LAW' interprets the affair as a dastardly attempt to abridge the basic rights of the English subject.

The scandal provoked by her imprisonment eventually became so great that Queen Victoria intervened, insisting that Rosina should be released, or that Bulwer should resign. Sir Edward chose the former option, and Rosina was freed, having spent only a month at Brentford. But to what extent did this represent a victory for her cause?

On one hand, Rosina's situation invited comparisons between her victimization in the asylum and her oppression in the domestic sphere. The fact that the asylum was a domain beyond the public gaze meant that it was readily imagined a terrifying, *unheimlich* inversion of the home. If nothing else, the scandal had emphasized the difference of interest between the Bulwers, and the popular perception that Rosina's confinement as a lunatic was unfair could be seen as a step towards the argument that her lack of legal, social and political personhood was also inequitable. On the other hand, though, inveighing against the mystery in which the procedures of madhouses were veiled as something that rendered the asylum system open to abuse was very different from



sympathizing with Rosina's argument that the domestic sphere should be opened up to the public gaze in order to protect wives against their domineering and self-interested husbands. The two types of 'privacy' involved were very different, and it was only when her case chimed with more traditional complaints against institutional opacity that Rosina managed to obtain the backing of a sizeable public.

In the last two chapters, I argued that the major difficulty that radicals faced when using scandal as a political tool was transforming public fascination with the particular details of a sensational revelation into support for a more abstract, theoretical and depersonalised platform of reformist measures. By the 1840s, however, domestic ideology, with its emphasis on the sacredness of the private, had hardened to such an extent that Rosina Bulwer-Lytton faced far greater opposition than Mary Ann Clarke when she tried to represent the intimate details of her wrongs. Because exposing the minutiae on which she grounded her case involved betraying intimate details of the home life of Edward Bulwer, her strategy was far more likely to be seen as a kind of domestic treachery than as a serious political process. It was only when her case could be reframed in terms of the abuses inherent within a type of institutional privacy, rather than the wrongs of the domestic sphere, that she was able to command widespread sympathy. Using scandal as a feminist tool tainted the female scandal monger with as much opprobrium as the male wrongdoer. As Anna Wheeler suggested, it was only when a complaint was 'less pointed towards the individual, and more towards the general delinquency of men, their laws and institutions', that a woman was likely to succeed in arousing popular support.

## Conclusion

Publicity was a useful tool for feminists and respectable radicals who wanted to demand reform of social, legal and political conditions. Debates on scandal established a connection between the role of public opinion in controlling an individual's capacity to promote their particular welfare over the general good and the need for groups hitherto excluded from the official political process to be involved in the political process. However, where respectable radicalism was concerned, scandal was also a slippery and treacherous tool, liable to collapse the general, theoretical arguments which reformers sought to draw from sensational revelations back into the particular details of an incident. Consequently, while scandal could dramatize an instance of corruption in an especially vivid manner, mobilizing a massive amount of popular feeling, it also made more general support for the radical cause difficult to sustain in the longer term.

Similarly, early feminists used debates on the relationship between general and particular interests to discuss the problem of balancing women's individual autonomy against the demands of social duty. Stael reworked the role of the revolutionary salon hostess in Rousseau's writing, arguing that by pursuing scandalous authenticity women could not only enter the political realm, but could help men to set aside their particular desires to seek the general good. For Edgeworth, however, this type of feminism was dangerously individualistic, and was more likely to encourage corruption in politics than to conquer it. She advised women to follow the dictates of reason, while bearing in mind the importance of moral convention to the stability of society, creating a feminism that was more universal, yet less superficially attractive to women in terms of the limited freedoms that it offered. In the Clarke and the Queen Caroline affairs, the slippage between different definitions of public/publicity private/privacy created space for women to engage with political issues in varied and highly complex ways, and to demand recognition of the separateness of 'female' interests. Once again, however, the particularity of scandal ensured that popular interest in an incident faded too quickly to allow the piecemeal instances of female support to become any kind of collective action.

I want to end this thesis with a few words about the role of scandal in modern Britain. Optimism about the positive effects of publicity is still incredibly strong, and scandal is still widely regarded (and heavily promoted by the newspapers that sell it) as a kind of therapeutic discourse, which reveals and heals. However, while exposure is still capable of mobilizing massive radical discontent against the government, the problem of its treacherous particularity is greater than ever. Unpopular institutional and political decisions have increasingly become the subject of costly and lengthy enquiries, often accompanied by a cumbersome methodology designed to give the reassuring impression that every scrap of available evidence is being heard and weighed, with a view to producing an official, and incontrovertible 'truth'. Such is our investment in this culture of publicity, that we have almost ceased to question the way that the attention to detail in these enquiries can operate as a distraction which can effectually smother popular outrage.

Consequently, we allowed the Hutton enquiry to act as a massive diversion, directing popular feeling against the war in Iraq away from a relatively straightforward moral case by revealing a few, sensational details about the secret operations of the public intelligence services, as if this type of 'private' revelation were a direct substitute for the insights which a more open, moral debate on the issue might have produced. Furthermore, even though the outcome of the enquiry had, in practice, been decided by the methodological decisions that were taken before the hearing of evidence commenced, it proved impossible for many people to resist the idea that this high-level investigation, which provided newspapers with cheap and easy copy for weeks, was comprehensive and fair. Quite simply, the government was able to utilize the particularity of scandal to sidetrack public debate, and as a result the anti-war movement lost much of its energy and momentum. Only when we cease to think of scandal as an improper subject for serious intellectual enquiry, when we begin to consider the way in which it is used in the political society that surrounds us, when we manage to develop a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to contemporary debates on publicity, will we be able to circumvent the problem of scandal's particularity and mount a serious, radical challenge to

decisions which are neither in the general interest, nor supported by the majority of people.

## Appendices

## APPENDIX ONE

### Chapter One: Quotations in the Original French

1.1. '...je serais tenté de croire que ce que nous appelons les gens vertueux, n'ont pas tant de mérite qu'on se plaît à nous le dire'.

- Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Ed. Francis Marmande. Paris: Pocket, 1989, p. 72.

1.2. 'Il aurait fallu, pour échauffer notre jeune homme, plus d'obstacles qu'il n'en a rencontrés...'

- Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Ed. Marmande, Op. cit., p. 149.

1.3. '...les particuliers, toujours sous les yeux du public, sont censeurs nés les uns des autres'

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre a M. D'Alembert Sur Les Spectacles*. Ed. L Brunel. Paris: Hachette, 1907, p. 91.

1.4. '...chacun, dérochant aisément sa conduite aux yeux du public, ne se montre que par son crédit...'

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre a D'Alembert Sur Les Spectacles*. Op. cit., p. 91.

1.5. 'Je sens mon coeur et je connais les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent'.

- Rousseau, *Les Confessions*. Ed. Ernest Seillière. Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1929, Vol 1, p. 1.

1.6. 'Déterminé à passer dans l'indépendance et la pauvreté le peu de temps qui

me restait à vivre, j'appliquai toutes les forces de mon âme à briser les fers de l'opinion, et à faire avec courage tout ce qui me paraissait bien, sans m'embarrasser aucunement du jugement des hommes.'

- Rousseau, *Les Confessions*. Ed. Seillière. Op. cit., Vol 2, p. 193.

1.7. 'L'influence des femmes est nécessairement très grande, lorsque tous les événemens se passent dans les salons, et que tous les caractères se montrent par les paroles; dans un tel état de choses, les femmes sont une puissance, et l'on cultive ce qui leur plait.'

- Staël, *De la Littérature Considérée Dans Ses Rapports Avec Les Institutions Sociales*. Paris: M J Minard, 1959, p. 269.

1.8 'L'homme en bien faisant ne dépend que de lui-même et peut braver le jugement public, mais la femme en bien faisant n'a fait que la moitié de sa tâche, et ce que l'on pense d'elle ne lui importe pas moins que ce qu'elle est en effet...l'opinion est le tombeau de la vertu parmi les hommes, et son trône parmi les femmes.'

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau IV: Émile ou de l'éducation*. Ed. J S Spink. Dijon: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969, pp.702-3

1.9 Je distingue dans ce qu'on appelle honneur celui qui se tire de l'opinion publique, et celui qui dérive de l'estime de soi-même. Le premier consiste en vains préjugés plus mobiles qu'une onde agitée; le second a sa base dans les vérités éternelles de la morale. L'honneur du monde peut être avantageux à la fortune; mais il ne pénètre point dans l'âme, et n'influe en rien sur le vrai bonheur. L'honneur véritable au contraire en forme l'essence, parce qu'on ne trouve qu'en lui ce sentiment permanent de satisfaction intérieure qui seul peut rendre heureux un être pensant'



- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Ed. M Launay. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, p. 50

1.10 ...on passe discrètement en revue les anecdotes de Paris, qu'on dévoile tous les événements secrets de la chronique scandaleuse, qu'on rend le bien et le mal également plaisants et ridicules, et que, peignant avec art et selon l'intérêt particulier les caractères des personnages, chaque interlocuteur, sans y penser, peint encore beaucoup mieux le sien; c'est là qu'un reste de circonspection fait inventer devant les laquais un certain langage entortillé, sous lequel, feignant de rendre la satire plus obscure, on la rend seulement plus amère...

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, pp. 175-6

1.11 'Quoique tous les domestiques n'aient qu'une même table, il y a d'ailleurs peu de communication entre les deux sexes; on regard ici cet article comme très important... Les liaisons trop intimes entre les deux sexes ne produisent jamais que du mal. C'est des conciliabules qui se tiennent chez les femmes de chambre que sortent la plupart des désordres d'un ménage. S'il s'en trouve une qui plaise au maître d'hôtel, il ne manque pas de la séduire aux dépens du maître. L'accord des hommes entre eux ni des femmes entre elles n'est pas assez sûr pour tirer à conséquence. Mais c'est toujours entre hommes et femmes que s'établissent ces secrets monopoles qui ruinent à la longue les familles les plus opulentes.'

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, p. 336

1.12 Julie! femme incomparable! vous exercez dans la simplicité de la vie privée le despotique empire de la sagesse et des bienfaits: vous êtes pour tout le pays un dépôt cher et sacré que chacun voudrait défendre et conserver au prix de son sang; et vous vivez plus sûrement, plus honorablement au milieu d'un peuple entier qui vous aime, que les rois entourés de tous leurs soldats'

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, p. 360

1.13 'Un seul précepte de morale peut tenir lieu de tous les autres, c'est celui-ci: ne fais ni ne dis jamais rien que tu ne veuilles que tout le monde voie et entende; et, pour moi, j'ai toujours regardé comme le plus estimable des hommes ce Romain qui voulait que sa maison fût construite de manière qu'on vît tout ce qui s'y faisait'

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, p. 317.

1.14 'Supposez un moment quelque intrigue secrète, quelque liaison qu'il faille cacher, quelque raison de réserve et de mystère; à l'instant tout le plaisir de se voir s'évanouit, on est contraint l'un devant l'autre, on cherche à se dérober, quand on se rassemble on voudrait se fuir; la circonspection, la bienséance, amenant la défiance et le dégoût'

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, p. 525.

1.15 'Cette femme est intelligente et fidèle, mais indiscrete et babillarde. Je soupçonne qu'elle a trahi plus d'une fois les secrets de sa maîtresse, que M. de Wolmar ne l'ignore pas, et que, pour prévenir la même indiscretion vis-à-vis de quelque étranger, cet homme sage a su l'employer de manière à profiter de ses bonnes qualités sans s'exposer aux mauvaises'

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, pp. 335-6.

1.16 'J'ose m'honorer du passé; mais qui m'eût pu répondre de l'avenir? Un jour de plus peut-être, et j'étais coupable!

- Rousseau, *Julie. Op. cit.*, pp. 564.

1.17 'l'auteur se bat les flancs pour s'échauffer, et le lecteur reste froid... Il n'en est pas de même en parlant. L'habitude de travailler son organe y donne de la sensibilité; la facilité des larmes y ajoute encore...'

- Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses. Op. cit.*, p. 96

1.18 'Héloïse est le seul qu'on en puisse excepter; et malgré le talent de l'Auteur, cette observation m'a toujours fait croire que le fonds en était vrai'.

- Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. *Op. cit.*, p. 96

1.19. 'Qui sont ceux qui déclament sans cesse contra la licence de la presse, et qui demandent des lois pour la captiver? Ce sont ces personnages équivoques, dont la réputation éphémère, fondée sur les succès du charlatanisme, est ébranlée par le moindre choc de la contradiction; ce sont ceux qui, voulant à la fois plaire au peuple et servir ses tyrans, combattus entre le désir de conserver la gloire acquise en défendant la cause publique, et les honteux avantages que l'ambition peut obtenir en l'abandonnant, qui, substituant la fausseté au courage, l'intrigue au génie, tous les petits manèges des cours aux grands ressorts des révolutions, tremblent sans cesse que la voix d'un homme libre vienne reveller le secret de leur nullité ou de leur corruption'

- Robespierre, 'Discours Sur La Liberté de la Presse, 11 May 1791', quoted from *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre*. Ed. Charles Vellay. Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908, pp. 22-42, this quotation p. 37

1.20. 'la publicité est l'appui de la vertu, la sauvegarde de la vérité, la terreur du crime, le fléau de l'intrigue. Laissez les ténèbres et le scrutin secret aux criminels et aux esclaves. Les hommes libres veulent avoir le peuple pour témoin de leurs pensées'

- Maximilien Robespierre, 'Discours Sur La Constitution, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1793' in *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 255-274, this quotation p. 269-70.

1.21. ...depuis la révolution, les hommes ont pensé qu'il étoit politiquement et moralement utile de réduire les femmes à la plus absurde médiocrité; ils ne leur ont adressé qu'un misérable langage sans délicatesse comme sans esprit; elles

n'ont plus eu de motifs pour développer leur raison: les moeurs n'en sont pas devenues meilleures.

- Staël, *De la Littérature. Op. cit.*, p. 335

1.22. 'Un homme doit savoir braver l'opinion, une femme s'y soumettre'

- Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. S Balayé and L. Omacini. Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1987, Vol.1, p. 5.

1.23. 'Il est dans la nature des choses, que, dans une monarchie où le tact des convenances est si finement saisi, toute action extraordinaire, tout mouvement pour sortir de sa place, paroisse d'abord ridicule.

- Staël, *De la Littérature. Op. cit.*, p. 333

1.24. 'L'opinion apparoît en tout lieu, et vous ne pouvez la saisir nulle part; chacun me dit, *qu'on dit* les plus indignes mensonges contre Delphine, et je ne parviens pas à découvrir si celui qui me parle, les répète, ou les répand lui-même.'

- Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. Balayé and Omacini. Op. cit., p. 644.

1.25. 'Quand la société de Paris se met à vouloir se montrer morale *contre* quelqu'un, c'est alors sur-tout qu'elle est redoutable. La plupart des personnes qui composent cette société, sont en général très-indulgentes pour leur propre conduite, et souvent même aussi pour celle des autres, lorsqu'elles n'ont pas intérêt à la blamer; mais, si par malheur il leur convient de saisir le côté sévère de la question, elles ne tarissent plus sur les devoirs et les principes, et vont beaucoup plus loin en rigueur que les femmes véritablement austères, résolues à se diriger elles-mêmes, d'après ce qu'elles dissent sur les autres. Les développemens de vertu qui servent à la jalousie ou à la malveillance, sont le sujet de rhétorique, sur lequel les libertines et les coquettes font le plus de *pathos*, dans de certaines occasions.'

- Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. Balayé and Omacini. Op. cit., p. 504.

1.26. ‘...je crois tellement essentiel pour une femme de ménager en tout point l’opinion, que je lui conseillerois de ne rien braver en aucun genre, ni superstitions...ni convenances, quelques puérides qu’elles puissent être...’

- Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. Balayé and Omacini. Op. cit., p. 97.

1.27. ‘La crainte de l’opinion rend tant de femmes dissimulées, que pour ne point exposer la sincérité de mon caractère, M. d’Albémar travailloit de tout son pouvoir à m’affranchir de ce joug. Il y a réussi, je ne redoute rien sur la terre que le reproche juste de mon coeur, ou le reproche injuste de mes amis: mais que l’opinion publique me recherche ou m’abandonne, elle ne pourra jamais rien sur ces jouissances de l’ame et de la pensée, qui m’occupent et m’absorbent toute entière.’

- Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. Balayé and Omacini. Op. cit., p. 166.

1.28. ‘Qu’importe à celle qui croit à la protection de l’Etre-Suprême et vit en sa présence, à celle qui possède un caractère élevé et jouit en elle-même du sentiment de la vertu; que lui importent... les discours des hommes? elle obtient leur estime tôt ou tard, car c’est de la vérité que l’opinion publique relève en dernier resort; mais il faut savoir mépriser toutes les agitations passagères que la calomnie, la sottise et l’envie, excitent contre les êtres distingués.’

- Staël, *Delphine*. Ed. Balayé and Omacini. Op. cit., p. 166.

1.29. Déjà depuis quinze jours ne faut-il pas compter qui vient ou ne vient pas me voir? Ne faut-il pas examiner la nuance des politesses des femmes, le degré de chaleur de leurs empressemens pour moi! j’ai senti battre mon coeur de crainte, pour une visite à recevoir, pour une misérable formule de politesse à remplir. Je ne connois pas une qualité forte de l’ame, une faculté supérieure de l’esprit qui ne se degrade par une telle vie!

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 679.

1.30. C'est par l'ame, l'ame seule qu'elles sont distinguées; c'est elle qui donne du mouvement à leur esprit, c'est elle que leur fait trouver quelque charme dans une destinée, dont sentimens sont les seul événemens, et les affections les seul intérêts; c'est elle qui les indentifie au sort de ce qu'elles aiment, et leur compose un bonheur dont l'unique source est la félicité des objets de leur tendresse; c'est elle enfin qui leur tient lieu d'instruction et d'expérience, et les rend dignes de sentir ce qu'elles sont incapables de juger.

- Germaine de Staël, *Lettres Sur Les Ouvrages Et Le Caractère De J. J. Rousseau*. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979, pp. 16-17.

1.31 '...de tous les sentimens, l'amour de la liberté, me paroît le plus digne d'un caractère généreux'

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 190.

1.32. Quoique Rousseau ait tâché d'empêcher les femmes de se mêler des affaires publiques, de jouer un rôle éclatant, qu'il a su leur plaire en parlant d'elles! ah! s'il voulu les priver de quelque droits étrangers à leur sexe, comme il leur a rendu tous ceux qui lui appartiennent à jamais! S'il a voulu diminuer leur influence sur les délibérations des hommes, comme il a consacré l'empire qu'elles ont sur leur bonheur!

- Staël, *Lettres Sur Les Ouvrages Et Le Caractère De J. J. Rousseau. Op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

1.33. 'Mon front se couvre de sueur quand je me figure un instant, que même à cent lieues de moi, un homme quelconque pourroit se permettre de prononcer mon nom ou celui des miens avec peu d'égards, et que je ne serois pas là pour m'en venger'

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 161

1.34. D'abord de faux bruit circuleront, ils s'établiront bientôt après comme vrais dans la tête de ceux qui ne le connoissent pas; alors il s'en irritera, mais trop tard. Quand il se hâteroit de chercher vingt occasions de duel, des traits de courage désordonnés rétabliront-ils la réputation de son caractère? Tous ces efforts, tous ces mouvements présentent l'idée de l'agitation, et l'on ne respecte point celui qui s'agite: le calme seul est imposant.'

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 162

1.36. 'Certes, il faudra que la morale fasse de grands progrès, avant que l'on rencontre beaucoup d'époux qui se résignent au malheur sans y échapper de quelque manière, et si l'on y échappe, et si la société se montre indulgente en proportion de la sévérité même des institutions, c'est alors que toutes les idées de devoirs et de vertus sont confondues, et que l'on vit sous l'esclavage civil comme sous l'esclavage politique, dégagé par l'opinion des entraves imposées par la loi'

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 655.

1.37 'Les moyens employés pour accomplir la révolution ne valent pas mieux que ceux dont on se sert pour ourdir une conspiration: en effet commettre un crime sur la place publique, ou le combiner dans son cabinet, c'est être également coupable; mais il y a le perfidie de moins.'

- Stael, *Considérations Sur Les Principaux Événemens de la Révolution Française. Second Edition. London: Cradock et Joy, 1819, Vol. 2, p. 42*

1.38. 'Je crois fermement que dans l'ancien régime, où l'opinion exerçoit un si salutaire empire, cet empire étoit l'ouvrage des femmes distinguées par leur esprit et leur caractère: on citoit souvent leur éloquence quand un dessein généreux les inspiroit, quand elles avoient à défendre la cause du malheur, quand l'expression d'un sentiment exigeoit du courage et déplaisoit au pouvoir.'

- Staël, *De la Littérature. Op. cit.*, p. 337

1.39. ‘une sorte de niaiserie dans les discours et de médisance de cotterie, une insipide gaîté qui doit finir par éloigner tous les hommes vraiment supérieurs...’

- Staël, *De la Littérature. Op. cit.*, p. 337

1.40. ‘il ne faut pas qu’un homme public mette de mystère dans sa conduite.’

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 930

1.41. Sans doute j’aurois souhaité que la liberté pût s’établir en France, sans qu’un seul homme pérît pour une opinion politique; mais puisque la guerre étrangère excite une fermentation violente, n’exigez pas qu’un père de famille, qui s’est vu forcé d’accepter dans ces tems difficiles un emploi pénible, mais nécessaire, n’exiger pas qu’il compromette ses jours pour conserver ceux d’un inconnu.

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 934

1.42. ‘...ce n’est point une pitié commune que j’attends de vous, c’est une élévation d’ame qui suppose des vertus antiques, des vertus républicaines, des vertus qui honoreront mille fois davantage le parti que vous défendez, que le plus illustres victories.’

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 934

1.43. ‘...si vous livrez Léonce au tribunal, votre enfant, cet objet de toute votre tendresse, il mourra! il mourra!’

- Staël, *Delphine. Op. cit.*, p. 935



1.44 ‘...l’amitié, l’amour même, se glacent dans tous les coeurs; les qualités intimes tombent avec les vertus publiques; on ne s’aime plus entre soi, après avoir cessé d’aimer la patrie; et l’on apprend seulement à se servir d’un langage hypocrite, qui contient le blâme doucereux des personnes en défaveur, l’apologie adroite des gens puissans, et la doctrine cachée de l’égotisme.’

- Staël, *Considérations. Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 309.

1.45 ‘...le secret de faire naître ce froid isolement qui ne lui présentait les hommes qu’un à un, et jamais réunis’

- Staël, *Considérations. Op. cit.*, Vol 2, p. 309.

1.46 ‘Je l’ai vu un jour s’approcher d’une Française très-connue par sa beauté, son esprit et la vivacité de ses opinions; il se plaça tout droit devant elle comme le plus roide des généraux allemands, et lui dit: *Madame, je n’aime pas que les femmes se mêlent de politique.* “*Vous avez raison, général, lui répondit-elle: mais dans un pays où on leur coupe la tête, il est naturel qu’elles aient envie de savoir pourquoi.*”

- Staël, *Considérations. Vol. 2*, pp. 201-2

1.47 ‘Mais lorsque la curiosité pour les nouvelles ne peut se satisfaire qu’en recevant un appoint de mensonges; lorsque aucun événement n’est raconté sans être accompagné d’un sophisme; lorsque la réputation de chacun dépend d’une calomnie répandue dans des gazettes qui se multiplient de toutes parts sans qu’on accorde à personne la possibilité de les réfuter; lorsque les opinions sur chaque circonstance, sur chaque ouvrage, sur chaque individu, sont soumises au mot d’ordre des journalistes, comme les mouvemens des soldats aux chefs de file: c’est alors que l’art de l’imprimerie devient ce que l’on a dit du canon; *la dernière raison des rois.*’

- Staël, *Considérations. Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 262-3

1.48 ‘...il entroit dans les moindres détails des relations de chaque individu, de manière à réunir l’empire du conquérant à une inquisition de comérage’

- Staël, *Considérations. Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 310.

## APPENDIX TWO:

### The Plot Of Delphine

The plot of *Delphine* is enormously convoluted, not least because its protagonist lives in an atmosphere saturated with scandal, which results in multiple misapprehensions and misunderstandings in the course of the thousand page narrative. Delphine d'Albemar is a young and beautiful widow, and a good Rousseauvian, believing firmly in the ideal of liberty and the natural expression of affection. Without a male protector, she forms a close sentimental friendship with her older aunt, Mme de Vernon, an inveterate gambler, and helps her daughter, Matilda, to a marriage with her fiancé, Léonce de Mondoville, by the generous gift of an estate. However, when Léonce arrives in Paris, he and Delphine fall desperately in love, but the relationship is stalled by the conflict between her radical politics and inclination to disregard public opinion, and his aristocratic sympathies and faith in the significance of honour.

Meanwhile, a meeting between Delphine's married friend, Theresa d'Ervins, and her lover, M. de Serbellane, exposes Delphine to misconstruction, when M de Fierville, an aged scandalmonger, catches de Serbellane leaving Delphine's house in the middle of the night. Rumours concerning her behaviour begin to circulate, and Léonce begins to have serious doubts about her when she can give no explanation for the fact that her name is mentioned during a duel between M d'Ervins and de Serbellane, during which the former is fatally wounded. Theresa, full of guilt and remorse takes refuge in Catholicism and decides to take the veil, while Delphine, now the subject of a damaging scandal, writes to Mme de Vernon, confessing her love for Léonce, and asking her to inform him of the truth. But she is deceived in her friend: self-interest prevents Mme de Vernon from reconciling the lovers, and it is only after his marriage that Léonce accidentally hears the real state of affairs. Vernon admits her deception in private, but continues to make damaging public allegations against Delphine until her sudden death.

The lovers decide to brave public opinion and retreat to a country estate at the aptly named Bellerive. However, as soon as they leave the public world of the city, Delphine's reputation is in jeopardy, and she is only saved by a timely return to Paris and the support of a few loyal friends. The departure and forced return of the King in June 1791 once again force her to take public action, secretly sheltering her friend and admirer M de Valorbe, who is compromised in the political events of the day. The ever suspicious Léonce sees him leaving the house at night, and a duel between the pair is only avoided when both parties are persuaded that no-one has seen their exchange of insults. However, de Fierville has once again been an observer, and scandalous tongues soon destroy the reputation of Valorbe and threaten that of Delphine, who is only saved by Matilda's interposition. Full of remorse, Staël's heroine confesses her love to her cousin and flies to Switzerland, where she lodges in a convent under the auspices of Mme de Ternan, Léonce's aunt, who is secretly ill-disposed towards her, on political and personal grounds. Even here, Delphine is not safe from scandal, for the ruined Valorbe, bent on marrying her, deliberately wrecks her reputation, then commits suicide when he compromises her without obtaining her consent to marriage. As a result, she is thrown out of the convent, but when Matilda falls ill, de Ternan changes her mind and imprisons Delphine instead, threatening to publish her 'infamy' if she does not take the veil. Unaware that her cousin is dying, she agrees, to the dismay of Léonce, who arrives a few days too late to prevent the ceremony. On the suggestion of the radical Lebensey, Delphine agrees to return with to France, where monastic vows have been made invalid, but Léonce, unable to brave the shadow of dishonour which Delphine's compromise entails, begins to think of joining the emigrant nobles. In mid September, he travels to Verdun, where he is captured in a skirmish with republican guards, and condemned to death for fighting against France. Delphine follows him, and when her pleas to his judge fail to save him from a public death, she poisons herself and dies in his arms as he faces the firing squad.

### APPENDIX THREE:

#### Chapter Two: Quotations in the Original French

3.1. Madame de Staël a été dans tout son lustre, Lord Lansdowne, Romilly, MacIntosh, Mr. Rogers, Mr. Ward et d'autres encore tenoient le feu électrique dans un mouvement continuel, seule contre tous dans ses attaques contre Locke, contre l'utilité, contre les classifications et les définitions Benthamiques, nous accusant de tuer la religiosité, l'imagination, la poésie, l'enthousiasme du grand et du beau, de réduire les hommes à de viles machines arithmétiques, et de les tromper en morale en leur disant que la vertu étoit la même chose que le bonheur, elle nous étonnoit de la faiblesse de ses raisons et de la vivacité de son éloquence...

3.2. Elle a emporté d'ici le Castle of rack-rent. Elle est charmée d'*ennui* et de *manoeuvring*- vous étiez digne de l'enthousiasme, mais nous nous sommes perdus dans cette triste utilité. Et bien, la triste utilité vivra plus longtemps que le brillant enthousiasme.

- Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*. pp. 222-223.

#### APPENDIX FOUR:

##### The Plot Of *Leonora*

The complex plot of *Leonora* centres around the figure of Lady Olivia, a sentimental woman, who has separated from her husband after finding that ‘we were not born for each other’ [10], and has since spent her time in an appropriately Staëlian manner, wandering amongst the lakes of Switzerland reading metaphysical tracts and German novels. She becomes the subject of rumour when she falls in love with Monsieur R\*\*\*, (whose initial recalls the compromised woman on whom Delphine takes pity), though she solemnly swears that the affair has not been consummated. Against the warnings and advice of her mother, the Duchess of —, Leonora invites Olivia to stay in her house. A virtuous, domestic and very English wife, Leonora aims to use her spotless reputation to rehabilitate her friend by publicly countenancing her actions.

However, Olivia is soon bored by Leonora’s domestic retirement and begins an affair her husband, Mr L—, which she describes in letters to her French correspondent, Gabrielle de P—, who in return describes her lively life as a coquettish *femme de salon*. Contrasting Leonora’s practical rationality unfavourably with Olivia’s sentimental creed, Mr L— soon becomes convinced that only the latter represents true passion. Consequently, he elopes with his guest. However, having a high respect for public standards of decency, he decides to obtain an embassy to Russia in order to allow his mistress to mix in society without causing offence. When she informs Gabrielle of this, the salon hostess drops her sentimental tone, and begins to bargain with Olivia for power. Encouraging her friend to be ambitious, she advises her to abandon all thoughts of romantic love, and to use her sexual attractiveness to become mistress to rich and powerful Russians, working her way up to the Emperor of Russia. Gabrielle envisages a Europe under the sway of feminine power, based in two salons: her own in France, and Olivia’s in Russia. Olivia, however, is unable to abandon her sentimental outlook. When she discovers that Gabrielle is the new lover of

her R\*\*\*, she accuses her of using politics to distract attention away from this betrayal, and breaks off their friendship.

At the same time, Mr L— becomes tired of Olivia's unfavourable comparisons of himself with Rousseau's St Preux, and is further distressed by a theatrical suicide attempt on her part. When he catches a contagious fever, Olivia has the opportunity to put her sentimental affection for him into practice, but he finds that she prudently avoids him. Instead, it is the selfless Leonora who rushes to his bedside to nurse him back to health. There she receives the packet of Olivia's letters to Gabrielle, which have been forwarded by the former's servant, who, having no inclination to visit Russia, is desperate to prevent her mistress from undertaking the journey. However, Leonora but refuses to read them: however good and just the outcome of such an action would be, in her eyes, the action itself is still inherently wrong and dishonourable. Fortunately for her marriage, Mr L— is made aware of the correspondence by another means: a private note from St James's which states that the letters have been seized aboard a captured French frigate, and examined by the government because references to the court and emperor of Russia aroused suspicion of political manoeuvring. However, instead of political intelligence they contain only family secrets. The writer quotes some of Olivia's more uncomplimentary references to L—, before forwarding the packet for the sole purpose of ensuring her downfall. Olivia flees to the continent, leaving Leonora and Mr L— to rebuild their domestic happiness.

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