Introduction

In 1785 an anonymous pamphlet circulated the streets of London, instructing its readers in the evaluation of monarchy: “Those who would search into the genuine principles and sentiments of princes, must view them in their recesses – must examine them in their private hours, when untrammeled with pomp, and disrobed of dignity, the disguises of art are laid aside.”1 The quotation reflects a rejection of previous modes of ceremonious rule and a desire for government transparency. The public refused to accept pomp and artifice as justification for monarchical status. The author stresses that any true assessment of a leader’s character required scrutiny of his private life. With these attitudes gaining prevalence, the public’s demands for an open and accessible leadership placed new expectations on the monarchy, contributed to the outbreak of royal scandal, and redefined political culture in the late eighteenth century.

In this changed political context, George IV became notorious for his financial and filial misconduct. During the period from 1785 to 1820, critics publicized and denounced his excesses in spending, drinking, and promiscuity. Pamphleteers, caricaturists, and public opinion held political leaders to higher standards and expected them to serve as exemplars of popular beliefs. At a time of waning royal authority, an emerging middle class sought to redefine the monarchy on the basis of moral utility upon the monarchy. Under the pressure of an expanding and intrusive press, the crown found issues typically confined to the private sphere emerging within the public domain. The responses to scandals like the prince’s secret marriage, his mounting debts, and his mistreatment of his family provide insight into shifting political values. These criticisms

---

1 Letters between an Illustrious Personage and a Lady of Honour (London: 1785), XI.
depict the dependency of monarchical authority on the trust of its subjects and its ability to uphold ideals of fiscal responsibility and filial virtue.

Shifting expectations toward monarchy acquired force through an expansion in print culture. Between 1700 and 1780 London newspapers with circulation in the thousands increased from one to seventeen.\(^2\) Though circulation outside of London was smaller, the total number of newspapers in Britain increased from 100 in 1760 to over 300 by 1820.\(^3\) Furthermore, between 1740 and 1790, the number of printers, booksellers, and engravers in England nearly tripled. In addition, literacy rates among urban craftsmen reached 85 percent in 1760. As a result of improved learning and increased availability of information, pamphlets and newspapers were routinely read and discussed in coffeehouses, inns, and taverns. The emerging dialogue demonstrates how the rise in literacy and print production led to an expansion in the number and types of people involved in politics. While only 17.9 percent of adult males could vote in the late eighteenth century, the amount of people following and discussing politics grew dramatically.\(^4\)

The press established itself as a mediator of information and asserted its importance during an era of political change and corruption. The low cost of pamphlets and newspapers made them available to readers of both sexes and all societal ranks.\(^5\) Furthermore, the availability of news articles and parliamentary reports enabled readers

---


to identify political blocs and demand accountability from their representatives.\textsuperscript{6} Increased readership allowed the media to shape information and transform popular discontent into defined perspectives. Their reports immersed the public in debate and forced the populace to consider its role within the political sphere.\textsuperscript{7}

Although newspapers devoted most of their coverage to parliamentary debates, accounts of political and royal scandal fascinated the public. These scandals reflected the media’s ability to shape expectations of leadership and solicit public reaction. Scholars argue that the accessibility of information concerning royal activity demystified the person of the king and revealed the distinctions between his royal and mortal characters.\textsuperscript{8} As a result, caricatures like the Cover Image emerged, in which the prince appeared corpulent, drunk, and undignified. The text at the bottom declares, “Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.” This quote is taken from the biblical King Lemuel to demonstrate the danger of bodily temptations for political leaders. Below that, the figure reads, “In love, and in drink, and o’ertopped by debt; with women, with wine, and with duns on the fret.” By focusing attention on the prince’s human vices and separating him from Lemuel’s model of leadership, the image equated the heir with the common citizen. This example demonstrates how the royal image was transformed and its spectacle reduced at the hands of a bold and critical press.

The rise in print culture coincided with adjustments in both the phrasing and enforcement of censorship legislation. In 1695 measures to restrict literature prior to publication were abandoned in favor of an approach that only tracked works already in

\textsuperscript{6} Wilson, \textit{The Sense of the People}, 25-30.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 440.
While post-publication monitoring made it easier to identify seditious material, it also resulted in the release of more pamphlets than authorities could control. As a result of the volume of publication, authorities were unable to try a large number of radical authors. Historians argue that the subsequent reduction in sedition charges encouraged the release of scandalous material.10

The definitions and interpretations of libel and sedition law hardened during the 1790s when Britain entered war with Revolutionary France. Sedition had traditionally been defined as a “deliberate attempt to vilify the government and promote disaffection.” The prosecution was expected to prove “malicious intent” in order to secure a guilty charge.11 The outbreak of war with France in 1792, however, led the British government to tighten its stance on published material. The crackdown started when parliament suspended Habeas corpus following the beheading of Louis XVI in 1793.12 In addition, the courts’ emphasis on the need to protect the sovereign “against all potential threats” made authors and publishers the targets of frequent accusations.13

Changing interpretations of treason legislation also influenced print culture. As part of treason statute, it was illegal to “imagine” the king’s death. In the last decade of the eighteenth century, this vague clause underwent continuous reevaluation. Courts traditionally operated under the belief that “any act which might endanger the life of the king was equivalent to imagining his death.” In the 1790s, however, judges went further

---

11 Morris, The British Monarchy, 117.
12 Gatrell, City of Laughter, 486.
and convicted defendants for “any attempt to weaken or lessen the king in the esteem of his subjects.” Authors often defended themselves by claiming that their works represented warnings, issued to protect the king, rather than cause him harm. Their arguments, however, were generally ignored as prosecutors shifted their focus from an author’s intent to each work’s potential to disturb the public peace.

In spite of the government crackdown, expressions of political dissent persisted. The volume of criticism prevented authorities from trying authors for every potentially seditious text. To supplement censorship statute, authorities attempted bribing critics to moderate their attacks or release pro-government works. Though the government spent over £5000 annually to influence media production, their efforts proved unsuccessful. Authors and caricaturists typically accepted the funds and then continued to produce anti-government material. With their newfound audience, an author’s potential profit from high circulation dwarfed the gains of government payoffs.

By the late eighteenth century, trials of popular authors and caricaturists inspired public outrage. As the populace gained political awareness, they criticized censorship and supported media efforts to guarantee transparency. The spectacle produced by trials demonstrated a contradiction between the intent and ultimate effect of censorship legislation; rather than quelling public unrest, restrictive statutes instigated greater distress and controversy. In this context, libel and sedition convictions rarely occurred without a strong case from the prosecution. Additionally, in spite of the crackdown of

14 Ibid., 119-126.
15 Gatrell, City of Laughter, 487.
16 Baker, George IV, 214.
the 1790s, many judges made efforts to acquit their defendants. Though the trials allowed the government to demonstrate its concern with media expression, judicial tolerance prevented further criticism and maintained public loyalty. In this sense, media reports and public mobilization protected civil liberties and limited the impact of censorship. Thus, while the late eighteenth century witnessed wartime pressures and restrictive legislation, political criticism found new outlets and maintained steady production.

Compared to print, caricatures enjoyed greater freedom from censorship laws and contained broader appeal. Caricature began as a small, elite practice, but print production tripled in the 1780’s and maintained its presence throughout the second half of George III’s reign. Though the prints were a predominantly urban genre and beyond the price range of the average laborer, they acquired visibility through shop windows and public exhibitions. Figure 1 depicts the audience for caricatures as members of different social classes congregate outside a print shop. The fact that many images were accompanied by text reinforced the idea that caricatures lent themselves to multiple layers of reading and audiences of diverse educational backgrounds. Caricatures’ popularity also depended upon their use of indirect points and representational innuendo. Furthermore, prints often focused on human, rather than political events and relied on coarse imagery and crude humor to convey their controversial messages. These tactics, along with the ambiguity inherent in visual expression made it difficult to prove a caricaturist’s intent and resulted in few accusations of libel.

19 Morris, The British Monarchy, 120-123.
21 Baker, George IV, 20.
Given the wider range of permissible critique, caricatures emerged as political reference points. Regardless of class or literacy, viewers could decipher a print’s meaning. For example, though only a small elite read tracts on the French Revolution, almost anyone could understand the implication of an image like Figure 2, where the prince and his ministers appear running from a satirical guillotine. While this print hardly seems to favor revolution, the familiar images of the guillotine and the trampled money and crown illustrate the link between royal debauchery and political upheaval. By relying on popular symbols, prints allowed political commentary to reach a broader audience.

The popularity of George III reflected the shift of media attention from a monarch’s political activity to his private conduct. Though initially accused of excessive meddling, George retreated from the political realm after establishing William Pitt as

---

Prime Minister in 1783. Observers recognized the king’s waning civic influence and began to link their evaluations of royalty to concepts of moral utility.\(^{23}\) The press no longer depicted the king on the throne or among politicians, but instead focused on more human events, like George’s frequent walks with his family. By making a spectacle of his private life, the king served as a moral exemplar for the nation. In particular, depictions of him as the domesticated, “Farmer George” helped formulate a personal bond between the sovereign and his subjects. Essentially, his status outside the political realm served to legitimate his status within it.

In response to commentaries praising the king’s domestic virtues, popular loyalty migrated from the royal office to the monarch’s character. Allegiance shed its obligatory status in favor of a model dependent on individual merit.\(^ {24}\) In addition to changes in

\(^{24}\) Clark, *Scandal*, 174.
British culture, the influence of the French Revolution raised public expectations about royal virtue. George III deflected assaults on regal authority by adhering to popular standards of morality. During a period in which royal authority depended upon public opinion, it was the king’s gentlemanliness, rather than his grandeur that secured loyalty to the throne.25

The greatest appreciation for the king’s moral conduct, however, came during his first bout with mental illness in 1788. His ability to combine ordinariness with regality endeared him to a public that demanded royalty align with popular sentiment.26 Though the king frequently appeared in common dress and was known for his tendency to engage subjects in conversation, he also combined this familiarity with the pomp of royal processions and jubilees.27 In this respect, the king operated a fragile balance; his displays of sympathy dispelled fears of absolutism at the same time as his distinction served to maintain monarchy’s traditional aura.28 Thus, responses to the king’s vulnerability and family life demonstrate that his private conduct was not only being publicized, but also evaluated as a criterion of royal legitimacy.

Ironically, the same set of standards that inspired affection for George III provoked contempt for his successor, the Prince of Wales. As a result of the king’s illness and the prince’s limited political responsibilities, the press directed public attention to the prince’s private vices. One pamphlet reminded the prince of the exposure of his private life: “You are become the subject of general discussion among all rank of

27 Colley, Britons, 224.
28 Morris, The British Monarchy, 142.
people, from one end of the island to the other.”29 The quotation reflects the impact of the prince’s activity on national prosperity and individual wellbeing. Rather than reforming his conduct, however, the prince focused on selfish pursuits and ignored the sufferings of his people. In this regard, the prince’s misdeeds were not merely insensitive; they also damaged his public image and harmed the nation.

To understand late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century conceptions of monarchy, this study will examine reactions to various scandals in the prince’s private life. These events captured the public’s interest and aroused national discontent. I will begin with an analysis of the “secret marriage” of 1785. The prince’s marriage to a lowborn Catholic woman violated laws restricting the heir’s matrimonial options. His subsequent efforts to conceal the union resulted in increased scrutiny of his private life. Though criticism remained mild and blame was often deflected toward other targets, this incident established the precedent of public demands for full disclosure. Commentators’ dissatisfaction with the prince’s secrecy encapsulated hopes for his reform and depicted an emerging sense of distrust between the heir and his subjects.

Chapter 2 analyzes reactions to the prince’s mounting debts and the perceived connection between royal expenditure and national prosperity. Critics linked the prince’s expenses to the health of the British economy and to the struggles of the lower classes. The prince’s lavish tastes violated emerging ideals of moderation and restrained consumption. His failure to use royal wealth for public benefit caused observers to accuse him of wasting the people’s hard-earned money to fund immoral pursuits. Attacks

29 “Two Words of Counsel, and One of Comfort. Addressed to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales” (London: 1795), 36.
on the prince’s expenditure presented him as a national burden and connected his fiscal irresponsibility to his inadequacies as a leader.

The final chapter considers responses to the prince’s dysfunctional relationships within the royal family. First, I will look at comparisons between the prince and his father, George III. Whereas George III met Enlightenment expectations of paternalistic virtue, the prince abandoned his father’s model. His infidelity and filial disrespect violated popular expectations and cast him as an unfit moral leader. In addition, the prince’s eagerness to succeed his father led critics to characterize him as a selfish and impious son. By concentrating on the distinctions between the king and prince, pamphlets highlighted the prince’s moral failings and his rejection of virtuous models of kingship.

Finally, I will look at attitudes towards the prince’s daughter, Princess Charlotte. Observers criticized George for separating the princess from her mother and failing to provide her with a proper upbringing. This negligence led commentators to target the prince’s failings as both a biological and national father. Charlotte became a symbol of national struggles and the benevolence lacking in the prince. She emerged as the hope for succession and her domestic virtues were continually contrasted with George’s negligent rule. The media used the distinctions between father and daughter to criticize the prince for his filial and royal insensitivity.

Each of these issues of the prince’s private life highlighted a politically suspect character and reflected new demands on royalty. With the king's health failing, press coverage of the prince’s private life intensified. The press’s exposure of the private domain focused public grievances, shaped expectations, and expanded the political
nation. The media further contributed to anxieties about the succession by fixating on the prince’s ability to act as a moral exemplar and his capacity to lead the country in a time of international crisis. The progression of critiques demonstrates the public’s mounting demands for royal accountability and its waning tolerance for civic misconduct. Thus, the press’s exploitation of scandal shaped evaluations of monarchy and forced royalty to adopt popular standards of virtue in order to justify its exalted status.
Chapter One

The Secret Marriage

The prince’s “secret marriage” in 1785 drew national attention to the controversial union between the heir to the throne and a lowborn Catholic woman. George attempted to conceal his marriage to Maria Fitzherbert because it was illegal on multiple counts. First, the union violated the Royal Marriage Act of 1772, which required the King’s approval for all marriages involving members of the royal family. It also breached the Act of Settlement of 1701, which barred Catholics from the throne. The issue reemerged in 1788 when George III became ill and concerns about the heir’s marital status acquired greater relevance. The controversy that ensued generated criticisms of the prince that reflected the public’s desire for information. Though critics deflected blame away from the prince toward Maria and his political allies, the scandal focused on the heir’s moral and behavioral failings and revealed a breach of trust between the prince and the people.

In addition to questions of legality, the prince’s marriage also violated customary expectations for royal weddings. The public believed that only a princess was suitable for the heir; his bride needed to be a woman worthy of becoming Queen. Not only was Maria Fitzherbert of the wrong social class, but she was also a widow. Thus, public believed Maria could make a fine mistress, but was unsuited for a crown. Despite hopes that the prince’s marriage would stave off debilitating behavior, his secrecy indicated that
reform was not forthcoming.\textsuperscript{30} The illicit union violated hopes for a proper royal wedding and shed doubt on the possibility for behavioral improvement.\textsuperscript{31}

Though the prince hoped to conceal and publicly deny the union, the issue attracted national curiosity. With the pair regularly appearing together in public, rumors and newspaper accounts continued to swirl. When George III became mentally ill (beginning the “Regency Crisis”), arguments over the validity of the marriage emerged across political and class spectrums. Newspapers reported on parliamentary proceedings that were now dominated by discussions of a Regency Bill. In the process of determining which powers to grant the prince during his father’s incapacitation, debates on the clandestine marriage surfaced in the House of Commons. With succession appearing imminent, many observers and politicians suggested the crown itself was at stake. The secret marriage grew into a national mystery as confusion and distrust surrounded the royal family.

Philip Withers quickly emerged during the Regency Crisis as the scandal’s most prominent critic. Little record exists of Withers’ exploits prior to 1788, but as a former clergymen he initially took issue with Maria Fitzherbert for being Catholic.\textsuperscript{32} In his first tract on the issue, \textit{Alfred’s Apology}, Withers avoided direct criticism of the Prince of Wales but used the alias of “Alfred” to address the legal and moral ramifications of the marriage.\textsuperscript{33} In his next work, \textit{History of the Royal Malady}, Withers attempted to mask his intentions by casting the prince as a French monarch. Despite the disguise, the pamphlet was less about the prince’s vices than Maria’s, who was charged with having

\textsuperscript{30} Baker, \textit{George IV}, 37.
\textsuperscript{31} James Munson, \textit{Maria Fitzherbert: The Secret Wife of George IV} (London: Constable and Robinson, 2001), 143.
several illegitimate children and was the clear target for Withers’ claim, “the Queen of France is a Whore.” Maria responded by issuing libel charges against him. Like many trials of the time, however, the measures against Withers enhanced his reputation and brought greater notice to his works.

As a result of his popularity, Withers received patronage from Tory governing officials, who viewed him and the scandal as political resources. They hoped to weaken the Whigs traditional hold on parliament through attacks on their political attachment to the heir. The World, a notable Tory newspaper, published the “injustices” of the case against Withers and brought national attention to his works. After being sentenced to a year of prison for scandalous libel, Withers wrote his final two tracts while incarcerated. Emboldened by fame, support, and a relatively modest punishment, Withers escalated his attacks to arouse public sentiment.

Many critics, including Withers, used the secret marriage to justify investigations of the prince’s private life. By stressing the significance of the event, the prince’s detractors rationalized the necessity of reporting his personal affairs. Withers characterized the marriage as an urgent matter that demanded the public’s attention. In the beginning of his first pamphlet he states, “If parliament have any regard for the liberties of their countryman, any solicitude for the happiness of posterity, they will insist on knowing what relations Mrs. Fitzherbert bears to his Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales.” Withers thus exploits the marriage to stress the importance of investigating the

36 Withers, *Alfred’s Apology*, 12.
prince’s private life. He later extended these concerns to express how the prince’s
secrecy jeopardized the future of both crown and country:

Every inhabitant of the realm is more or less interested in this mysterious
business. Who can tell what dissension may arise, what treasures may be
expended, what blood may be shed, in future days, from disputable pretensions to
the throne? Now it is the time for legal investigation. It is a duty we owe
ourselves and posterity.37

Withers exaggerates the dangers of the secret marriage in an effort to frighten his
audience. His tone inevitably resonated with a nation that prided itself on the balance of
its constitution and the accountability of its rulers.38 Furthermore, he addressed how
George’s attempts to avoid public notice denied the people of the transparency they had
come to expect from political leaders.

Pamphleteers believed investigations of the secret marriage and the prince’s
private conduct provided a window into his true character. The prince’s desire to
withhold secrets from the public undermined confidence in his ability to act as a moral
exemplar. One pamphlet published mock letters between Maria and the prince to remind
the heir of the charge placed on royalty and the need for of virtuous conduct. The prince
is warned, “Scandal is a reigning vice, every distinguished character is liable to it – there
is no protection from its malignant eye and poisoned tongue, but in obscurity.”39 The
author reiterated demands for transparency and stressed the hopelessness of the prince’s
efforts to conceal his private life. Thus, the press continued to assert itself and subjected
all aspects of royal activity to public scrutiny and scandalous consequence.

Despite calls for the exposure of the prince’s private affairs, critics were careful to
deflect blame away from him and identify scapegoats. Addresses to the throne treated

37 Withers, History of the Royal Malady, 49.
38 Carretta, George III and the Satirists, 3.
the prince as a foolish youth in need of proper guidance. Withers used this strategy in each of his works:

The Heir Apparent must be in a state of CHILDHOOD. And as Ministers alone are responsible for the measures of the Cabinet – in pursuance of this idea – it is constitutional to transfer the moral infamy of a Prince of Wales to those who enjoy the tuition of his heart. Withers vilified the prince’s political allies for intentionally corrupting the heir. Another author addressed this theme in a letter to the prince by claiming, “My great object is, to rouse latent principles in a mind I think excellent, but which has been neglected, or misled with design.” These efforts to exonerate the prince characterized him as an unknowing accomplice to the crimes of power-hungry flatterers. While the secret marriage clearly agitated the public, most commentators appeared eager to forgive the prince and hoped their criticisms would inspire his reform.

Beliefs that the heir had been misled further limited denunciations of the prince and transformed the secret marriage into a tool for criticizing Whig politicians. Withers claimed the Whigs “have betrayed their sovereign, they have betrayed the people, and I have no ground of hope that the unsuspecting heart of the Prince of Wales will be proof against their enchantments.” Here, the Whigs are severely chastised and the prince is described as vulnerable to the debauched influence of his political associations. Caricatures were equally harsh on the Whigs and often focused on their leader, Charles James Fox. Figure 3 depicts a long-legged and “spineless” Fox encouraging the prince as he waits for Maria to jump over the broomstick, a symbol of matrimony. Fox appears to

39 *Letters Between an Illustrious Personage*, v.
40 Withers, *Alfred’s Apology*, 4.
41 David Williams, *Lessons to a Young Prince, on the Present Disposition in Europe to a General Revolution* (London: 1790), IV.
be orchestrating the scene while the cat at the bottom is literally “out of the bag.” Figure 4 adopts a similar approach as Fox appears in the midst of disorder, surrounded by women and alcohol. His position on the back of a crowned donkey is a symbol of the politician’s dangerous control over the heir. Finally, Figure 5 displays Fox and other notable Whigs participating in and encouraging the illicit marriage. These images do not excuse the prince, but deny him agency and shift blame onto the Whigs.

These literary and visual denunciations of the Whigs represented surprising attempts to vindicate the prince. For all the criticism they faced, George’s political allies had little to gain from a marriage that jeopardized his succession. Fox, in particular, addressed numerous letters to the prince to persuade him to maintain Maria as a mistress and forgo the marriage. In response to this disapproval, the prince hid the truth from Fox, leading to the politician’s subsequent campaign of denial. Despite evidence that the prince had lied, Fox incurred the greatest criticism for being dishonest with the public. The nation preferred to take issue with political parties than to openly recognize the heir’s moral inadequacy.

In addition to attacks on the prince’s political allies, many critics blamed Maria Fitzherbert for seducing the heir and forcing their clandestine marriage. She was frequently cast as a woman whose impurity and ambition violated feminine norms. Withers stressed her sexual misconduct by referring to her as a “whore” with several illegitimate children. He characterized her as a “woman who violates the laws of chastity…and is bound to suffer reasonable imputation, as a punishment for losing her innocence and honor.” Caricaturists, however, focused less on Maria’s sexual

43 Munson, Maria Fitzherbert, 142.
44 Withers, Alfred’s Apology, 83.
Figure 3: The Lovers Leap (1786)

Figure 4: Falstaff and the Merry Wives of Westminster Canvassing for their Favourite Member Ld T-d (1788)
promiscuity than on her influence over the prince. In Figure 6, titled, “To Be. Or Not to Be. A Queen,” a dominating Maria appears leading the prince to the altar. Similarly, Figure 7 displays Maria riding on the prince’s shoulders, directing him and his Whig supporters as she marches toward her coronation. These criticisms of Maria echo those targeted at the Whigs. Both were displayed as power hungry forces asserting excessive influence over the good hearted but easily impressionable heir. While many believed in the prince’s virtue, the criticisms of his company raised serious questions about his judgement and maturity.

Though the prince’s role in the affair remained ambiguous, observers expressed concern about his credulity. Some even proposed restricting the prince’s actions and
Figure 6: The Padlock. To Be, Or Not to Be. A Queen! Is the Question (1786)

Figure 7: The Introduction of F____ to St James’s (1786)
friendships as a means of protecting monarchical and national prestige. For example, Withers explained: “His Highness is very good and very gracious. But supposing this testimony admissible, it is no argument that severe restraints are not necessary for his political friendships, whom all the world believes to be neither good nor gracious.”

Thus, despite faith in the prince’s character, he could not be trusted to form his own associations. Withers later discussed the danger of well-meaning but unregulated royal behavior:

Do I insinuate, my Lord, that the Prince of Wales would ruin the Country! God Forbid. The idea has no existence in my breast. But I do most sincerely, publicly, confidently declare, that the Prince of Wales’ political Friendships would ruin the KING, the PRINCE, and the PEOPLE.

Thus, while the prince may not have deserved blame, his actions did harm the nation and therefore justified investigations and limitations of his private activity.

References to the prince’s father, King George III, differed from remarks on Maria and the Whigs, because blame was now directed towards the prince. The King’s popularity had risen during the Regency Crisis, with his illness providing an image of royal accessibility. The sense of the King as a “man of the people” contrasted with a prince whose insistence on privacy had instigated national scandal. Withers exploits the distinctions between the king and prince to demonstrate the prince’s failure to meet royal standards. He applauds the King as the “the most humane, benevolent, and generous Master that ever swayed the sceptre of these realms.” He continues this adulation by later stating, “His Majesty can incur no blame at any time. He is now beyond the reach of

---

46 Withers, *Alfred or a Narrative*, 16.
moral transgression.” 49 Thus, George III is not only a good King, but also one who has earned the right to escape public criticism. The fact that his son’s actions have not warranted a similar privilege is apparent when Withers tells the prince, “I still hope to see you adorned with the virtues of your Father.” 50 Here, Withers uses the scandal to address the prince’s inability to adopt his father’s model of kingship and inculcate a similar sense of trust in his subjects.

Despite the prince’s domesticity and detachment from his subjects, most commentators on the incident filled their works with expressions of loyalty. While in many cases, particularly that of Withers, this practice reflected an effort to avoid treason charges, authors also sought to capture the opinions of their audience. 51 Most of the public still trusted the monarchy, believed in the prince’s virtue, and hoped for his reform. 52 The public’s attitude led Withers towards superficial expressions of devotion to retain reader support. In many instances, however, Withers’ praise of the prince appears as a calculated attempt to mask his criticisms behind the disguise of a dutiful subject. At one point, Withers employed this strategy in the following commentary:

But did not the Prince of Wales consent to the instituted Ceremonies of Marriage, knowing that they were illegal, invalid, and contrary to the Act of Restriction? An imputation so ruinous to the credit of His Royal Highness, I dare not assume, even in argument. If the Prince of Wales be capable of seducing a woman of virtue to his arms by an expedient so base and disgraceful, he is a MONSTER and not a MAN. 53

Here, Withers relieves the prince of guilt but then fixates on the horror of his potential responsibility. Observers retained a sense of loyalty but also agreed with the statement’s

---

49 Withers, History of the Royal Malady, 9, 31.
50 Withers, Alfred’s Apology, 12.
52 Hunt, Defining John Bull, 63.
53 Withers, Alfred, or a Narrative, 29.
suggestion of moral inadequacy. Thus, commentators’ expressions of both loyalty and criticism reflected the public’s conflicting attitudes towards monarchy and its evolving expectations of virtue.

Popular sentiment appeared more coherent when critics began attacking the secret marriage for its violation of English law and religious tradition. Though it had been 250 years since Henry VIII’s split from the Catholic Church, religion remained a sensitive national issue. Catholics were routinely discriminated against and George IIII actively opposed measures for religious toleration.\textsuperscript{54} Despite the king’s objections, in 1778 parliament passed the Roman Catholic Relief Act, allowing Catholics to own property and join the military. In response, a Protestant uprising emerged and their violent efforts to repeal the law became known as the Gordon Riots.\textsuperscript{55} The movement encouraged fear of papism and stressed the link between Catholicism and French absolutism. Their efforts demonstrate that Catholicism not only violated the ideals of the Glorious Revolution, but also reinforced fears of a despotic government. Thus, the potential for a Catholic heir threatened parliamentary authority and the balance of the British constitution.

Withers exploited the nation’s fear of Catholicism and its legislative traditions by using the scandal to place the entire succession in doubt. In his first work addressing the secret marriage, Withers wrote, “If his Royal Highness be married to a Papist, he is cut off from the succession and every man in the realm is absolved from his allegiance.”\textsuperscript{56} Withers’ reference to the Settlement Act was an effort to undermine royal authority and

\textsuperscript{54} Smith, \textit{George IV}, 132.
\textsuperscript{56} Withers, \textit{Alfred’s Apology}, 31.
present the scandal as a threat to national ideals. Figure 8 echoes these concerns by focusing on the religious implications of the marriage. The couple appears caring for a baby while in the presence of another child wearing a papal hat. The christening scene in the background picture reminded viewers of the possibility of a Catholic heir. Thus, the image casts the prince as disconnected from his subjects, their anxieties, and the nation’s fundamental values. By marrying a Catholic, the prince appeared to act above the law, flout the constitution, and disregard his people’s religious anxiety.

By rooting his arguments in law, Withers and his peers combined attacks on monarchy with claims of devotion to Britain. He separates the concepts of royalty and loyalty to demonstrate how a monarch’s actions can violate national values. This concept underlies Withers claim that “professions to the King only prove a man to be a Royalist.”

Figure 8: The --- [Prince’s] Nursery, or Nine Months After --- [Marriage] (1786)
To vindicate your *Loyalty*, you must be obedient to laws.”57 His division of royalism and loyalism emphasizes that loyalty to laws takes precedence over loyalty to King. To reinforce legal supremacy, Withers stresses that even royalty is subject to its guidelines. He writes, “I will remind His Royal Highness of a salutary truth, *whatever difference the accidental circumstances of birth and fortune have caused between us – on a ground of Law we are EQUAL – the Prince is my PEER.*”58 Here, Withers evokes arguments similar to those used during the Civil War and Glorious Revolution to justify restrictions on royal authority. Thus, claims of royal transgression were not unprecedented and resonated with a public committed to upholding its constitution.59 By founding loyalty upon law, critics stressed that public allegiance was something to be earned and that all Britons, including royalty, must abide by legal statute.

Related to the questions surrounding monarchical loyalty were mounting criticisms of royal privilege. Under the influence of an emerging middle class, advantages gained by birth faced greater attack.60 Withers equated royalty with the common man by emphasizing its human qualities. He declares, “Why they are only flesh and blood. As long as Royalty eats and drinks like other people, so long will it be subject to the same habits of mind, and the same propensities of animal life.”61 In another tract, he stresses the inadequacy of birthright as a justification for authority by saying, “I am not awed into submission to the will of man, by the accidental appendages of birth and fortune.”62 Finally, Withers claims, “the people of the Happy Island are not the property of the Sovereign. He does not receive them by inheritance, as CATTLE are

57 Ibid., 54.
59 Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 42.
transferred to an Heir at Law.”

These quotations emphasize the limits of royal authority and the need for a monarch to secure the people’s trust on account of his virtues. They also assert the rise of an independent, free-minded citizenry, distinct from subjects who obeyed out of obligation. Loyalty was no longer a given, but instead depended upon the king’s performance; as citizens, the public had the right to criticize the crown’s exalted status and evaluate its moral worth.

Demands for royal accountability emerged regardless of one’s stance on the secret marriage. John Horne Tooke, who battled Withers over the merits of the marriage, claimed that “Against an unjust, an usurping, or undermining prince, every plausible pretense of the subject to cast him off would be justifiable.” The quotation demonstrates how commentators on both sides of the secret marriage debate emphasized that loyalty had to be earned, not expected. The public mandated that its leaders act as moral exemplars; failure to do so represented a breach of their trust and carried dangerous consequences.

The emphasis on royal accountability also fueled arguments for a free press. The secret marriage propelled attacks on censorship and calls for looser enforcement of seditious law. Withers expressed his dissatisfaction with literary restrictions by stating, “My tongue is my own. If I think proper, I will employ it in lewdness and blasphemy from morning to night – accountable to none, but God and the Laws.” Withers challenged the charges brought against him and defended his right to speak his mind.

61 Withers, History of the Royal Malady, 58.
62 Withers, Alfred or a Narrative, 22.
63 Withers, Alfred to the Bishop, 31.
64 Wilson, Sense of the People, 440.
65 John Horne Tooke, A Letter to a Friend, on the Marriage of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (London: 1787), 35.
66 Withers, Alfred to the Bishop, 42.
Also, by separating “God and the Laws” from the crown, Withers asserted his authority to issue evaluations of royal conduct. Furthermore, Withers stressed the danger of restricting public commentary. He later stated that “The moment the hand of power prevails over the freedom of the press, we are a ruined People.” Here, Withers presents the resistance to censorship as an issue of national significance. As a result, attempts to repress scandal appeared contrary to the people’s welfare and helped inspire more assertive expression of public opinion.

Withers denounced censorship by stressing his own innocence in comparison to the prince’s misdeeds. He asked why civic misconduct was tolerated, while its exposure was punished. To highlight this injustice, Withers separates his text from the actions they describe. He claims that because of the marriage, “The throne of the Sovereign was invaded, the dignity of Parliament insulted, and the sacred privileges of the People were on the verge of destruction before a syllable on the subject was published by Alfred.” He concludes his appeal by stressing the purity of his intentions relative to the prince’s transgressions. He tells the prince, “It certainly would not be decent in your Royal Highness to indict Alfred for breaking the King’s Peace since God knows, your Highness has broken the King’s Peace more than all the private subjects in the realm.” Here, Withers exonerates himself by holding the prince to the same moral standards expected of the masses.

If the monarchy must abide by the same behavioral codes as the common man, then a free press was not only permissible, but also necessary to ensure royal

---

67 Withers, Alfred or a Narrative, 4.
accountability. Proponents of a free press argued that a scandal’s exposure helped to relieve, rather than amplify national crises. Withers tells the prince, “Your lordship riots with impunity in forbidden joys and the man who dares to name your offence is exposed to ruin.”71 By revealing royal misdeeds to the public, the press provided a sense of consequence to prevent continued wrongdoing. Many believed that the embarrassment of media exposure might inspire a much-needed change in royal conduct.72

Despite the discontent raised by the secret marriage, the press gradually reduced its coverage of the scandal. The king’s recovery in 1789 deflected attention away from the prince and reduced concerns about his marital status. Though the prince’s relationship with Maria Fitzherbert continued until 1811, in 1790 he began appearing publicly with other women. With Maria seemingly replaced, she no longer appeared as a potential spouse and faded from the public mindset. Although the nation feared the influence of mistresses, they resumed hopes that an official marriage would encourage reform in the prince’s behavior.

While the debates surrounding the secret marriage resolved quickly, the issue inspired distrust of the prince and suspicions of his character. Although tracts on the issue often sought out scapegoats to shield the prince from blame, the incident generated contempt toward the monarchy. Even those who proclaimed the prince’s innocence demanded investigation and restriction of his private actions. Throughout the controversy many recognized that the prince could resolve the scandal simply if he were to reveal the truth of his marital status. Thus, whether perceived as a misled youth or a

69 Withers, Alfred’s Apology, 6.
70 Ibid., 85.
71 Ibid., 58.
72 Wilson, The Sense of the People, 42.
seductive criminal, the fact remained that the prince was withholding information from his subjects. His refusal to disclose his relationship with Maria Fitzherbert presented a breach of trust and created separation from a populace that valued royal accessibility. While early commentators remained willing to excuse the prince’s misdeeds on account of youth and outside influence, this early divide between the people and the heir would manifest itself in his later scandals.
Chapter Two

The Cost of Spending

Complaints concerning the prince’s excessive expenses first emerged in the 1780s and persisted throughout his life. The expense of the prince’s lavish residences along with the cost of gambling and other luxuries fell directly in the public eye. These pursuits inspired distrust of the heir and contempt for his selfish use of national funds. Additionally, the prince’s requests for debt relief seemed insensitive during a period of war and economic downturn. As a result, he received blame for high taxes, financial struggles, and the exploitation of the working class. Furthermore, observers found it increasingly difficult to preach patience and express confidence in his promises of reform. Among a people who valued diligence and fiscal restraint, critics cast the prince as an economic burden who appeared detached from the values of his subjects and neglectful of national welfare.

Continuous newspaper reports on the prince’s spending made it impossible for the public to ignore royal excess. Accounts of his massive expenses inevitably led readers to link the wasteful practices of royalty to their own financial struggles. The fact that the prince spent more than double his annual income during the 1780s became a well-known and frequently cited statistic.\(^73\) One pamphlet reported that the prince spent between four and five thousand pounds per day and as a result, his debts reached £160,000 by 1784.\(^74\) The press even covered smaller expenses, including the cost of George’s imported apparel and monetary gifts provided for his mistresses. As the prince’s checkbook

\(^{73}\) Clark, Scandal, 178.

became more accessible to public scrutiny, his expenses appeared unnecessary and potentially harmful to national prosperity.

While reports on the prince’s spending ran continuously, his debts received the greatest attention following his attempts for parliamentary relief. The prince’s budget was determined jointly by the king and parliament and he was expected to respect the confines of his annual salary. George, however, disregarded these limits and hoped parliament would resolve his credits. After his first request in 1787, parliament agreed to come to his aid and even raised his allowance. Though the decision was made reluctantly, the legislature decided on the importance of shielding the heir from financial embarrassment. Though he promised to reduce his spending, the prince’s consumption increased further and by 1793 his debts amounted to £370,000. Following George’s second application for relief, the king and parliament no longer felt obligated to protect him. They resented his irresponsibility and refused to pay off his debts unless he agreed to an official, royally approved marriage. The prince consented in 1795, with his debts estimated at £552,000. Despite public hopes that the influence of marriage and the threat of further shame would curtail the prince’s extravagance, his debts swelled again to £650,000 by 1803. The prince’s repeated expenses and broken promises disappointed the populace and its confidence in him declined.

Attacks on the prince’s expenses gained energy during recessions when critics and reformers denounced luxury as a national vice. Britain clashed with France throughout the 1790s and wartime taxes remained high until the ousting of Napoleon in 1815. Furthermore, a grain scarcity in 1795 imposed even harsher conditions upon the

---

75 Smith, *George IV*, 44.  
With the prince requesting a second relief of debts in the same year, charges of misconduct and detachment mounted. One pamphleteer captured the poor timing and insensitivity of his request in an address to parliament:

At a moment when the accumulation of taxes and the calamities of an unsuccessful war have raised the necessaries of life to so high a price as to occasion universal discontent, and even to excite, in some places, dangerous tumults, a bill has passed the Commons for burdening the people with near a million of debt contracted by the Prince of Wales.

The quotation reflects perceptions of the prince as a “burden” to an already suffering nation. The author also demonstrates how the prince’s expenses translated into higher taxes for the people. After the war, conditions initially worsened when many jobless soldiers returned home. In this context of growing hostility toward the government, reports of royal expense proved especially alarming to a concerned public. The simultaneous effects of royal excess and national strain caused critics to cast the heir as an indifferent ruler, unaware of national duress and unsympathetic to the needs of his subjects.

Similar to accounts of the secret marriage, critics of the prince’s expenses felt the need to justify inquiries into his private conduct and explain its national significance. One pamphlet began a discussion of the prince’s expenses by stressing the association between royal and national virtue. The author exclaimed, “We cannot, then for a moment, consider the character of the Heir Apparent to the Throne of the United Kingdom as a matter of small importance to the welfare and happiness of the people of

---

77 Baker, George IV, 34-36.
78 Barrell, The Spirit of Despotism, 137.
his country.”

Amidst these reports and an increasingly informed public, the prince’s spending emerged as an issue of critical importance. In this way, studies of the prince’s consumption provided a window into his true character and offered evaluations of national wellbeing.

Commentators also legitimized inquiries into the prince’s finances by stressing royalty’s duty to serve as a moral exemplar. Charles Pigott, a prominent social critic, emphasized the ability of the prince’s actions to influence his subjects. He posited, “Had a private individual acted in like manner, he would have become the outcast of his family, and the whole world had abandoned him: but in the case before us, the example is ten thousand times more contagious.”

Pigott’s fear about the pernicious effect of royal expense reinforced the idea that the prince’s actions have national implications. Figure 9 also addresses the disgrace associated with poor leadership by depicting an ashamed prince being harassed by female creditors. His debts have an emasculating effect, causing the prince to appear weak and servile in the company of women. The women were symbolic of the payments George made to his mistresses, but also reminded viewers to moderate their expenses and avoid the prince’s example.

George’s expenses acquired greater relevance against the backdrop of changing patterns of consumption. Though the quantity of consumption rose rapidly in the late eighteenth century, the percentage of income spent remained constant. The steady expense rate was largely the result of lower prices and the availability of cheaper

---

81 *A Complete Vindication of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, Relative to his Creditors; but not Quite so Complete a Vindication of the Right Hon. W. Pitt, Relative to His Royal Highness* (London: 1806), 3.
82 Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club, or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age* (London: 1792), 5.
substitute goods within Britain’s expanding empire.\textsuperscript{83} While criticisms of consumption remained mild, most believed expenditure should be marked by sensibility and restrained passion.\textsuperscript{84} With the greater affordability of a variety of goods and a growing distaste for ostentation, the prince’s expenses appeared to embody an outmoded and suspect ideology of autocratic consumption.

These new ideals became most prominent among the emerging middle classes. Shopkeepers and artisans characterized themselves as virtuous, religious, and hardworking. The prince’s notoriety for gambling and luxury, however, violated ideals of moderation and frugality.\textsuperscript{85} As this group gained political consciousness, they noticed the disparity between the prince’s conduct and their own moral and economic

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure9.png}
\caption{	extit{A Meeting of Creditors (1795)}
Kenneth Baker, \textit{George IV: A Life in Caricature} (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 37}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{85} Clark, \textit{Scandal}, 10.
perspectives. One pamphlet articulated this contrast by stating, “For a liberal and honorable mind, what situation can equal the misery of being in debt.”\textsuperscript{86} Thus, a large public saw the prince’s wasteful practices as shocking, immoral, and damaging to their own wellbeing. They also felt excessive royal taxes limited their ability to meet basic responsibilities like providing financial support for their families.\textsuperscript{87} Thus, the prince’s spending challenged national values and distanced him from an increasingly vocal public.

In response to his disregard for national moral sentiment, critics attacked the prince as a reckless libertine. Instead of embodying middle class virtues like sound judgment and contemplation, the prince was condemned for being a man of passion.\textsuperscript{88} His expenses reflected rashness and a debauched sense of morality. One author declared, “How dexterously, with what a simple operation have you out-leapt all barriers of moral obligation; - with what princely composure do you change your mistresses; with the same ease as your subjects would change their clothes.”\textsuperscript{89} This quotation asserts the corrupting influence of royal wealth and emphasized the disparity between the financial perspectives of the monarchy and the public. Another pamphlet denounced the prince as a “man of pleasure” who was “known to have indulged himself to excess in every luxury.”\textsuperscript{90} These criticisms reinforced the idea that the prince’s allowance was responsible for his immoral behavior. His penchant for “excess” conflicted with notions of budgeting and expectations of prudent leadership.

\textsuperscript{86} Thoughts on the Prince’s Debts (London: 1795), 21.
\textsuperscript{87} Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 334
\textsuperscript{88} Williams, Lessons to a Young Prince, 3.
\textsuperscript{89} Hampden, A Mirror for Princes, in a letter to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (London: 1797), 42.
The prince’s indifference towards middle class moral attitudes encouraged comparisons to absolutist regimes. His inability to embody common virtues combined with limited voting rights to fuel the middle class’s sense of exclusion from the political realm.91 To emphasize this point, caricaturists portrayed the prince as an Eastern autocrat. The implications of despotism carried particular weight for a nation that prided itself on parliamentary government. Figure 10 is a later print but offers an excellent example of how the prince’s expenses were characterized as contradictory to British ideals. Most observers recognized the central character as the prince in the form of an Asian emperor, towering over dutiful servants and useless possessions. The image also references the prince’s costly residences, with Brighton Pavilion appearing in the top left and Buckingham Palace shown in the bottom right. Brighton appears again in Figure 11 within the body of a dominant, but unsympathetic despot. His swollen figure depicts how his demands and impulses have grown at his subjects’ expense. In this manner, critics characterized the prince’s disregard for national economic values as literally “foreign” to the expectations of his people.

In addition to the growing divide between monarchy and the middle class, investigations of the prince’s luxurious lifestyle also highlighted the disparity between royal extravagance and the struggles of the poor. While the rise of industry helped maximize productivity, it also contributed to the exploitation of the working class.92 Even following the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, industry slowed and economic conditions

---

92 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 195.
Figure 10: The Great Joss and his Playthings (1829)

Figure 11: The Joss and his Folly (1820)
William Hone, The Queen’s Matrimonial Ladder, A National Toy (London: 1820), 18
worsened in the new industrial towns. During a period of increasing hours and stagnant wages, critics blamed the prince for high taxes and political corruption. Figure 12 captured these attacks by displaying John Bull (a symbol of the common Briton) and Louis XVIII celebrating Napoleon’s defeat. The prince appears in the top right corner promising reductions in food and tax costs. The toiling farmers in the background demonstrate the artist’s skepticism, as George’s unrealized promises became a frequent theme of political satire. This image reinforced perceptions of the prince as responsible for lower class struggles and unworthy of public confidence.

Given the perceived impact of the prince’s expenses, critics characterized him as a national burden. This image became particularly popular in caricatures that depicted the prince stealing from the public. Figure 13 echoes these themes by displaying John Bull struggling to stand as he is forced to support the growing weight of the prince’s expenses. Similarly, many pamphlets expressed the notion that the people suffered because of the prince’s luxuries. One author wrote, “No man can be happy while half the fruits of his industry are forced from him to sooth the pride and foster the profligacy of numerous useless and oppressive orders.” These criticisms of the prince emphasized not only his individual moral failings, but also his mistreatment of the entire nation. Cast as a national parasite, rather than a national exemplar, images linked the crown to poverty and suffering.

---

95 Williams, *Lessons to a Prince*, 74.
Figure 12: *Peace & Plenty or Good News for John Bull!!!* (1814)

Figure 13: *No Grumbling* (1795)
Some critics heightened the debate by characterizing the prince’s debts as evidence of his inadequacy as a leader. One hostile observer condemned the prince’s timing, for seeking debt relief during a period of economic hardship:

Whilst we are trembling on the verge of a national bankruptcy, whilst we are deluged with taxes, little short of total confiscation; whilst the hard-earned wages of the poor and industrious peasantry are barely sufficient to supply the common necessaries of life, there should live a man who throws the munificent bounty of the nation into the vortex of folly and dissipation, is a reflection that calls a tear from the eye of Humanity and bids the cheek of Justice kindle with resentment.96

The author stressed the prince’s accountability to all his subjects, regardless of their economic status. He also depicts the prince’s carelessness with national funds and emphasized his disregard for popular struggles. The same author continued by saying, “The money you squander is the money of the people – it is the fruit of their labor and bounty: -- it is from them you receive it, and it is to them you must render account.”97

The quotation argues that the prince’s wealth stemmed from the people’s labor and characterized George’s excesses as a breach of their trust. Finally, the pamphlet extended the idea of the prince’s responsibility to the people by declaring, “There is not a poor mechanic who drags out his comfortless existence in his miserable garret, or a menial porter tottering under his burden in the streets of the metropolis, to who you are not indebted for some share of your splendid luxuries.”98 Since royalty derived its wealth from its subjects and contributed to their impoverishment, the prince owed them a moral debt. Unfortunately, he lacked the necessary virtues and his expenses revealed a disregard for the poor and the struggles he inflicted upon them.

---

96 Hampden, A Mirror for Princes, 44.
97 Ibid., 44.
98 Ibid., 45.
Although the prince’s squandering of public funds alarmed the nation, it was the nature of his expenses that caused the most distress. Critics denounced the practice of focusing public funds away from the people in order to sponsor royal profligacy. Figure 14 addresses this point visually, as George demands a higher salary while his minister asks him to “consider the poor starving manufacturers.” The background stressed the prince’s hypocrisy as he is surrounded by symbols of Asian despotism and a picture of Brighton appears on the wall. The public considered the palace to be an extravagant waste and it became a symbol of royalty’s detachment from public welfare. Literary critiques, however, tended to delve even further as one pamphlet concluded a list of the prince’s vices by emphasizing his exploitation of the people:

> Where the reputed domestic virtues of the sovereign are the sole compensation for all the above evils, - for the fruits of an inordinate selfish avarice extracted from the very entrails of the people; and for a load of taxes, that must eventually either rouse or destroy them.  

The author, Charles Pigott, laments how the pains and struggles of the populace are wasted on royal excess and immorality. A later pamphlet echoed this sentiment by claiming, “There is not a man (except a maniac) whose mind is so constructed as to think it just, that the wretched pittance of the industrious poor should be wrung out of their pockets, to pay for the follies and profligate expenses of any one.” The quotation employs strong language to describe the injustice of the prince’s allowance and to denounce the use of hard-earned money to feed his vices.

Disgusted with his hedonistic pursuits, the people expected the prince to use his allowance for public benefit. Pamphleteers called on the heir, as a national and moral leader, to sympathize with the sufferings of his people and use his wealth for charity and

---

virtue. 101 John Horne Tooke, a supporter of the prince, expressed the crown’s responsibility by declaring, “The revenue of the Prince of Wales is granted to the Heir Apparent; and in trust that he will maintain a correspondent state: for his dignity is the dignity of the nation, and the revenue is not his to apply to any other purpose.” 102 Tooke emphasized the prince’s responsibility to the people and stressed that his allowance was a symbol of their confidence. They expected him to use the money towards national, rather than private interests. Another pamphleteer asserted the public’s expectation of reward for funding the prince by stating, “The common principles of moral justice teach us that it is but reasonable to expect some return from those to whom nothing has been denied.” 103

The author evokes an ideal of justice to express public disappointment with the prince’s

100 John Bull Starving, 6.
101 James Paull, A plain letter to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, upon his plain duties to himself, his wife, his child, and to the Country (London: 1806), 22.
102 Horne Tooke, A letter to a friend, 42.
moral and financial negligence. Thus, the prince’s expenses were not only burdensome, but also contradicted the responsibilities of leadership.

This dissatisfaction with royal expenditure led the public to evaluate the prince’s purchases on the basis of public utility. These criticisms targeted the royal palaces, which had become highly visible symbols of royal extravagance. The press devoted exhaustive coverage to their construction and informed the public of the plans and building costs. Though Britain supported a tradition of public works, the prince’s residences were seen as exclusive “pleasure palaces” and represented the precedence of royal demands over national welfare. One author wrote, “The pomp of the drawing-room could not have effaced from our painful recollection the comfortless habitation of the honest artifice and oppressed peasant.”

Rather than glorifying the nation, the prince’s palaces represented royalty’s detachment and neglect of national hardship. Another author affirmed these sentiments by speaking for the populace: “We, seeing the folly or vice gorged with wealth, or bloated by the pride of power, are not struck with the splendor surrounding them, but attend only to the mischief of their operations.”

Here, the author expressed how the aesthetic splendor of these projects was lost on a public forced to suffer the fiscal consequences.

Despite the prince’s inability to use his wealth for public gain, his promises of reform inspired hope for improved behavior. Similar to the secret marriage, commentators initially sought to forgive the prince, but grew more critical as his debts accumulated. After honoring the prince’s first request for debt relief in 1787, both parliament and the populace expected the prince to adhere to promises of reform. When

103 Hampden, *A Mirror for Princes*, 3.
104 Ibid., 16.
his debts rose again in the early 1790s, observers emphasized the necessity of denying funds to force frugality and restraint. Still, these critics distinguished their attacks on royal spending from attacks on royalty itself. One pamphlet stated “I declaim not, Sir, against the decent magnificence of Royalty – I am alarmed only by its excesses.” The quotation demonstrates that though dissatisfied with the prince’s debts, most early pamphlets maintained expressions of loyalty to the crown.

As the prince’s extravagance continued, pamphleteers emphasized that monarchical loyalty was conditional upon moral leadership. In return for national support, the public expected the prince to display a level of dignity consistent with his status. One pamphlet responded to the prince’s second application for debt relief by claiming, “The question is, whether the Prince deserve to have such distress removed from him.” Thus, the prince was held accountable for his actions and his rank could no longer excuse his expenditures. Charles Pigott reiterated these concerns by claiming, “The nation is called on to liquidate the immense debts, without one single instance of the kind on record, to justify such a perversion of their money.” A third pamphlet emphasized the idea that the prince, like his subjects, must earn his salary:

The nation has freed you from embarrassments, which have not only been mortifying to you as Prince of Wales, but painful to you as a man; and I will tell you, Sir, what it expects in return: - It expects a conduct, in which the dignity of the Prince and the worth of the man may be united, and form together a bright and glorious object, for the future gaze of an admiring and enraptured people.

This quotation emphasized how George’s office as prince was inherently connected to his worth as a man. The author also established a link between the prince’s financial debt to

105 The Royal Tour to Weymouth and Places Adjacent, in the Year 1789 (London: 1789), 36.
106 Hampden, A Mirror for Princes, 16.
107 Thoughts on the Prince’s Debts, 5.
his creditors and his moral debt to his subjects. Therefore, continued public support depended on the prince’s reform, adoption of national virtues, and sensitivity to his subjects’ welfare.

Furthermore, the prince’s second application for parliamentary relief in 1795, directed greater attention to his abuse of public trust. The nation expected the prince to uphold his promises of reform and curtail unnecessary spending. The public’s disappointment with George’s failure to comply is captured by one pamphleteer who claimed, “We should be loath to suspect that you have abused the confidence we have reposed in you and that you have returned our kindness with ingratitude; that you have been negligent and inattentive to our welfare.”110 The pamphlet connected the prince’s expenses with national prosperity and exposed his debts as a symbol of royal neglect. The same author acknowledged the prince’s breach of trust by declaring, “We have heard your vows of repentance, and your promises of reform: and we have lived to see those vows and those promises violated and forgotten.”111 Rather than instructing his subjects in self-discipline, the prince had violated the people’s confidence and aroused concerns about his forthcoming accession.

While many pamphlets attacked the prince as untrustworthy, some went so far as to stress the limits of public loyalty. In light of growing economic hardship and renewed displays of insensitivity, critics questioned the justification for royalty’s exalted status. One pamphleteer articulated this sentiment by asserting that, “The time will come, when the pardonable period of life for these things will be passed; when it is impossible for folly to possess a grace, and when errors will be criminal in proportion to the elevated

109 Two Words of Counsel, 48
110 Hampden, A Mirror for Princes, 6.
rank of the person who is guilty of them.”  Here, the author warned the prince that the nation had reached its threshold for tolerating royal misconduct. Finding it more difficult to excuse the prince’s misdeeds on account of youth or corrupt influence, the nation grew increasingly vocal about its impatience and dissatisfaction with royal neglect.

Similar to the case of the secret marriage, distrust of the prince led to criticisms of royal privilege. These attacks addressed the unfair allowances the prince received in both his moral and financial actions. One pamphlet emphasized the prince’s responsibility to popular standards by stating, “I know of no Royal exemption from the common feelings of human nature, nor do I know of any princely prerogative in the estimating of moral duties.”  This quotation represents another effort to evaluate the prince according to the moral guidelines of the people. The same text augments its claims by equating the prince with his lowest subjects:

Let the grooms of Newmarket, the scene-shifters of the Theaters, the menials of those in whose polluted embraces you have wantoned, glory in having witnessed the pastime of degraded Royalty: -- Let them enjoy the coarse sneer; -- let them brood over the wretched consolation of beholding the Prince reduced to a level with themselves: -- their minds, un-educated as they are, may yet comprehend, from the view of your humiliating state, that nothing is really respectable but Virtue.

Here, the prince received no exoneration from public criticism as he is compared to and criticized by subjects of all social classes. By speaking of “degraded Royalty” and noting “the Prince reduced to a level” of commoners, the author characterized the heir as ordinary and stripped him of his sacred status. When he states that “nothing is really

111 Ibid., 36.
112 Two Words of Counsel, 16.
113 Hampden, A Mirror for Princes, 52.
114 Ibid., 30.
respective but virtue,” he suggests that without meritorious action, the prince appeared no more deserving of his status than the common citizen.

In addition to claims against unworthy titles, critics characterized privilege as detrimental to national interests. Some pamphleteers even held privilege responsible for the prince’s excesses. Charles Pigott extended this point by insisting that the wealthy failed to contribute to national welfare. He attacked the governing structure that sponsored these groups by stating, “Such is their blessed system, which grants all to those who do nothing, while it withholds all from those who do every thing.” Pigott denounced royalty’s status for abusing the common Briton, rewarding the idle, and jeopardizing national prosperity. His criticisms demonstrate how privilege, as the basis of monarchy and autocratic rule, violated the criterion of public utility.

Despite the flood of criticism directed at the prince’s luxuries, some royalists attempted to exonerate him. Like the case of the secret marriage, these commentators sought scapegoats to explain the prince’s misdeeds. One pamphlet addressing George’s second application for relief referred to the Whigs as “sycophants of a lower order” and chastised the influence of flatterers. It posed the question, “While a Prince has his ears stopped with such fulsome and clogging sweets, is it possible that he should be able to listen to the sound of virtue?” Other authors stressed the prince’s difficult situation by blaming parliament for an unrealistic allowance and contractors for inaccurate building estimates. Some even targeted Prime Minister William Pitt, characterizing him as a corrupt politician planning the prince’s ruin. Regardless of these examples, efforts to excuse the prince were not widespread and reduced further following George’s second

application for parliamentary relief in 1795. Thus, though defenses of the prince’s expenses existed, these accounts continued to lose ground to the mounting criticism.

Much like the secret marriage, complaints against the prince’s excesses encouraged pamphleteers to demand a free press. Since the prince squandered public funds, the nation desired information about his expenses and activities. Charles Pigott, whose publishers were tried as a result of his works, expressed the importance of exposing misconduct:

Surely, when persons of the most exalted rank, preeminently distinguished by genius and talents, in full enjoyment of all the blessings of fortune, abuse these advantages, it cannot be criminal to bring them forward on the public stage, and we have felt no reluctance in developing the vile conduct of men, who derive all their consequence from rank or fortune, none from merit.

Here, Pigott takes issue with royal privilege and libel laws attempting to silence his criticisms of the prince’s misdeeds. His assertion that “merit” should override “rank” suggests that social distinction did not excuse the prince from the scrutiny of public opinion. Another pamphleteer extended the argument by reminding readers of the prince’s guilt:

The man in high station, who, careless of the fatal consequences of bad example, continues invariably to present it for imitation, may be considered as a moral traitor, who deserves a far severer punishment than the greater part of those who suffer for the commission of political treason.

The author’s strong language emphasized that fault lies with the party who commits, rather than the party that exposes a crime. By calling the prince a “moral traitor,” it is he, and not the press who appears guilty of treason. Therefore, the prince’s profligacy posed

117 A Complete Vindication of His Royal Highness, 5.
120 Two Words of Counsel, 52.
a threat to prosperity and reinforced the belief that the press had a duty to uphold accountability and protect the populace.

The press’s most alarming tactic, however, was its ability to expose potential dangers surrounding the throne and the nation. These threats rested on the notion that the prince’s conduct was critical to Britain’s future. One author expressed the threat of the prince’s actions on both individual and national levels. He claimed that the prince was “whirling in that vortex of sensuality, erroneously named pleasure, which may at length sink him into a gulph of misery and repentance.” Regardless of the nature of this “misery,” the consequences for the prince remained clear. The pamphlet then connected the prince’s actions to the status of Britain by claiming that money has “ruined his constitution, and perhaps will ruin the constitution of his country.”121 In this way, the prince’s excesses became linked to fears of royal, constitutional, and national decline.

Other pamphleteers went further in expressing their concerns by referring to the activities in France and positing revolutionary ideals. Enlightenment and revolutionary ideology had garnered great interest in Britain, but also aroused great concern. While most commentators denounced the French Revolution, there was also a fear of its potential arrival in Britain. These observers expressed concern that the prince’s actions could alienate the people and encourage them towards drastic action. One author described the prince’s precarious position in the following terms:

If you, who can command all rational pleasure, and can summon every thing around you to dignify amusement, should condescend to engage in vulgar relaxations and dissipating pastime, the nation, disappointed in the gratification of its most ardent wishes, will, I fear, attribute such a conduct to that depraved taste and degraded intellect, whose miserable propensity it is to prefer evil to good.122

121 John Bull Starving, 15, 17.
122 Two Words of Counsel, 51.
The author threatened the prince with the power of public opinion and characterized him as a detriment to national welfare. Similarly, another author recalled those fears by asserting the power of the people and reminding the prince of revolutionary dangers. In an address to George, he wrote, “These are not times, Sir, to trifle with the affection of the people and to dissipate those rays of sacred opinion.”123 A third pamphlet echoed these sentiments by claiming that the prince’s wasteful conduct “redoubles the odium in which the Prince is held, excites in the nation disgust at monarchy and may shake the throne.”124 The quotations demonstrate how the prince’s expenses and personal misconduct threatened the future of both the monarchy and the nation. Thus, for some critics the prince’s detachment from his subjects became indicative of a potential change in the entire structure of government.

The prince’s accumulation of debts offered another opportunity to investigate his private conduct and report his moral failings. His rampant expenses and the criticisms they aroused remained throughout his life. One author summarized national sentiment surrounding the prince’s expenses by stating, “Sir, you neither inspirit us by your virtues, soothe us by your affection, nor arm us by your wisdom – we have put you in the scale and you are found wanting.”125 Thus, his expenses appeared insensitive during periods of economic struggle and out of touch with new ideals of consumption and moderation. In addition, critics blamed the prince for squandering the people’s labor and using it toward selfish ends. Furthermore, the prince’s failed promises for reform appeared as an abuse of public confidence. These feelings of insensitivity, unfit moral leadership, and popular distrust echoed the criticisms surrounding the secret marriage. Accounts of the prince’s

123 Hampden, A Mirror for Princes, 52.
debts, however, were less likely to identify scapegoats for George’s misdeeds, and were also more scathing and far less forgiving. These works also connected royal expenditure to fears of the French Revolution and ongoing threats to the British constitution.

Chapter Three

The Royal Family

The prince’s relationship with his family attracted some of the most pronounced criticisms of his private life. At a time when the public expected the sovereign to display concern as both a biological and national father, the prince appeared to disregard social values. With emphasis shifting to marriages based on compatibility and the nurturing of children, many criticized George’s distance from the royal family. Opposition first emerged during the Regency Crisis of 1788. Rather than acting as a devoted son during his father’s illness, the prince appeared excessively eager to attain the throne. In addition to his insensitivity towards his father, George was later chastised for neglecting the upbringing of his daughter and heir, Princess Charlotte. National frustration triggered an explosion of caricatures featuring the royal family. These prints as well as numerous pamphlets insisted that family values were critical to monarchy’s role as a moral exemplar. With Enlightenment sentiment stressing filial love, the prince’s relationships with his father and daughter produced criticisms that characterized a leader who was out of touch with his subjects and unfit as both a gentleman and a ruler.

George’s disregard for the royal family became problematic as the nation began to venerate the household. Fathers were expected to cherish their domestic responsibilities and conceptions of masculinity required men to provide their families with both money and affection. Additionally, marriage was considered an institution founded on love and it was recognized as both an economic and social building block. As a result of the household’s emerging significance, adultery was condemned as a “domestic

126 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 199.
tragedy. Furthermore, many authors emphasized the necessity of showing affection towards one's children and devoting oneself to their upbringing. These sentimental and romantic ideals of family imposed new standards of behavior and caused men of all classes to embrace filial commitment as a sacred responsibility.

The Prodigal Son

George III’s popularity reflected his ability to meet Enlightenment expectations of domestic and paternalistic virtue. Despite controversial political actions, the king’s piety and filial devotion endeared him to the public. He was continually praised for his ability to combine the duties of monarchy with moral propriety and proper etiquette. In addition, his frequent appearances with his wife and children provided an accessible and human image that enhanced his regal authority. Through these displays of his private character, the king revealed a connection with the ideals of his subjects. Figure 15 displays the King and Queen as a completely ordinary couple, devoid of displays of regality or lavishness. Their common dress and the image of their mutual devotion resonated with popular attitudes towards consumption and family. The king’s embodiment of filial values resulted in characterizations of him as a benevolent patriarch. Though he lacked a majestic appearance, the king’s dedication to his family allowed him to appear more in tune with the needs and sentiments of his subjects.

George III attained even greater popularity following his illness in 1788. His vulnerability made him appear even more accessible and distinguished him from his

128 Ibid., 49, 392.
130 Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, 105
131 Clark, *Scandal*, 218.
successor, the Prince of Wales. The episode reinforced the idea that George III’s popularity hinged on an ability to humanize the monarchy, while preserving regal spectacle. His debility and domesticity led to caricature depictions of “Farmer George,” which credited the king’s common virtues for his aptitude as a leader. Figure 16 combined the private and political by portraying the king countering Napoleon, while maintaining the image of a wholesome farmer. This print illustrates how the monarch’s domestic virtue validated his status and strengthened the nation. Similarly, pamphlet literature reiterated the importance of the king’s morality for national prosperity. One author wrote, “If our present Monarch had been a bad man, and consequently a bad king, this country, if it had not changed its form of government, would have been convulsed to

---

133 Carretta, *George III and the Satirists*, 265.
the centre.”¹³⁵ In this example, the author characterizes the king’s benevolence as a pillar of national stability, protecting Britain in an age of international turmoil.

Whereas George III was adored for sobriety and domesticity, the prince was accused of libertinism and insensitivity towards his people. These attacks increased following the separation of the prince from his wife, Princess Caroline. The prince only agreed to marry because of parliament’s refusal to relieve his debts while he remained single. George was not allowed to choose his spouse and took an instant dislike to his bride. Despite hopes that the marriage would improve the prince’s behavior, the tension between the couple grew and the two rarely appeared together after their wedding in 1795. Many newspapers published accounts of the couple’s marital discontent as well as details of their official separation in 1797. The relationship between the two deteriorated to the point that the prince refused to see Caroline and ordered an investigation for
adultery in 1806. George’s neglect and attack on his own wife inspired horror among the public. One author reflected on the situation by reminding the prince that “A husband is the most natural protector of his wife, he is bound by those laws you are hereafter to administer.” Rather than fulfilling his natural duties as the “protector of his wife,” the prince emerged as her primary oppressor.

In addition to the prince’s disregard for Caroline, his numerous liaisons and mistresses violated new expectations of conduct. Critics looked down upon the prince’s pursuit of pleasure and its inconsistency with ideals of fatherhood. Furthermore, George III’s model of domestic virtue created higher expectations for royalty and lowered tolerance for the prince’s filial neglect. One author subtly attacked the prince by praising the king for his faithfulness and gentlemanly conduct:

Our gracious King, a being in whom the nation most implicitly relies; in him we behold an affectionate and attached husband, diligently and tenderly performing all the duties of that character. The friend, the protector of his wife, and the defender of her honor; upright in his conduct, and moral in his actions; temperate in his living, and just and honest in his dealings; exact in his payments, a fond and indulgent father, pious without hypocrisy, and attentive to the forms of religion without parade or ostentation.

While lauding the king, the author alluded to the prince’s mistreatment of Princess Caroline, his denial of filial responsibilities, and his excessive expenditures. The quotation also demonstrates how the prince’s misdeeds contrasted with his father’s noble character and aroused greater appreciation for virtuous leadership. Figure 17 also captures the disparity between father and son, as Princess Caroline appeals to George III

135 Two Words of Counsel, 13.
137 Trumbach, Sex and the Gender Revolution, 78.
139 Plain Letter to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales upon his Plain Duties to Himself, his Wife, his Child and to the Nation, as such Duties Arise Out of the Late Investigation of the Conduct of the Princess of Wales (London: 1806), 13.
for support. Meanwhile, the prince attempts to hide from his domestic responsibilities and escape his father’s disapproving gaze. In this manner, the prince’s neglect of his filial duty coupled with his father’s model of domesticity to fuel criticism of the heir’s moral failings.

The contrast between the king and prince also inspired hope that the prince might reform and accept his father’s example. One pamphlet expressed a son’s obligations by telling the prince, “You would consult your honor, your comfort, and the happiness of the people, if you were to conduct yourself according to the principles of your royal father’s perfect mind, to act as the representative of his reason, and the finisher of his work.”

The author, William Combe, emphasized that national prosperity and popular support depended upon the prince following his predecessor’s example. Figure 18 echoes demands for improvement as the king stands in the center distributing funds, while his corrupt son appears on the right accepting a bribe. Figures 19 and 20 extend the point by depicting the king issuing advice to his debauched successor. In Figure 19 George III appears in the bottom left and tells his son that instead of attempting to remove his critics by force, he can eliminate them naturally if he conducts himself “like a man and a gentleman.” In Figure 20 an angel, sent by the deceased George III, envisions a hanging in order to warn the prince of the potential consequences of his “evil life.” These images insist that if the prince failed to heed his father’s model, dissent and turmoil would overrun the nation.

Figure 17: Exculpation (1820)

Figure 18: A New Way to Pay the National Debt (1786)
Figure 19: His Most Gracious Majesty Hum IVth and his Ministers Going to Play the Devil with the Satirists (1820)

Figure 20: Advice from the Other World – or A Peep in the Magic-Lanthorn (1820)
Vincent Carretta, George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 348.
The prince’s failings as a son and rejection of his father’s example manifested itself during the Regency Crisis. The king’s illness focused national attention on the moral qualities of his successor. As parliament debated which powers to grant the prince during his George III’s incapacitation, newspapers reported on the prince’s partying and reckless behavior. These actions made him appear unsympathetic to his father’s suffering and forced the public to question the prospects of his future reign. In Figure 21, titled, “Filial Piety,” the prince appears drunk while his father lies in agony. This print depicts the prince’s eagerness to assume the throne and sought to recall him to his filial duties. Figure 22 emphasized the prince’s disrespect through a reference to the secret marriage. Here, the prince feigns remorse for his father while Maria Fitzherbert seizes the throne. Characterizations of the heir’s excitement for his father’s demise reinforced views of the prince as a selfish and unworthy successor.

Figure 21: Filial Piety (1788)
Many of the critics targeting the prince during the Regency Crisis believed he was attempting to erase his father’s memory. It was considered a son’s duty to continue the work of his father and the prince’s failure to do so inspired nationwide contempt. Figure 23 reinforced these ideas as the prince and his political allies struggle to blow out the flame of George III. The image of a son seeking to erase his father’s legacy was repugnant to a family oriented public. Therefore, the prince’s hasty efforts to replace his father’s cabinet with Whigs emerged as an issue of great concern. While the prince viewed the Whigs as his political allies, his appointment plans violated his father’s continuous attempts to exclude them from power. By adjusting his father’s ministry, the prince attempted to seize control of the monarchy’s greatest remaining power. One

---

pamphlet expressed the nation’s disappointment with the prince’s political and filial affront:

That the Ministers whom the King approved, while he possessed a capacity to approve, should, the moment that capacity was suspended, be discharged from their stations, without having committed any act, been guilty of any neglect, or discovered any incapability which could justify their dismission, would be a measure too full of indecency to the King, or injustice to his servants, and insult to the nation, for any one to advise.142

In addition to the injustice of altering the cabinet, the author presents the switch as disrespectful to the memory of George III and harmful to the nation. Philip Withers also commented on the dishonor to the king’s reputation by claiming, “Those principles of dignity and decorum, from the practice of which he has been deemed a paragon of virtue and domestic excellence, are now buried under the rubbish of juvenile pursuits.”143

Withers used the term “juvenile pursuits” to reference the prince and his disregard for his

142 Combe, A Letter from a Country Gentleman, 5.
father’s example. Thus, the prince’s lack of filial sentiment further tarnished his reputation as a proper son and a worthy successor to his father’s legacy.

National disgust with the prince’s mistreatment of his father extended into larger concerns about his succession. One author expressed the nation’s anxieties about the heir by claiming, “The people of this country, when they reflect that their present Sovereign is not immortal, look with anxious solicitude to the qualities of his successor.” The Regency Crisis reminded the nation of the king’s vulnerability and generated questions about the prince’s moral worth. Figure 24 addressed these concerns as the prince ascends the throne by trouncing on the “the voice of the people,” “public safety,” and ultimately, “virtue.” Thus, critics felt that the prince’s reign would prove despotic, crushing the will of the people under his feet.

Figure 24: A Touch on the Times (1788)

143 Withers, History of the Royal Malady, 30.
144 Two Words of Counsel, 15.
Like responses to the secret marriage and early reactions to the prince’s debts, some observers of the Regency Crisis attempted to divert blame away from the prince. Once again, many pamphlets and caricatures targeted the Whigs, rather than the heir, for exploiting the king’s illness to attain political influence. William Combe emerged as a chief opponent of the Whigs and denounced their tactics:

No sooner was the awful visitation of Heaven on our Sovereign communicated by the Royal Physicians to the Prince of Wales, and the Administration, that the scattered Members of the party began to hold up their heads, and enjoy the enlivening expectation of a better and more honorable dependence.\textsuperscript{145}

The Whigs appear insensitive for celebrating the sufferings of a reputable ruler and attempting to ingratiate themselves prematurely with the successor. Combe further relieves the heir from blame when he claims, “The counselors of the Prince have disgraced the Royal mind, in making it appear to harbor suspicions of insult, where insult could not be intended.”\textsuperscript{146} Though Combe acknowledged the appearance of guilt, he freed the prince from charges of filial disrespect and attributed his unpopularity to immoral influences. It is also important to recognize that Combe did not excuse filial injustices, but instead blamed these vices on other parties. Still, Combe did not completely vindicate the prince as he concluded his letter by telling him, “Your \textit{advisors} are not your \textit{friends}; - they never were the friends of the afflicted King, nor, with all their professions, do I believe them to be the \textit{friends} of the \textit{people}.”\textsuperscript{147} While this quotation provides further criticism of the Whigs, it also demanded royal accountability. This principle resonated with reactions to the prince’s other scandals, which demanded that he separate himself from harmful influences and focus his attentions on national distress.

\textsuperscript{145} Combe, \textit{A Letter from a Country Gentleman}, 44.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 74.
Regardless of fault, the prince’s disregard for filial piety inspired controversy because of his status as a moral exemplar. In matters of family, church, and law, the populace expected the monarchy to act as a leader of society and a symbol for the nation. In this context, the prince’s conduct was continually measured against the example of the king. George III excelled as a moral symbol and became “a paragon of the virtues to which ordinary men must aspire.”\(^{148}\) Though the king’s recovery in 1789 effectively ended the Regency Crisis, addresses to the prince continued to preface their letters with praise of his father’s moral virtues. One pamphleteer wrote that the king was a man who “blends with public care the private virtues; whose court encourages no profligacy, and whose palace exhibits an exemplary scene of domestic excellence.”\(^{149}\) The author’s mention of “private virtues” and “domestic excellence” suggests the importance given to the personal qualities of the sovereign. Another pamphleteer reiterated these sentiments when he told the prince, “Your father acted on the principles he professed – he was not more reverenced as a king, than he was beloved and respected as a man.”\(^{150}\) Thus, it was the king’s ability to epitomize popular ideals that cultivated a connection with his people and made him worthy of his station.

The importance of family to conceptions of royal responsibility was linked to men’s new status in the household. Men saw themselves as “kings of the home,” and therefore looked to the sovereign as a model of conduct. In this context, the king’s domestic excellence equipped him to assume his role as a father to the nation.\(^{151}\) One pamphlet expressed the unique status of the royal family by telling the king, “Indeed thy

\(^{149}\) *Two Words of Counsel*, 8.
\(^{151}\) Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 154.
family is more a public than a private concern; and the maxims which regulate it, or the passions it forms, affect the condition of millions.”\textsuperscript{152} The quotation emphasized that the royal family was subject to public scrutiny and as a model for the nation, its status remained critical to the welfare of Britain. Thus, the comparisons drawn between leading a home and leading the nation led observers to look to royalty for moral guidance and to demand greater accountability to justify its status.

The prince’s distance from his father attracted greater concern as observers concentrated on the importance of virtuous leadership for state stability. Without a virtuous leader, some feared the nation would slide into a state of degeneracy or suffer a loss of social order.\textsuperscript{153} One pamphleteer expressed this fear by distinguishing the royal family from the typical household. He described the separation of the prince and the princess by remarking, “The nation was not more concerned, than in the discord, quarrel, or separation of any private man and his wife, except in the example, which was likely to be the more contagious as being set by so illustrious a couple.”\textsuperscript{154} The quotation emphasized the impact of the prince’s conduct on couples throughout the nation. Another pamphlet, urging the prince to reconcile with Princess Caroline, highlighted the danger of their continued separation. Without royalty as a moral center, the people would “sink into general depravity” and “make his crown not worth the wearing.”\textsuperscript{155} The same text continued by calling on the prince to “Rise at once into that elevated conduct and display of virtuous dignity which becomes your character, and the nation has a right to

\textsuperscript{152} The Royal Tour to Weymouth, 52.
\textsuperscript{153} Two Words of Counsel, 53.
\textsuperscript{154} Plain Letter to His Royal Highness, 6.
\textsuperscript{155} Two Words of Counsel, 55.
expect of you.” These quotations demonstrate how the populace expected the prince to embody standards of morality and respond to their demands for reform. Thus, it became imperative that the prince emulate his father and embrace his family in order to realign the nation with standards of virtue.

**The Absent Father**

Responses to the prince’s relationship with his daughter, Princess Charlotte, further emphasized the significance of family for conceptions of royalty. As a result of his tumultuous relationship with his wife, George restricted Princess Caroline’s access to their daughter. He viewed Caroline as an unsuitable guardian for a future Queen and thus preferred to leave Charlotte in the care of aunts and governesses. This decision inspired national uproar as critics charged the prince with violating the sacred bond between a mother and her child. Additionally, instead of taking personal responsibility for Charlotte’s upbringing, the prince was a neglectful father who left the care of his successor to outsiders. He only allowed Charlotte to see her mother every two weeks and he placed strict limitations on her activities. In this context, Charlotte emerged as a popular figure who embodied the public’s sense of royal neglect and represented the hope for a virtuous successor.

The prince’s restriction on Caroline’s access to Princess Charlotte unsettled a public that had come to cherish childhood and respect its long-term significance. Despite the prince’s opinions, Caroline became wildly popular as numerous pamphlets and caricatures lamented her unfortunate position. Though the prince insulted his wife on numerous occasions, the public viewed the constraints on her access to Charlotte as an

---

156 Ibid., 55.
injustice. Daughters were typically educated by their mothers and were expected to remain with them until marriage. One pamphlet sympathized with Caroline in an address to the prince: “To common parents, possessing the mere feelings of nature for their children, it became difficult to ascertain how Your Royal Highness could separate the reputation of the mother from the welfare of the child.” In this example, the prince’s attacks and restrictions on Caroline inevitably damaged the wellbeing of his successor. Thus, for Caroline, Charlotte, and the populace, the prince’s decision to separate mother and daughter constituted a national tragedy.

Pamphlets and newspapers recognized the nation’s dissatisfaction with Charlotte’s confinement and devoted exhaustive coverage to her unfortunate childhood. William Hone, who would later become one of George’s most prominent critics, chastised the prince’s decision to isolate the heir from her mother:

Nature stands appalled at so hideous a violation of her laws. What mother can read it without the strongest emotions? What child can hear of it without feeling her young heart bursting asunder as she holds up her hands to Heaven to thank the Almighty that she was not born a Princess.

This strong language revealed the limits of royal authority; not even a monarch can claim supremacy over the laws of nature. In addition, Hone denies the benefits of privilege in favor of filial bliss, as the common child appears more fortunate than a motherless princess. Thus, without a mother to look after her, critics characterized Charlotte as a forsaken daughter, deserving of the people’s sympathy and support.

---

158 Smith, George IV, 127.
159 Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, 341.
160 Plain Letter to His Royal Highness, 30.
161 William Hone, The King’s Treatment of the Queen Shortly Stated to the People of England (London: 1820), 11.
The focus on Princess Charlotte’s childhood developed from connections drawn between the prince’s negligence as both a father and a ruler. Although paternalistic images of the king traditionally contributed to justifications of his authority, the prince’s disregard for his daughter reinforced accusations of royal negligence. In this context, Charlotte became a symbol of a nation that felt victimized by an incompetent ruler. One pamphlet emphasized the link between political and familial duties by demanding a leader “who reigns over the great family of the nation with the same affection which distinguishes every office of his domestic life.” The quotation characterized the nation itself as a family, requiring the attention and care of its royal father. Rather than devoting himself to his family and country, critics saw the prince as a selfish pleasure seeker with little regard for public welfare. Figure 25 focused on George’s filial injustice by depicting the prince as a violent disturber of the household, while Caroline attempts to soothe the young princess. The prince’s hypocrisy is emphasized by a door on the right leading to the room of his mistress. His actions are also contrasted with his father, as a portrait of the faithful King and Queen hangs in the background. The caricature captured the prince’s insensitivity as he simultaneously abandoned his family responsibilities and ignored virtuous models of kingship.

With Caroline’s influence limited and the prince proving an inadequate father, critics hoped Charlotte’s care would be entrusted to the king. George III displayed great affection for the princess and requested the prince’s permission to educate her. The prince, however, refused, fearing that the arrangement would result in more contact.

162 Clark, Scandal, 4.
163 Two Words of Counsel, 33.
164 Clark, Scandal, 2
between his wife and daughter. Reactions to the king’s offer praised George III, while characterizing the prince as an unfit caretaker. Figures 26 and 27 highlight the disparity between the paternal competence of the prince and the king. In Figure 26, the prince appears drunk and disheveled as his infant daughter pleads for his affection. In contrast, Figure 27, published just one month later, presents George III embodying filial virtues as he feeds his young granddaughter. The prints express the idea that Charlotte, like the nation, required paternal support and attention. The prince’s disinterest in domestic life, however, left Charlotte without a father and the nation without its moral leader.

As a result of the prince’s neglect of Charlotte and his refusal to allow her access to her mother and grandfather, observers attributed the princess’s faults to George’s failure to provide her with a proper role model. These criticisms emerged during a period
Figure 26: The Presentation, or, The Wise Men’s Offering (1796)

Figure 27: Grandpappa in his Glory!!! (1796)

165 Smith, George IV, 157.
when the faults of children were associated with poor parenting.\textsuperscript{166} Whereas the cases of
the secret marriage, the prince’s debts, and even the Regency Crisis featured examples of blame being
diverted away from the prince, with Charlotte he became accountable for the faults of another. In her early
youth, Charlotte garnered a reputation for being a “wild child” who lacked a sense of discipline.\textsuperscript{167} Rather
than targeting the princess, critics assigned fault to her father’s negligence. One pamphlet discussing her
behavior claimed, “The reader cannot help loving her for her very faults, and one is disposed to esteem
them altogether needful to constitute, what she has been, the universal delight of a high-minded and generous
people.”\textsuperscript{168} Thus, not only were the princess’s faults excusable, but they endeared to her a public that
sympathized with her distress. The prince, by contrast, had already abused the people’s patience and was a target
for numerous social complaints.

Following her mischievous childhood, Charlotte appeared to acquire her father’s penchant for spending. While
taken more seriously than her juvenile misdeeds, commentators generally pardoned the princess’s expenses or
exploited them to criticize her father. Figure 28, which is similar to prints produced about the prince’s debts,
depicts the princess burdening John Bull with heavy expenses. The prince encourages her as he says, “Push
on! Preach Economy! And when you have got your money follow my example.” Thus, rather than teaching his
daughter discipline and fiscal responsibility, the only lessons the prince offers her are immoral and debilitating to
the nation. Figure 29 echoes this message by predicting that Charlotte’s pregnancy will usher in a new

\textsuperscript{166} The Royal Tour to Weymouth, 53.
\textsuperscript{167} Smith, George IV, 155.
\textsuperscript{168} McGowan, The Life and Memoirs, 26.
generation of royal insensitivity. John Bull posits further expense, by saying, “I suppose there will be a dozen or thirteen in time, at 6000 a year each.” Meanwhile, the prince holds up the baby as it urinates on the people. The image suggests that George established a precedent for royalty’s abuse of the populace. The prince’s poor model made him morally unfit as both a father and a sovereign; his inability to properly instruct his own family cast doubt on his qualifications to guide the country.

In addition to the prince’s negligence, his occasional displays of paternal cruelty triggered public outrage. Rather than observing paternal ideals and providing Charlotte with affection, George seemed to mistreat his daughter. One instance that agitated the public was the prince’s reaction to Charlotte’s refusal to marry the Prince of Orange in 1813. The prince had longstanding hopes for the match, which would have strengthened

---

169 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 333-335.
Britain’s alliance with the Netherlands. Charlotte initially approved the union but when she changed her mind, the prince responded harshly. He dismissed her attendants, placed her under strict confinement, and limited her visitors.\textsuperscript{170} Following the incident crowds gathered at the prince’s residence to admonish the heir. Figure 30 depicts George’s rashness as he assaults members of Charlotte’s household. Meanwhile, the princess is seen on the right desperately running to her mother for help. In addition to highlighting George’s lack of compassion, the print also suggests his hypocrisy. Rather than learning from the failures of his own arranged marriage, the prince attempted to control his daughter through force and insensitivity.

\textsuperscript{170} Smith, \textit{George IV}, 159-163.
Charlotte’s attempt to flee from her father’s imposed confinement brought her even greater esteem among the public and placed her in direct opposition to her father. Unable to bear her punishment, Charlotte escaped her father’s watch and took a carriage to her mother’s home. Though the princess soon returned and reconciled with her father, the incident caused her popularity to surge, while the prince’s plummeted. Instead of chastising her disobedience, most observers admired the princess’s efforts to reunite with her mother. William Hone wrote that Charlotte “cast to the wind every stern command, and in the effort to fly once more into the arms of the mother that bore her, vindicated those feelings which never wither in a truly pious and virtuous heart.” Hone demonstrates how observers celebrated Charlotte’s rebellion against a cruel ruler who had violated the sacred bonds of family.

---

171 Clark, Scandal, 181.
Charlotte’s resistance to her father combined with accounts of her religious devotion to characterize her as a benevolent leader. Hone claimed, “It was that heroic – that darling child – who, at an early age, displayed in her mother’s cause, a degree of magnanimity that abashed her enemies, and delighted the whole country.”173 In addition to the quotation’s focus on the mother-daughter relationship, it also implicitly praises the princess for disobeying her father’s command. If Charlotte deserved praise for upholding filial virtues, then the prince, her “enemy,” deserved blame for denying them. In addition to her filial devotion, however, Charlotte also received adulation for her displays of piety and intelligence. Her faith and moral outlook compared favorably with the beloved George III and Hone pointed out that “she was a great favourite of his Majesty.”174 Hone hoped to display the similarity between the king and his granddaughter to suggest her ability to continue his virtuous legacy.

The comparisons made between Charlotte and George III demonstrate how the public’s ability to empathize with royalty affected its popularity. She was referred to as “the hope of an empire” and “the daughter of England.”175 One author captured the regard held for the princess by stating, “The amiable, the sweet, the good natured Princess has had a full dominancy over our hearts, and we insensibly feel our thoughts as much taken up in perusing her story, as if the dearest friend on earth were the subject of our contemplations.” In this example, the author demonstrates the strength and familiarity of the relationship between the princess and the public. The same author continues by declaring, “Her cast of mind and manner would have proclaimed her worthy

172 Hone, The King’s Treatment of the Queen, 13.
173 Ibid., 14.
of a throne, had she been the daughter of humble parents, and born to the inheritance of poverty and virtue.” The quotation asserts that Charlotte’s character, regardless of her birth, was worthy of royal status. Thus, unlike her father, Charlotte’s station was accompanied by the merit required to connect with the “thoughts” and “hearts” of her people.

The theme of connection between royalty and its subjects was popular for commentators who exploited the idea to highlight the contrasting models of leadership offered by the prince and his daughter. Having given up on George’s unsympathetic ear, many citizens addressed their economic and social complaints to his daughter. The fact that pamphlets targeted the princess, rather than her father, highlighted the belief that she was more in tune with the people’s wellbeing. One text followed praise of Charlotte with an assessment of the relationship between the prince and the public:

> It is the distance of the prince from his people which feeds the political jealousy of the latter, and which by removing the former to a height of inaccessible grandeur, places him, as it were, beyond the reach of their sympathies. Much of that political rancor, which festers, and agitates, and makes such a tremendous appearance of noise and of hostility in our land, is due to the aggravating power of distance.

The quotation recognized the prince’s unpopularity and attributes his disfavor to his “distance” from George’s subjects. The author also notes the magnitude of the nation’s discontent with his failure to exemplify popular standards of behavior. Unlike Charlotte, the prince dissociated himself from the public and lost their affections.

After Charlotte’s marriage to Prince Leopold in 1816, much of the praise she received focused on her domestic and filial commitment. Similar to George III, the

---

veneration for Charlotte’s private conduct caused readers to reflect on the prince’s moral failings. Hone identified her talents within the home by claiming, “The Princess had a taste for none but the most innocent and rural pleasures, and in the society of her husband these had more attractions for her, than all the splendour of London and the Court.”

Hone commends the princess for taking joy in simple, yet honorable practices. The public admired her interests and unlike her father, Charlotte provided a model of marital felicity. Furthermore, Hone’s reference to “the splendour of London and the Court” was an illusion to the prince’s lavish tastes and their contrast with his daughter’s modest occupations. Another author echoed these sentiments with a celebration of the princess’s virtuous model of conduct:

Every wife would have gazed upon her as a bright example of those duties whose performance rewards itself, and constitutes the chief blessing of society. The loss of such a model, in such an age, may be a subject of lamentation to our children’s children.

In addition to praising Charlotte’s devotion to her husband, the author emphasized the importance of her example to wives throughout the nation. In “such an age” of immoral royal activity, the public embraced a sovereign who could exemplify its moral values.

Though most texts praising Charlotte avoided direct mention of the prince, readers easily recognized the contrast between the virtuous daughter and her negligent father. For example, William Hone’s commendation of Charlotte’s propriety distinguished her from the prince’s ostentation:

She had very little of the vanity of exterior ornaments and dress – she never indulged in it, either before or after her marriage. – She aimed at little beyond neatness or plainness: there was no encumbering superfluity of jewels to be seen upon her person; in short, nothing which distinguished her from the common

---

177 Ibid., 568.
178 Hone, Authentic Memoirs, 14.
gentlewoman, in splendor or apparel. Always elegant, modest, and refined, and peculiarly chaste and circumspect in her demeanor, she had nothing of high or fashionable life about her, but a lofty and generous sense of the duties which her elevated rank demanded.\footnote{Hone, \textit{Authentic Memoirs}, 15.}

Hone’s reference to Charlotte as the “common gentlewoman” and praise for her modesty and sense of duty separated her from the selfish activities and expenses of her father. Though Hone never mentions the prince explicitly, readers identified Charlotte’s distinction from George’s extravagant and libertine lifestyle. Figure 31 provides a more direct display of the disparity between the prince and the princess, as Charlotte and her husband appear on opposite sides of a balance. Despite George’s efforts to use bottles of alcohol to tip the scale against her, he cannot compete with the supremacy of Charlotte’s “moral weight.” The print also expressed the belief that Charlotte would excel as the leader of her people in spite of her father’s poor example.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{\textit{Balancing Accounts: Proving the Weight of A Crown (1816)}}
\end{figure}

The hopes surrounding the young princess were destroyed when Charlotte died during childbirth in 1817, at the age of 21. With the child a stillborn, the nation essentially lost two successors in a single evening. This misfortune resulted in unprecedented outpourings of remorse and sorrow throughout the nation. One author characterized the public’s distress by writing, “A black mantle was thrown as it were over the whole country, there was no joy, no gladness to be seen anywhere.”¹⁸¹ William Hone declared, “This event has smitten the nation with sudden gloom, like the visitation of a darkness.”¹⁸² The private virtues that had endeared her to the populace became the focus of mourning sermons throughout Britain.

Without the prospect of a virtuous successor, many mourners feared for the nation’s future. After Charlotte’s death, none of George III’s sons had children to offer as an heir. With the king still suffering from mental illness and the prince approaching his fifty-sixth birthday, commentators focused on the national implications of Charlotte’s passing. One author summed up these concerns by saying, “it is impossible to avoid apprehension for the succession.”¹⁸³ The same writer also lamented Charlotte’s death by positing the beneficence of her reign:

> The eminence of her station while she lived, was such as to attach the utmost importance to her minutest actions. How much more then must her death fix attention; and if, as there is every reason to believe, the qualities of her heart, and the powers of her understanding were calculated to adorn the station for which she appeared destined, and to promote the happiness of those who she was to govern – how must her loss exact sorrow and regret.¹⁸⁴

---

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 504.
The author highlights Charlotte’s caring and sensitivity to describe the virtue that she would have displayed as Queen. After commenting on the loss of this royal prospect, the same author continued by reminding readers of George III’s vulnerability:

The many admirable properties which distinguish the illustrious monarch who is now laboring under the infirmities of mortal existence, are all well known and prized by his devoted subjects, and if the government of the country could be farther improved, who was more likely to accomplish it than she.185

This quotation establishes a connection between George III and his granddaughter and highlights Charlotte’s potential to follow the king’s model. It is important to recognize that the author designates Charlotte, rather than the prince, as the best hope for benevolent rule. Thus, Charlotte’s death deprived the country of a virtuous successor and left the nation’s welfare in the hands of the debauched and insensitive George IV.

Charlotte’s death also refocused attention on the prince’s domestic incompetence and its threat to the future of Britain. In Figure 32 the prince appears to be avoiding his public responsibilities by hiding under the skirt of a depraved woman. The image depicts how George’s sexual depravity led him to political negligence and subjected him to potentially dangerous influences. Figure 33 demonstrates the political implications of the prince’s infidelity by displaying the frightful image of a crowned mistress. George appears in the form of a carriage and is entirely exposed to external control. Furthermore, some feared that without Charlotte, George’s exploits would result in illegitimate children and jeopardize hopes for a civil succession.186 Thus, in addition to family’s symbolic importance for royalty, it also contributed to national stability.

The prince’s relationships with his father and daughter reveal the importance of family values and provide a window onto public concerns. At a time when family virtues

185 Ibid., 576.

Figure 33: *Royal Hobby’s, or The Hertfordshire Cock-Horse!* (1819) Tamara Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 258

186 *Plain Letter to His Royal Highness*, p. 22.
became a priority for Britons, the prince’s filial irresponsibility alienated him from his subjects and their moral values. Whereas both George III and Princess Charlotte were loved for their domestic virtues, the prince’s adultery and recklessness violated popular morality. Much like the responses to the secret marriage and the prince’s debts, commentaries on the royal family aroused criticisms of the prince’s failings as a moral exemplar and inspired concerns for the nation’s future. Observations of the royal family also differed from the previous examples, however, because it allowed critics to attack the prince by referencing contrasting models of leadership. In this manner, the emphasis on the prince’s paternal responsibility to both his home and his country positioned the royal family as an outlet for public anxiety. Filial devotion became crucial for royal approval as all levels of society began to scrutinize the prince’s familial relationships.
Conclusion

A memoir commenting on the death of Princess Charlotte in 1821 claimed, “Every countenance expressed astonishment and anguish – every individual felt as if suddenly overwhelmed by some deplorable misfortune – every family seemed as if it lost one of its dearest members. We know, in short, no event which could at this time produce such intense emotion.” The quotation described Charlotte’s passing as a profound loss that affected the entire country. It also captured how the princess’s death symbolized the nation’s lost hope for a moral leader who would be sensitive to the needs of her subjects. Charlotte’s death cemented her position as a national icon and mourners continually emphasized her personal bond with the populace. Her ability to uphold the public’s expectations of moral leadership endeared her to her subjects and transformed her death into a national tragedy.

A modern reader is struck by the similarities to the outpourings of attachment and sorrow following the death of Princess Diana in 1997. Like Charlotte, Diana’s sudden death shocked the nation and caused unprecedented displays of mourning. Public affection for both Charlotte, “the daughter of England,” and Diana, “the People’s Princess,” was based on perceptions of each woman’s accessibility and connection with her people. Media emphasis on Diana’s displays of charity and personal concern celebrated the princess’s compassion and contributed to her popularity. The two princesses also shared a position of alienation from the royal family that aroused popular sympathy. For Charlotte, her domesticity and contrasting model of royalty became a tool

---

188 Ibid., 528.
for criticizing her father’s misdeeds; similarly, Diana’s exploitation at the hands of an unloving, cheating husband enhanced her popularity and inspired criticisms of the heir. As depicted in the 2006 film, *The Queen*, Princess Diana’s death also caused the nation to question monarchical privilege and impose demands on the royal family. Thus, the nation’s attachment to Diana’s virtues and use of her legacy to criticize the monarchy demonstrates the continued relevance of public opinion and its impact on royal activity.

The similarities between the responses to the deaths of the two princesses demonstrate Britain’s progression towards a modern press in the late eighteenth century. The abundant coverage of the prince’s vices strengthened public opinion and raised demands for royal accountability. In addition to the implications for monarchy, exposure of the prince’s scandals also encouraged arguments for reduced censorship and freedom of expression. Furthermore, belief in the people’s right to information granted the press greater authority. Radical pamphleteers saw themselves serving an essential civic role of alerting the public to injustices. They stressed that it was vice itself, rather than its exposure, that represented the true crime. Despite the government’s accusations that critics amplified public distress, pamphleteers and caricaturists believed their works regulated civic action, promoted government transparency, and encouraged concern for public welfare.

Media scrutiny contributed to a larger phenomenon by which private activity was politicized. The press’s invasion of royalty’s private life established public opinion as a decisive force in modern politics. One pamphlet advised the prince to hide his misdeeds.

---

from the public eye: “If you cannot live without having recourse to the pleasures of intemperance, let them be enjoyed in the secret corners of your palace; - give to the world, at least, the exterior due to the station which you occupy.” Despite the author’s efforts to conceal the prince’s misdeeds, the press’s newfound authority made this nearly impossible. The public’s awareness of the tensions within the royal family reveals that even the “secret corners” of the palace were subject to popular evaluation. Thus, the scandals of the prince’s private life force us to question the division between the public and private spheres. These questions remain, as the private lives of current political leaders are constantly used to assess their moral characters.

The eruption of private activity in the public sphere also reflected a growing sense of political consciousness. People began considering themselves as the citizens of a state rather than the subjects of a sovereign. Although the number of men who could vote remained small, scandal presented broader political issues that altered the public’s conception of civic responsibility. While the majority of the nation had little hope of influencing politics in an official context, awareness of royal vice mobilized public opinion and encouraged expressions of political discontent. This awareness led to demands for broader civic inclusion and provided the context for future enfranchisement.

With the development of an aware and informed public, virtue emerged as the central criterion for royal leadership. The progression of the prince’s scandals from the secret marriage to tensions within the royal family highlights George’s failure to uphold ideals of virtue and sensitivity. As monarchical legitimacy shifted from divine to positive

191 Combe, A Letter from a Country Gentleman, 75.
right, the media expanded its presence and its influence over public opinion. This shift in the role of the press raised public awareness and limited royal authority through values of trust and moral utility. The monarchy’s inability to recognize the expansion of the political nation and failure to reflect changing values and expectations permanently altered the relationship between the crown and its subjects.

192 Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 440.