5-2012

A SCANDAL IN BRITAIN: THE MARY ANNE CLARKE AFFAIR AND REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDERED PATRIOTISM

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A SCANDAL IN BRITAIN: THE MARY ANNE CLARKE AFFAIR
AND REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDERED PATRIOTISM

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
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May 2012

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

In 1809, Mary Anne Clarke served as a key player in an investigation against her former lover, the Duke of York. She testified before the House of Commons that the Duke, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, did not provide her with enough financial support and allowed her to accept bribes for commissions in the army. Her confession rocked early nineteenth-century Britain, and the scandal caused the Duke to resign his military position. With Britain in the thick of the Napoleonic Wars, 1809 was a bad year for a scandal, as it encouraged Britons to doubt the authority of their military leaders.

Given this context, the Mary Anne Clarke affair offers the opportunity to study what patriotism meant to Britons during a time of war. Historians of the scandal have thus far overlooked the issue of representation, or how the popular press depicted Clarke during the scandal. In the over two hundred political cartoons that circulated at the time of the scandal, Clarke is represented as both a “good” and “bad” female patriot. The existence of both positive and negative portrayals underscores the British public’s lack of consensus about patriotism: it was infused with gendered distinctions, yet unfixed in its meanings.
DEDICATION

To my mother, for telling stories and encouraging me to tell my own.

To my father, for following his dreams to America.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a thesis can be many things—transformative, exciting, daunting, empowering—but, most importantly, it is collaborative. It has been a joy to grow as an historian and writer under the direction of my committee. I simply could not have written this thesis without the expert knowledge, skilled edits, patient guidance, and comforting encouragement of Dr. Stephanie Barczewski, chair of my committee. For the past two years, she has nurtured my ideas and helped me find my voice as an historian. She is a brilliant scholar and gifted educator, and I am fortunate to have deepened my knowledge of British history under her tutelage. In addition to being a helpful, supportive committee member, Dr. Michael Silvestri and his course on British India helped me understand imperial history in greater detail. Dr. Paul Anderson, as both a committee member and graduate advisor, has served a dual role in my development at Clemson. My thesis benefitted from his mastery of the writer’s craft, and I consider myself a more conscientious writer thanks to his mentorship. His gentle presence as graduate advisor was constantly reassuring, and on more than one occasion he gave advice that made me feel as though I could conquer the world, or at least make it to tomorrow.

I must thank the British Museum, whose collection of online prints and free image service provided dozens of primary sources at my fingertips. Additionally, the staff at the Newberry Library in Chicago was attentive and helpful when I conducted research there in June 2011. I am also grateful for the financial support I received through the Margaret Anne Bundy Scholarship, courtesy of my sisters at the Alpha Delta Pi Foundation, Inc.
My professors at Ripon College paved the road that led to Clemson—I thank them for believing in me from the start.

An individual is only as strong as the community that nurtured her, and the community in the Clemson University History Department has been, in a word, perfect. My experience as a Teaching Assistant for Dr. Steven Marks, Dr. Richard Saunders, and Dr. James Burns has enabled me to be a better educator. Dr. Alan Grubb’s seminar on the French Revolution helped me understand some of the prologue to the Mary Anne Clarke affair. My talented friends and colleagues in the department’s graduate community have supported, challenged, and balanced me—their essential presence made this program intellectually vibrant and personally meaningful. I could not have navigated this labyrinth called graduate school without them. They made Clemson magical.

My family’s love and support has sustained me throughout my education. Special thanks goes to my mother, who read countless drafts, shared my excitement for new discoveries, and encouraged me when I needed it most. Her faith in me, and this project, kept me going.

April 2012
Clemson, South Carolina
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. SCANDALIZED BRITANNIA: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OF SCANDAL IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1750-1820</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. CALLS FOR REFORM: REPRIMANDING THE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRITISH ARMY, DEFENDING THE BRITISH NATION</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PRIDE AND PROTECTION: IMAGES OF THE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD WOMAN</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CIRCE THE CONJURER: IMAGES OF THE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAD WOMAN</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

ANATOMY OF A SCANDAL

Various and opposite are the means by which obscure persons, of both virtuous and vicious habits, become the objects either of public admiration, curiosity or disdain.
- Authentic and Interesting Memoirs of Mrs. Clarke

In 1806, the Duke of York found himself with a crisis on his hands: Joseph Clarke threatened to sue him for adultery. The veracity of Clarke’s claims was undeniable. Since 1803, the Duke had kept Mary Anne, Clarke’s wife, as his mistress, even setting her up in a fashionable residence in London’s Gloucester Place. The Duke simply could not afford the bad press that a public trial would inevitably bring. In an attempt to obviate Clarke’s legal claims, the Duke ended his relationship with Mary Anne and, as a gesture of goodwill, offered her a modest annual income. Quietly, the affair ended, and with it, Mary Anne’s way of life. Most women in this position, abandoned by their source of support, sustenance, and solicitude, would move on and attempt to find a new partner.

But Mary Anne Clarke was not like most women. After the Duke abandoned her, Clarke claimed that he was not honoring his promise to support her financially; that she could not afford the upkeep of her home or properly educate her children; and, worst of all, that the Duke, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, maintained a ring of corruption with her at the center. She alleged that she took bribes to influence military promotions and that the Duke himself was aware of the subterfuge. These allegations were kept private at first, as Clarke attempted to blackmail her former lover, but slowly, their volume increased until they attracted the attention of reformers in Parliament.
Balladeers and printers lampooned the Duke; reformist writers lambasted him. In February 1809, the House of Commons launched a formal investigation into the matter, and the public, hungry for scandal, devoured it.

This appetite for scandal is particularly revealing. Scandals, as occurrences in society when behavior falls below expectations, are testaments to what those expectations were in a given time and place; those expectations reveal the beliefs, assumptions, and views of those who held them. Scandals therefore possess undeniable historical relevance, and their implications reverberate beyond the biographies of great men and women and beyond a culture’s obsession with celebrity. They also reveal social conceptions of morality and tensions between public and private lives. As cultural artifacts, they reflect social and political attitudes as well as aspects of national identity. Yet, scandals do not only mirror society; they also help to shape it.

Scandals involving the British elite were common in the early nineteenth century. The Duke’s older brother, the Prince of Wales, was the subject of near-constant scandal. His romantic dalliances were a source of embarrassment for his father, George III, and succeeded in making the prince into a subject of ridicule.\(^1\) Even Admiral Lord Nelson, hero of Egypt and martyr of Trafalgar, was not immune. His relationship with Emma, Lady Hamilton, was well known. Though Nelson was besotted with Emma, his adoring

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\(^1\) Consider, for example, the Prince of Wales’s relationship with the actress Mary Robinson, whom the Prince had to buy off to prevent her from publishing their love letters. In 1787 he caused another stir when he “secretly” wed the divorced Maria Fitzherbert. As Mrs. Fitzherbert was a Catholic, the relationship would have upset the line of succession: the 1701 Act of Settlement stipulated that only Protestant members of the Royal Family could ascend the throne. By marrying and potentially having children with a Catholic, the Prince of Wales would have made his offspring unable to inherit the throne.
public was not: the government ignored his wishes by denying her an income after his
death and barring her attendance from his funeral in 1805.

Scandals thus played a prominent role in early nineteenth-century British society. Even in this context, however, the Mary Anne Clarke affair is unique in two important ways. First, the scandal featured a prince of the realm who was also at the head of the British Army. Second, the scandal encouraged Britons to doubt the suitability, authority, and legitimacy of their military leaders. Tellingly, it occurred in the thick of the Napoleonic Wars, when Britons felt anxious about their national security as the threat of Napoleon loomed.

As with all scandals, the Clarke affair was an intersection between public and private lives, where private acts and relationships were put under intense public scrutiny. It is important to understand the trajectory of the affair and subsequent scandal in order to explore its significance. Clarke’s relationship with the Duke of York began in 1803. Though these two individuals came from very different worlds, it is easy to see why they were drawn to each other. Clarke was a tradesman’s daughter from London who dreamed of riches; the Duke was King George III’s second son with a position in life that gave him confidence, wealth, and security. Clarke was witty and vivacious, the Duke mild-mannered and devoted. Both had unstable, unfulfilling marriages at the time of their meeting and eventual relationship. Clarke was estranged from the bankrupt stonemason she had married at fifteen, while the Duke was trapped in a loveless, barren marriage to a German noblewoman who seemed more interested in her many pets than her royal husband. Clarke and the Duke each had something to offer the other: Mary Anne was the
lively, attentive woman that the Duke’s wife was not, and the Duke was the doting, secure man that Joseph Clarke was not. Clarke was taken in by the material comforts the Duke could offer, while he was taken in by her charms.

Clarke’s life had not always taken place in such fortuitous circumstances. Born Mary Anne Thompson in 1776, she was attracted to an unconventional lifestyle from the start. After her father died, Mary Anne’s mother married Robert Farquhar, a Scotsman by birth and printer by trade. Farquhar, who noticed Mary Anne’s sharp mind, enlisted her as a proofreader in his business. As her biographer Paul Berry notes, this environment exposed Mary Anne to the power of the pen and press. Her willingness to work at a press also reveals her early determination to seek wider horizons: even from a young age, Mary Anne had an insatiable thirst to live and act outside the confines of the domestic sphere and to challenge the social order that limited her as a lower-class woman. At the age of fifteen, Mary Anne left home to live with Joseph Clarke, a stonemason; their marriage followed the birth of two of their three children. Though Clarke started his own business and supported the family financially, the romance soon wore off: Joseph was a drunk who was also drowning in debt. Unwilling to be tethered to such an unreliable man, Mary Anne took her three children and left. As a woman without a source of income, she weighed her limited options, as other women had done before her: remarriage was impossible. She could go into domestic service, but quickly dismissed this possibility as too demanding and inconvenient for a mother with three children. Instead, Mary Anne chose to live by her own wit and charms by becoming a kept woman.

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Clarke’s decision to become a mistress to prominent men afforded her security and protection. “Slight, short, with lively blue eyes and sparkling vivacity,” Clarke had no problem finding partners, the first of whom was a baronet. After a string of lovers—the exact number remains unknown—Clarke eventually attracted the attention of the Duke of York, though how and where their first meeting occurred remains unknown. He set the family up at 18 Gloucester Place in London, giving them a landau and staff of servants. Every day for three years—excepting the fortnight he spent in the country once a year—the Duke visited the home, doting on the children and reveling in Clarke’s natural allure.

But the fairy tale was not to last. In 1806, just a few months before Joseph Clarke threatened the Duke with a trial, Mary Anne’s creditors caught up with her. Eager to embrace a lavish lifestyle to accompany her newfound status as a royal mistress, Clarke had accumulated around £2,000 in debt. When she was unable to pay her creditors, they turned to the Duke, who quickly paid them off in order to prevent a scandal. But, Joseph Clarke’s threats were the last straw. The Duke’s advisors encouraged him to break off the relationship with Clarke, arguing that it was too risky—personally, legally, and financially—to maintain it. Rather than sever the bond in person, the Duke charged William Adam, an advisor, to deliver a letter that broke the news to her. While the affair was to end, Adam made clear, the Duke’s financial support was not: he intended to pay Clarke a quarterly annuity of £400 to ensure that she was provided for.

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3 Berry, *By Royal Appointment*, 27.
4 This translates to roughly $170,000 by today’s standards.
5 An amount comparable to a quarterly annuity of $33,500 in today’s market.
Yet, the money did not always come, and Clarke, enraged at the separation and loss of support, petitioned the Duke for the money in a series of letters. When the money remained unpaid, she turned to threats. In sharp prose, Clarke intimated that she would publish the Duke’s love letters to her if he withheld payments. Still, he did not pay. The last weapon in Clarke’s arsenal was her allegation of corruption. She claimed that she had accepted bribes for promotions in the army. The men who wished to be promoted paid her a fixed sum. She would inform the Duke that the man sought a promotion, which she did by pinning the candidates’ names to her bed curtains, where the Duke was sure to see them. The promotion would then sail through; the Duke’s habit was to sign promotions and official documents without reading them. Clarke’s allegations thus insinuated that the Duke was not only corrupt. He was grossly incompetent and unsuited for military leadership.

Clarke’s allegations attracted the attention of Colonel Gwyllym Wardle, Member of Parliament for Okehampton in Devon. Wardle, himself an army veteran, saw in Clarke an opportunity to bring down the Duke, whom he viewed as the embodiment of the military corruption he had witnessed as a dragoon. Wardle saw it as his patriotic duty to purge the British Army of corruption, in order to purify Britannia for the coming battles against Napoleon. Clarke was part of his plan. He hoped to use her as a key player in an investigation by the House of Commons into the Duke’s conduct. Mary Anne Clarke and her claims of trafficking in commissions fit perfectly into Wardle’s argument that the Duke was corrupt and undeserving of his military position. Between February and March 1809, Clarke and other witnesses were called to testify about the bribes. Though the Duke
of York, as a member of the royal family, never took the stand to testify, several of his associates did. By a margin of just 82 votes, the House voted to acquit him on March 17, 1809. The British public was not satisfied, and, caving into popular opinion, the Duke of York resigned his post as Commander-in-Chief three days later.

As an incident that put the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army’s credibility on trial in a time of war, the Mary Anne Clarke affair shows how scandals could both celebrate and challenge patriotism. More specifically, it also reveals the degree to which women participated in the construction and perpetuation of patriotism. Gender was a critical component in the maintenance of patriotism in early nineteenth-century Britain: Britons understood and defined patriotism in gendered terms. Indeed, the word “patriot” itself is infused with gender distinctions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, its roots are Greek and Latin, coming from patrios (“of one’s fathers”), patris (“fatherland”), and pater (“father”), making it a masculine word rather than a feminine one.

At the same time, the patriotism that existed in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century is complicated. Patriotism did not have a fixed meaning, nor did it have a universal definition of who was and was not included in those meanings. Though women could and did take an active role in being patriotic, theirs was a different brand of patriotism than that which their fathers, husbands, and brothers celebrated. Men who volunteered for the militia were called patriots; women who sewed clothing and

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6 The Members of the House voted on three separate resolutions. The first, proposed by Henry Bankes, called for the Duke’s acquittal followed by his immediate dismissal from his post; this amendment was vetoed by a vote of 294 to 199. They next voted on Colonel Wardle’s original charges of guilt and removal from office; this was rejected by a majority of 364 votes to 123. Debate continued into the night. At 4:30 a.m., Spencer Perceval’s resolution—which acquitted the Duke on all charges and affirmed his competency as Commander-in-Chief—was finally passed by 278 votes to 196.
organized fundraisers were likewise called patriots. Men and women were both allowed
to express patriotism, but each did it in very different and defined ways. Patriotism was
therefore compartmentalized and meant different things to different people. An unstable
patriotism relates to what Kathleen Wilson has identified as the “sense of the people,” or
elite definitions of what was best for white, Protestant, and middle-class Englishmen,
whose public participation “challenged the seemingly ineffable structures and
imperatives of patrician hegemony by defining the patriot through position and practice
rather than birth, through merit and discipline rather than entitlement” and constructed
new understandings of and identifications with national life.\(^7\) Patriotism was thus a tool to
measure the people of Great Britain, and how they were a part of the nation. It was not,
however, fixed in its meaning, but rather a changeable concept that was wrought with
gender distinctions in particular.

The issue of representation connects all of these points: how did Clarke’s critics
and defenders represent her to a public preoccupied with perceived threats to the nation,
both foreign and domestic? Mary Anne Clarke demonstrated the ways in which
patriotism was gendered. Throughout the course of the scandal, publishers circulated a
diverse body of textual and visual material about her. How they represented Clarke
provides insight into public attitudes toward patriotism and gender, and how Clarke
herself fit into those beliefs. She was represented as both a “good woman” and a “bad
woman”: her image oscillated in the popular press between virtuous protector of the
nation and a destructive and seductive force that threatened Britain’s morality. Both

\(^7\) Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*
views acknowledge that patriotism was colored by gender conventions. It is thus essential to evaluate these representations in order to understand how Britons tied the scandal to issues of patriotism and gender.

Chapter I will provide a historiographical framework for these arguments. Historians in recent years have increasingly turned their attention to issues of scandals and what they reveal about the expectations, beliefs, and worldviews of a society. Historical work has been done on the issue of scandal and empire, citizenship, monarchy, and female participation in politics. Though two recent works have looked at the Mary Anne Clarke affair, neither historian takes into account the issue of how Mary Anne Clarke was represented in the popular press, something that this thesis will explore in depth to reveal beliefs about female patriotism in the early nineteenth century.

The Mary Anne Clarke affair occurred in the specific context of reform and military mobilization during the Napoleonic Wars. Chapter II will explore this climate of reform. Though the Duke of York is credited with bringing moderate reforms to the troubled British Army in the early nineteenth century, reformers still accused him of corruption. These accusations—driven by anxiety about “petticoat influence”—came from radical reformers who hoped to restore virtue to Britain as the nation fought France. To these men, a virtuous nation equated a strong nation, one that must be internally sound so that it could withstand the aggressions of a powerful enemy. Patriotism, to them, meant championing reform. Ironically, though many politicians had concerns about growing petticoat influence and female participation in politics, the Duke’s accusers depended on the testimony of a woman—Mary Anne Clarke—to make their case.
The issue of positive female patriotism will be explored in Chapter III. At the turn of the nineteenth century, women were finding acceptable ways to express their patriotism. Since gender conventions dominated domestic relationships, women were charged with maintaining the virtue of the family, the foundation of the nation. Though there is little evidence to suggest that Clarke thought of herself in this light, she was sometimes represented as a virtuous female patriot, since many perceived her allegations against the Duke to be acts of preserving the virtue of the nation.

Conversely, others saw her as an anti-patriot and, worse, a detriment to the nation. Chapter IV explores how Clarke was often represented as a “bad woman,” or one who did not operate within the established gender norms and consequently upset the order of society. These critics highlighted flaws in Clarke’s morality and thought that her influence in politics was too great, a clear example of fears of petticoat influence in practice. She was represented as a bad patriot because she strayed from the compartmentalized definitions of acceptable female patriotism; she was duly punished for this in the popular press. As a result, she was often portrayed as a being alien to her own gender.

Ultimately, the Mary Anne Clarke scandal stands as a testament to a British nation that lacked a consensus on the meaning of patriotism. Patriotism meant different things for men and women; it was a complex idea that mirrored the social make-up of the family and society. Being a true patriot meant serving the nation as one would serve the family: women kept its virtue and men defended it from attacks. In this vein of thought, the Mary Anne Clarke affair—a scandal that fascinated the British people for a period of
less than two months—encapsulated and expressed the public’s imagination of what the nation was and meant. By pulling out their measuring sticks and criticizing the ways in which the establishment was not satisfying their expectations, Britons revealed their conceptions of the multiple, gendered meanings of patriotism.
CHAPTER I

SCANDALIZED BRITANNIA: 
THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SCANDAL IN 
GREAT BRITAIN, 1750-1820

Gossip is charming! History is merely gossip. 
But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality. 
- Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere’s Fan

The Mary Anne Clarke affair was not the only scandal that rocked Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the contrary, the number of scandals stands as evidence of the standard of morality to which Britons held their social and political leaders. Accordingly, historians have begun to take scandals seriously and analyze their implications. Instead of looking at impersonal events or epic changes in the political landscape, scandals focus on specific people operating in specific contexts. Indeed, context is immensely important in assessing the broader meaning of a particular scandal to society as a whole, not merely the individuals involved.

Regarded as sources of salacious gossip rather than historical insight, scandals were long relegated to the fringes of British historiography. Most often, historians studied scandals primarily in the context of biography, as part of a larger story of the life of an historical figure. Biographies generally did not emphasize the scandal as a distinct research topic; on the contrary, biographies used scandals to explain larger facets of a particular life. Biographers focus on the individual involved in the scandal rather than the scandal itself and the society in which it occurred. One such example is Amanda Foreman’s Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Though the book became a bestseller, its
roots were academic: Foreman first wrote it as her doctoral thesis at Oxford. Published by Random House, the book went on to win the Whitbread Prize for Biography. Foreman emphasizes the Duchess’s political activities in the book and the ways in which she challenged social norms as a woman acting in the public sphere. Scandal ensued as the Duchess engaged in an extramarital affair and allied herself with young politicians outside of her family. Foreman used scandal to portray the Duchess as an individual willing to challenge the respectabilities of society; the more she challenged, the more she scandalized. However, given their very nature, biographies such as Foreman’s are limited in their approach to scandals. Thus, although biographies often discuss scandals, their meanings, implications, and ramifications are circumscribed: an individual reputation is ruined, or someone spends the rest of his or her life dealing with the shame. These are very personal effects; they do not speak to larger trends, themes, or attitudes. But, in more recent years, historians have increasingly used scandals to understand attitudes toward gender and the nation in Great Britain, specifically in relation to the tempestuous political climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At a time when elites received attention for their bad behavior, it was only a matter of time before contemporary politics came to be influenced by those who championed or critiqued them.

Gender history appears to complement scandal studies. Scandals, born from a collision between public and private, often relate to femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and family life, topics that gender historians typically explore. The historiography of scandal and gender, though still developing, shows that gender roles were clearly defined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Individuals who acted outside of their
prescribed roles were punished with scandal. Thus, historians study these scandals to understand how gender intersects with ideas about the nation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain.

One recognizable type of scandal is the political one. In *Scandal of Empire* (Harvard, 2006), Nicholas Dirks focuses on the British presence in India and the flawed political culture that allowed corruption to run rampant. Dirks critiques the development of imperialism in India over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, contending that domestic political history and imperial history were intertwined. The Warren Hastings scandal dominates Dirks’s narrative. In analyzing the scandal’s many facets, Dirks uses it to point out the failures of empire. The Anglo-Irish Whig politician and gifted orator Edmund Burke attempted to use scandal to force the resignation of Hastings and to “purify” the British Empire. He alleged that Hastings had gained a personal fortune in India while serving as Governor-General of Bengal. Less central to Burke’s allegation was the claim that Hastings had been abusing Indian princesses; this salacious charge added moral failure to the list drawn up against him.

In lambasting Hastings and the corrupt system that incubated the scandal, Burke argued, “The reputation of British justice, all that was good and sacred about the ancient constitution, was on trial as well. To convict Warren Hastings was to uphold the foundations of British sovereignty.”

Dirks describes how Burke claimed that the scandal was not just a political failure; it was also a moral outrage. In his calls for a purging of corruption in British India, Burke made the

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political issue into a moral one.9 The political scandal would taint the character of the nation. Burke presented a choice to the British nation: either convict Hastings and remove corruption from the imperial state, or condemn Britain and its politics to continued immorality.

But while Dirks provides a critique of the political function of the scandal, he glosses over key gender issues. Gender, though not the focus of Dirks’s study, was inseparable from the Hastings scandal once Burke raised an allegation of sexual violence. He claimed that Hastings permitted ill-bred Indians to act as imperial agents in the district of Rangpur. Their actions incited “disturbances” in the region that culminated in violence against women: virgins were raped and wives’ nipples were ripped from their breasts.10 Burke, who knew that several prominent women were watching the trial, used these descriptions to provoke the outrage of his female audience. As Dirks points out, “The use of sexual violence as a means to blame Hastings […] was especially drawn to the increasing importance of women in the mobilization of political opinion in late-eighteenth-century Britain. Much of Burke’s rhetoric seemed calculated to mobilize the paternalism of men and the sentiment and sensibility of women.”11 Though Dirks admits that Burke relied on gendered reactions to add further spectacle and drama to the trial, he does not explain how the images of sexual violence violated British gender attitudes of the late eighteenth century, and what that “mobilization” meant for Burke’s case and the

9 Dirks, Scandal of Empire, 106.
10 Ibid., 111.
11 Ibid., 111-2.
use of sexual scandal in politics. Instead of analyzing this issue, Dirks merely points out that as Burke described the violence, a woman fainted in the courtroom.\textsuperscript{12}

The second mention of gender in Dirks’s analysis came with the allegation that Hastings was involved in the sexual degradation of Indian princesses. Together with Richard Sheridan, Burke charged Hastings with ordering his armed troops into the sacred women’s quarters of the begums of Awadh. This act of “desecrating the shrine of Indian womanhood with mercenary soldiers”\textsuperscript{13} clearly was a violation of notions of both gender and morality: Hastings thus failed not only as a political leader, but as a gentleman too.

Dirks explains:

\begin{quote}
[T]his explicit language of sexual violation and violence was intended to present a gripping portrait of the rape of India, a literal as well as metaphorical condemnation of Hastings as a vicious man with neither scruple nor even a shred of moral concern. Burke thus assumed the mantle of universal morality against these threateningly stark and sexualized images, which evoked the horror, and the eroticized fascination, of an audience that had already been accustomed to descriptions of the East as feminine and, behind the veil of purity, deeply licentious.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

In using these images of sexual violence, Burke and Sheridan added spectacle to the impeachment trial. Yet Dirks’s assertion that Britons saw India and Britain in gendered terms is essential to understanding imperial history: “India itself was cast as feminine, in a way that dramatized its exoticism and difference, and rendered into the object of Britain’s protective, and patriarchal, benevolence. Burke’s rhetoric consistently highlighted the gendered, and sexualized, character of imperial scandal.”\textsuperscript{15} Rather than developing this statement, however, Dirks returns to the list of charges that Burke made

\textsuperscript{12} Dirks, Scandal of Empire, 111.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 112.
against Hastings. Using gender to understand the imperial process—that feminine colonies were things to be taken over in a process of masculine control—raises gendered issues of domination, submission, and conquest. Even though the scandal affords an opportunity to do so, Dirks refrains from providing a complete discussion of gender and empire.

Patriotism is another critical issue that brings up issues of gender: who could participate in forming and expressing it? The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a key time for British patriotism: the 1707 Act of Union led to the unification of all the nations of the island of Britain for the first time, creating a need to construct an identity for the new nation. Attempts to define and qualify patriotism are thus central to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British historiography. Matthew McCormack makes such an attempt in “Citizenship, Nationhood and Masculinity in the Affair of the Hanoverian Soldier, 1756,” published in The Historical Journal in 2006. He investigates how scandal contributed to reform in the militia, and how it “held out an alternative vision of an active, manly, and public-spirited citizenry, whose citizenship consisted of political participation and civilian defence.”

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surrounding Christopher William Shröder, a Hanoverian soldier in the British army. Shröder was stationed at the Coxheath military encampment in Kent when he traveled to nearby Maidstone to go shopping. After entering a store, he asked to see several silk handkerchiefs. Shröder left the store with eight handkerchiefs, even though he had only paid for six. The theft was probably an accident, but the clerk dragged the soldier before the local authorities nonetheless. From there, the scandal escalated until it reached the attention of the press and high military command. In analyzing it, McCormack takes a contextual approach, insisting that “if we are to understand why this event was of such symbolic importance and how Pitt and the patriots were able to raise and exploit ‘a clamour’ in the extra-parliamentary political nation, we also have to ask questions about the wider cultural history of the period.”

The “clamour” to which McCormack refers came most vocally from “country” commentators who “sought to use the Maidstone affair to diagnose wider social, political, and moral roots of the disasters of 1756, and also to prescribe a remedy.” So much of critics’ interest in the Maidstone affair was due to Shröder’s German heritage, and their anxiety underscored a sense of xenophobia: “The government’s policy of hiring foreign auxiliary troops was offensive to patriot politics in every conceivable respect, and the fact that the troops were German made them an especially easy target for their rhetoric.”

Part of eighteenth-century British patriotism included targeting all those who were deemed non-British. McCormack shows how the scandal can be used to read what

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19 Ibid., 978.
20 Ibid., 979.
patriotism meant to Britons in the eighteenth century, and who was included in that patriotism.

One of the many facets of patriotism was citizenship. A chief demand of being a good citizen was being a good patriot. As McCormack points out, ideas of citizenship and patriotism were linked to gender. Good citizens were meant to extol masculine virtues. “Country” values shaped notions of citizenship: “‘Patriots’ identified themselves with the nation at large and its manly ancient values, against the effeminate vice of the court and the newly moneyed, who were implicitly less indigenous.”

The presence of foreign troops, however, challenged the masculinity inherent in British citizenship. McCormack demonstrates this through several prints that display masculine Hessians interacting with effeminate British soldiers: “Satires on the Maidstone affair therefore suggested the presence of the foreign troops upset gender relations, by emasculating British men and subjecting their womenfolk to sexual danger. By contrast, civilian defence would restore the domestic order.” The presence of foreign troops on British soil made British men feel as though they were not fulfilling their civil duty of protecting their land, women, and family. This, in a sense, unmanned them. Militia reform was thus linked to the struggle to reclaim and reinstate masculinity in the British citizenry by taking ownership of the militia and purging it of an “emasculating” foreign influence. McCormack thus shows that Britain’s xenophobia was inextricably linked to patriotism and gender; eighteenth-century patriotism was fundamentally insecure when it came to gender roles.

22 Ibid., 991.
Gender anxieties in British society also surfaced during the Queen Caroline affair of 1820. Tamara Hunt shows that the common people overwhelmingly supported Caroline throughout the scandal. For them, “support of the queen often took the form of reviling the king and his minister, and revolution seemed to be in the air.”

Hunt points out that historians have mistakenly dismissed the scandal as unimportant, and argues that, “This was an event of profound cultural significance and was in some respects the first wide-spread popular expression of the moral standards that have come to be labeled ‘Victorian.’” Using a wealth of both written and visual sources, Hunt convincingly argues that Britons used the scandal to attack the monarchy, make a mockery of the king, and vent their frustrations over his immorality.

Indeed, the king’s morality seemed to interest Britons more than the queen’s. Tellingly, the attacks were directed mostly at the king himself, a clear indication that the public decided not to take his side in the matter. Hunt explains that this was a deliberate decision on the public’s part—the common people supported their foreign-born queen, despite the evidence against her. The public was especially critical of the king’s treatment of his wife: by questioning her virtue, George IV was not displaying gentlemanly traits. Hunt includes a number of satirical prints that captured public sentiment. In one such print, the king is depicted in a tussle with John Bull, who relentlessly hangs on to a pair of cuckold’s horns. The king appears desperate to put on the horns, and, “despite the fact that the cuckold was a universal figure of ridicule, the

24 Ibid., 698.
25 Ibid., 717.
The king is depicted as wanting this label in order to ride himself of his wife.\(^{26}\) The king’s willingness to do whatever it took to obtain his divorce became a central point in the public’s critique of his behavior. In analyzing a pro-Caroline pamphlet, Hunt notes the maternal, domestic rhetoric used to describe the queen, explicitly emphasizing her womanhood and “helpless” femininity. As Hunt explains, “This pamphlet plainly reflected a popular source of sympathy for the queen: her husband’s behavior had forced her to leave the traditional comforts of a woman—her home and child—having no legal or social recourse against him.”\(^{27}\) The trial was a domestic tragedy; it highlighted the king’s failure as a chivalrous husband. King George IV, in his inability to act morally and stand by his wife, failed as a gentleman. The public’s refusal to side with the king implies that it was holding George IV to a new moral standard.\(^{28}\) Attitudes toward the monarchy were being transformed: Britons demanded that their king be a moral figure.

The changing role of the monarchy is discussed by Linda Colley, who asserts that George III fundamentally transformed the institution. His reign encouraged the British people to expect a stable, responsible royal family that was a focus of public attention alongside the monarch.\(^{29}\) Additionally, celebrating monarchy became the core of civic ritual during George III’s reign, as it was “a way of celebrating the nation’s liberty.”\(^{30}\) Colley claims that George III consolidated this ceremonial monarchical power throughout the course of his reign; the monarchy was at the very center of British national liberty.

\(^{26}\) Hunt, “Morality and Monarchy in the Queen Caroline Affair,” 713.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 715.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 718.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 121.
The nation was thus inextricably linked to the monarch, and civic ritual became an expression of this merger.

David Cannadine, however, takes a vastly different approach. In his study of civic ritual, Cannadine argues that monarchs did not yet hold that much cultural authority. He points out that “the monarchy was neither impartial and above politics nor Olympian and above society, as it was later to become, but was actively part of both. And because both politics and society was quintessentially London-based, metropolitan activities, the ceremonial appeal of the monarchy was only further circumscribed.”31 Cannadine further states that monarchs who were unpopular did not head the nation in the same way as popular ones did; they were more leaders of elite society than the nation.32 He contests Colley in claiming that monarchs did not always consolidate power and serve as the symbol of the nation. The national character could be divorced from the reigning royal individual.

Scandal emerges here as a tool of reconciliation between two contrasting viewpoints. Both Colley and Cannadine ask the same fundamental question: what was the relationship between the monarch and the nation? In emphasizing gender, Hunt’s article brings together the differing approaches. She admits that civic ritual was crucial to the monarchy in the late Georgian period—but in the case of the Queen Caroline affair, that civic ritual was less ceremonial and more a critique of the king as it “checked” his advances by attacking his gentlemanly credentials. This is the same brand of civic

32 Ibid., 116.
engagement that “checked” the royal family in the Duke of York affair of 1809. The scandal also, however, upholds Colley’s assertions that George III brought a sense of familial responsibility and stability to the monarchy. As Hunt shows, George IV was criticized precisely because he made the royal family unstable by pursuing a divorce and failing as his wife’s gentlemanly caretaker. In using scandal, Hunt proves that the eighteenth-century British public expected its king to uphold defined gender roles. The Queen Caroline affair displays George IV as an exception to a rule that his father had established: though George III was very much the symbolic center of the nation, his son did not live by the same standards. The king had changed, his values had changed, and society itself had changed; and with it, so had the monarchy.

The Mary Anne Clarke affair thus fits into the context of conceptions of gender and the nation. Two historians have published recent scholarship on the scandal, Philip Harling and Anna Clark. Harling uses the Mary Anne Clarke affair to show how patriotism could be challenged. In examining the affair, he attempts to merge scandal into notions of patriotism in a time of war. He argues that Britons used the scandal to criticize and challenge the established political order:

British patriotism in the first decade of the nineteenth century was indeed consensual and widely diffused. But it is precisely for this reason that it is a deceptively loose analytical concept whose nuances in this decade need to be handled with care. For the York affair shows that the consensual patriotism which emphasized the benefits of Britain’s balanced constitution could be turned against the wishes of the monarch and his ministers even at the height of a popular war in defense of the existing order. Staunch supporters as well as critics of the status quo did not hesitate to invoke patriotism as a means of criticizing royalty when it
was thought to have neglected its duty to set a good moral example to the nation.\textsuperscript{33}

Harling studies the scandal in order to uncover notions of what patriotism meant and how it was used in the early nineteenth century.

Many Britons felt that it was their patriotic duty to chastise the Duke for his bad behavior. In criticizing him, they were proving their love of the nation by upholding its virtue and morality. The press lambasted the Duke with particular ferocity. In citing many examples of the pamphlets and news items that circulated at the time, Harling insists, “The continual lecturing to which York was subjected in the Commons and in the press showed that Britons also felt it their patriotic duty to chastise royalty when it set an example that was bad enough to compare with that set by the royal families who had paid for their indiscretions with their crowns.”\textsuperscript{34} In this way, Harling points out that Britons prided themselves in having the liberty to criticize the crown and to do it in a relatively civilized manner. Instead of staging a revolution or leading an uprising that might culminate in regicide, Britons channeled their anger into the popular press. The British people thus established their own system of checks and balances, one that was meant to preserve the nation by publicly criticizing its leaders. Harling’s treatment of the scandal shows that patriotism meant actively calling out leaders for their bad behavior, thereby upholding the morality of the nation.

Although Harling successfully explains the role the scandal played in challenging patriotism, he largely ignores gender. Harling’s male-dominated focus suggests that

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 976.
patriotism was something limited to the masculine sphere; however, he never explicitly explores this. His identification of the scandal as the “Duke of York affair” shows that his focus rests on the Duke and not on the woman who testified against him. Because a woman was a catalyst of the scandal, the opportunity exists to discuss how gender played into the construction and maintenance of patriotism in Great Britain during the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Mary Anne Clarke, as a woman acting in the public sphere, played a role in creating or challenging British patriotism.

In Scandal, Anna Clark uses case studies of scandals that occurred between 1760 and 1820 to chart attitudes toward politically charged issues and examines questions of who could be political, how the public consumed scandals, and the ways in which political and sexual scandals intersected. Clark insists that the personal was political: the private actions of public figures impacted their successes and failures, and private relationships were political acts in the private sphere. The idea of “independence,” an idea that preoccupied eighteenth-century thought, is a common thread that ties together many of the scandals. It was championed, questioned, or challenged by scandals and how the public reacted to them. Clark discusses gender issues in the context of an independence that contemporary women usually lacked. However, she draws a distinction between aristocratic and common women: though aristocratic women could become involved in the fringes of politics, their gains furthered only their own interests, not those of all women.

Women’s engagement with politics was thus possible only in certain forms. They could not run for office or even vote; instead, “great ladies wore ribbons and adopted
fashions in the colors of their parties, turning theater and social events into displays of political loyalty.”35 Aristocratic women acted within these designated roles—as proud sisters and wives of candidates and as hostesses of exclusive events—to support male political actors. Though they lacked legal independence, their station in life gave them the means to become active on the sidelines. “Petticoat influence” was a normal component of political culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.36

Clark thus focuses predominantly on gender and uses the Mary Anne Clarke affair to explore petticoat influence in action. Yet, while she acknowledges that the scandal “undermined the patriotic consensus that had seemed to unite Britons at a time of war,” her focus is on how the scandal impacted Britons’ relationship with their government.37 It is not on the re-definition of the patriotism it inspired. As Clark demonstrates, petticoat influence was a very real issue in early nineteenth-century society. Though she shows that a woman could impact patriotism, she does not discuss the extent to which Britons viewed patriotism in gendered terms. Her straightforward, political narrative also downplays the attitudes that the public held regarding the affair. She incorporates common Britons into her story not to analyze what the scandal meant about how they defined patriotism, but to present their relationship to a strained political system that was no longer working. Clark concludes, “As an individual woman, Mary Anne Clarke temporarily overcame the association of femininity with corruption by defying

36 Ibid., 8.
37 Ibid., 148.
This thesis will show that Clarke’s femininity was inextricably linked to the scandal; her critics used her femininity against her, while her supporters idealized it. In this critical way, then, Clarke could not overcome “the association of femininity with corruption” because gender played such an important role in how Britons conceptualized patriotism.

Both Harling and Clark see the Mary Anne Clarke affair as an expression of an increasingly fractured political consensus in early nineteenth-century Britain. However, these two interpretations do not tell the whole story in their analyses of Clarke as a female catalyst for patriotism. Harling’s interpretation does not take gender into account at all, while Clark’s uses gender solely in a political context and ignores its role in contemporary conceptions of patriotism. How did Clarke’s critics and defenders represent her to a public preoccupied with perceived threats to the nation, both foreign and domestic? This work re-imagines the Clarke affair as a specifically gendered expression of patriotism in the early nineteenth century. It will be argued that Mary Anne Clarke’s actions challenged contemporary notions about the role of women in the creation of patriotism.

Art historian Amelia Rauser’s approach to the Westminster election of 1784 offers a glimpse of what can be done with the Mary Anne Clarke affair. She argues that the Duchess of Devonshire was “caught between the representational modes of caricature and allegory. Neither mode was able to represent both a single, individualized woman and that woman’s effective presence in the public sphere. Instead, these political prints

38 Clark, Scandal, 176.
policing the masculine, middle-class nature of the new civic identity.”\(^{39}\) During the Westminster election, the Duchess canvassed on behalf of her friend, Charles James Fox. Though the Duchess acted in a manner both typical and becoming of an aristocratic woman in the late eighteenth century, Fox’s political opponent, William Pitt, and his camp accused her of giving kisses in exchange for votes. This allegation was, of course, scandalous. Rauser analyzes a number of prints depicting this incident and the Duchess’s participation in the election, and thus investigates what her perceived actions meant to an anxious populace and how they conceptualized gendered citizenship in two extremes: promiscuous caricature and virtuous allegory.

Both representational extremes de-humanized the Duchess and judged her actions as contrary to predominant notions of masculine citizenship. Prints that caricatured the Duchess sometimes showed her not only kissing eager voters, but also unmanning them. Rauser notes that, donning plumes and fox tails, “the Duchess is loaded down with phallic symbolism, while symbols of castration surround the squat and unsuspecting butchers,” in the form of axes and chopping blocks.\(^{40}\) This connects to anxieties about petticoat influence, a seemingly dangerous trend in which aristocratic women were becoming active in the public sphere. In representing the effeminate aristocracy of the Foxites, the Duchess’s powerful sexuality served as a “dangerous threat to the newly middle-class conception of Englishness.”\(^{41}\) Foxites also used her to garner support, but instead emphasized her virtue to combat negative representations. Thomas Rowlandson’s

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40 Ibid., 34-6.
41 Ibid., 36.
print *The Apotheosis of the Duchess* depicts a “translucent, evanescent,” and abstracted Duchess, buttressed by figures representing Truth and Virtue. As Rauser notes, this equally de-humanized, yet still positive, portrayal of the Duchess reminds the viewer that “the only apparent recourse for a public woman was to appear as bloodless and unreal as possible.”

Rauser’s article looks at the Westminster scandal through the lens of gender. Men and women ultimately had roles to fill; by accusing the Duchess of giving kisses for votes, her critics not only slandered her femininity, but also threatened masculine citizenship throughout the voting public. Rauser shows how both the Pitt and Fox camps captured men’s and women’s roles and public anxieties about them. Women were represented in limited ways: they could not be themselves, but rather only abstracted entities that were either scandalous or virtuous. At the same time, all political caricatures, in some way, abstract reality. Figures are never true depictions, but rather one-dimensional representations of people embroiled in scandal. Such is the case, too, with Mary Anne Clarke. Like the dual representations of the Duchess of Devonshire, Clarke’s representations were equally contentious. But just as the Duchess was made into the threat to or embodiment of citizenship, so Clarke was represented in terms of patriotism. Nonetheless, Rauser’s work serves as a model for what can be done in interpreting the print culture surrounding the Mary Anne Clarke affair.

How Mary Anne Clarke and the scandal were represented in the popular press reveals the ways in which Britons reconciled gender and patriotism. More than simply

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43 Ibid.
being salacious stories, scandals possess relevance for historians. Emerging from biographies, scandal studies are now coming into their own. Scandals allow historians to blend context with microhistories to produce scholarship focused on social and cultural history. Specifically, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British scandals were colored by notions of gender distinctions and roles. Scholars show through their treatment of these issues that gender was clearly prescribed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain; when individuals acted outside their gender roles—failing as a gentleman, unfulfilling a citizen’s masculine duty, disrespecting family values, and canvassing for an unrelated politician—scandal ensued. The case of Mary Anne Clarke is more complicated. Just as the Duchess of Devonshire was punished for pushing the conventions of female patriotism, so Clarke was sometimes reprimanded for stepping out of bounds. Just as frequently, however, she was credited with being a female champion of the people. The scandal was thus important because it brought attention to the gendered contours of British society.

Ultimately, scandals are worthy of scholarly attention because they represent the humanity of the past. To blunder is to be human. While history is full of successes—as echoed by the old idiom that winners write history—it is also full of failures. These are the reminders that people in centuries past once loved, gambled, won, and lost. There is nothing more human than that.
CHAPTER II

CALLS FOR REFORM:
REPRIMANDING THE BRITISH ARMY,
DEFENDING THE BRITISH NATION

I would ask whether it be possible that our army can prosper, that its spirit can succeed, or its character be advanced while such injustice is tolerated?
- Colonel Wardle, January 27, 1809

Prior to January of 1809, Colonel Gwyllym Wardle was all but unknown. To the men who made up the House of Commons, he was an undistinguished parliamentarian who won a seat for Okehampton after an equally undistinguished military career. A man more suited to the heavily timbered halls of a country manor than the marble pillars of the city, Wardle had a modest reputation as a jovial drinking companion, not a stirring rhetorician or shrewd politician.\(^4^4\) That all changed on January 27, 1809. Wardle stood before his friends and enemies, acquaintances and strangers, God and King on that mid-winter day and boldly declared that the Duke of York and the army he led were a sham. Outlining eight grievances, Wardle argued that corruption lay embedded within the army bureaucracy that was supposed to defend Britain from the French menace. A woman named Mary Anne Clarke, he claimed, was at the center of this scandal. He had recruited her to tell her story, to pull back the curtain to reveal the corruption that marked the Duke of York’s tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.

In his opening remarks to the Commons, Wardle acknowledged the difficulty that lay ahead, the precariousness of his position in accusing a member of the royal family of

\(^4^4\) Paul Berry, By Royal Appointment (London: Femina, 1970), 69.
corruption, of failing as a protector of the nation: “To stand forward the public accuser of a man so high in rank and so strong in influence as the Commander-in-Chief, may very naturally be deemed no less a bold than an arduous undertaking. But, however bold, however arduous it may be, being determined that no consideration of that nature shall ever induce any hesitation or wavering in the performance of my duty.” His motives, he claimed, were pure: “In the course which I am pursuing, I feel conscious of no motive but that of a desire to serve my country, and I am confident that none other can be fairly ascribed to me. The conviction of my mind is, and for some time has been, that unless the system of corruption that has so long prevailed in the military department be done away, this country may fall an easy prey to the enemy.” Wardle envisioned himself a patriot and saw his quest to wrest corruption from the brawny armed forces of Britain as a crusade. The process of buying and selling promotions rendered the entire establishment impure and unstable. More to the point, a Commander-in-Chief who allowed his mistress to involve herself in official military matters was not competent. His inability to control her was dangerous and consequently made the nation vulnerable—if commanders were not doing their jobs, then the British Army, the institution meant to defend Great Britain, was unstable. In a time when Britain was at war, such instability made the entire nation vulnerable.

Britain in the early nineteenth century was preoccupied with questions of political morality, of whether the nation’s leaders were running it properly, efficiently, and with a strong sense of what was right and wrong. Nothing terrified Britons more than the threat

46 Ibid.
of revolution, the chaotic, traumatic upheaval that had annihilated all systems of the nation in France—social, political, and economic—and led to the tyranny of Napoleon. The French Revolution succeeded in one key way: it struck fear into the hearts of Britons and upset their sense of what was rational, orderly civic engagement. But the fear caused by the French Revolution and its aftermath was not just psychological. As Napoleon and his army expanded an Empire that, at least in theory, represented the ideals of the Revolution, more and more kingdoms and empires fell to France’s power. A pamphlet that circulated at the turn of the nineteenth century, *Reflexions on the Invasion of Great-Britain by the French Armies…* (1803), urged the nation to prepare for an invasion and claimed, “We may possibly fear a second edition of the Norman conquest.”\(^47\) In listing the many strengths of the enemy, the anonymous author points out that French “officers have been raised solely by military merit,” something that could not be said of their British counterparts.\(^48\) Though chances of a French invasion of Britain drastically decreased after the Battle of Trafalgar, Britons still felt vulnerable to a French attack.

In the wake of the French Revolution, many politicians hoped to purge the British government and military hierarchy of corruption, so as to prevent the revolutionary spirit from crossing the English Channel and possessing the hearts and minds of British men and women. Ironically, men like Wardle were called radicals for their efforts—the very same word associated with revolutionary activity. Yet this radical, reforming spirit was intended to defend the nation, rather than undermine it. The British military at the turn of

\(^{47}\) *Reflexions on the Invasion of Great-Britain by the French Armies; or The Mode of Defence; and on the Useful Application of the National Levies* (London: Knott and Lloyd, 1803), 2.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 3-4.
the nineteenth century was all that stood between the British people and Napoleon. A manifestation of British patriotism, the military needed to be strong to ensure the safety of the general population and to protect the nation.

Going into the Napoleonic Wars, the British Army was often perceived as an inferior fighting force full of drunkards, thieves, and thugs. In describing a man “cut out by nature for a grenadier,” one parody teased “he’s five feet ten inches high; he shall box, wrestle, or dance the Cheshire round with any man in the country; he get’s [sic] drunk every Sabbath-day, and he beats his wife.”49 The army’s poor reputation, however, was not based solely on its brutish image, but also its failures. In the early nineteenth century the British Army was still licking its wounds after the embarrassing loss of the American colonies. As Andrew Kippis, clergymen-turn-political commentator, penned in The New Annual Register, Britain’s loss of her colonies was too “humiliating a truth” to swallow:

No event of the present war contributed so much to produce in men’s minds a conviction, that the American colonies could not be conquered by the arms of Great Britain, as the surrender of lord Cornwallis’s army […] But those, who had a sincere regard for the honour and interests of Great Britain, could not reflect, but with the utmost regret, that nearly one hundred millions of money should have been expended, and so many thousand valuable lives lost, in this unhappy contest; in a contest, which had produced nothing but the loss of our American colonies, an accumulation of the public debt, an enormous load of taxes, and a great degree of national dishonour; and which had afforded too much ground for the triumph and exultation of our most inveterate enemies.50

The British Army had failed to put down the rebellion in the colonies, creating a sense of “national dishonour” for the entire country.

50 Andrew Kinnis, The New Annual Register, or General Repository of History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1781 (London, 1782), 170-1.
Little had changed in the interim: Great Britain was unprepared for war in 1793.\textsuperscript{51} The Pitt government failed to foresee the large-scale impact of the French Revolution. As a result, the modestly-sized British Army was at a distinct disadvantage to France, which had harnessed the militaristic, radical fervor that accompanied revolution and transformed it into an offensive war to spread the ideals of liberty, equality, and brotherhood. The enthusiastic men who took up arms for France had something to fight for; the British, on the other hand, had to fight a defensive war. France’s \textit{levée en masse} of 1793 put it at an even greater advantage, since it ensured a large supply of men that the allied forces did not have. In Britain, a cornerstone of the nation’s government was a rejection of a large standing army, which was seen as a threat to individual rights and liberties; a strong standing army, after all, could be used against the people it was meant to protect when their actions were deemed too radical or rebellious. Consequently, Great Britain kept a small army in peacetime. With the mobilization of the armed forces beginning in 1793 came the urgent need to increase the size of the army. But this was difficult, since army wages were comparatively low and many potential recruits found work elsewhere.

The army did not compete solely with other employers; it also had to compete with other British military bodies. Great Britain, island-nation that it was, had a particular fondness for the Royal Navy, an affection that dates from the Seven Years’ War and grew over the course of the Napoleonic Wars. With Admiral Lord Nelson as the architect of

\textsuperscript{51} In reaction to the execution of King Louis XVI, Great Britain joined Austria, Prussia, Spain, Sardinia, and Naples in 1793 to form the First Coalition, a military and political alliance that attempted to contain and destroy the spread of the French Revolution.
the most notable victories and his death a boon to war-time patriotism, Britons high and low united under “the cult of Nelson [that] proved a more compelling symbol of national unity than the cult of George III.” More than being an icon that united Britons, Nelson and the navy he led became symbols of “masculinist patriotism” that romanticized manly virtues like “independence, fortitude, courage, daring, resourcefulness and paternalistic duty.” The navy’s strength as a national symbol can be measured by the popularity of patriotic songs like “Rule, Britannia.” The song insinuated that, should Britain “rule the waves” and maintain a strong, glorious navy, “Britons never will be slaves.” Indeed, the navy became the primary vessel for patriotism, and, according to Timothy Jenks, “naval knowledge constitute[d] a kind of patriotic catechism” wherein it embodied “collective belonging.” The Royal Navy became the crown jewel of the British armed forces, overshadowing the army in popularity since it held such a privileged patriotic position in the national imagination.

Despite these obstacles, the army took in a staggering amount of recruits over the course of the French and Napoleonic Wars. It expanded from 40,000 men in 1793 to over 250,000 in 1813, making one out of every twenty-five Britons part of the service. This rapid growth necessitated a new promotion system to maintain an officer class. As it had for decades, the system promoted the wealthy, sometimes at the expense of the talented.

This was not entirely detrimental: the practice of selling commissions was a source of income for the army and helped to finance the wars against France.\(^{56}\) But by selling commissions without attention to experience or readiness, the army at times sacrificed preparedness for battle. Rees Howell Gronow, a socialite and army captain who saw action at Quatre Bas and Waterloo, recalled:

> I joined [the army] in February 1813, and cannot but recollect with astonishment how limited and imperfect was the instruction which an officer received at that time: he absolutely entered the army without any military education whatever. We were so defective in our drill, even after we had passed out of the hands of the sergeant, that the excellence of our non-commissioned officers alone prevented us from meeting with the most fatal disasters in the face of the enemy. Physical force and our bull-dog energy carried many a hard-fought field.\(^{57}\)

Gronow’s assessment credits the resolve of the British officers, not their training. Since new officers were constantly in demand—thanks, in part, to high casualty rates—quantity ultimately won out over quality.

This was the army that the Duke of York inherited in 1795 when he succeeded Lord Amherst as Commander-in-Chief. The Duke began his army career in 1780 as a colonel; he quickly worked his way through the chain of promotion until he found himself commanding the British Army. Though he lacked genius as a commander, the Duke was an able administrator. He recognized the need for army reform after witnessing too many incompetent men leading regiments. As part of his reforms, the Duke increased the number of free commissions in the army, so as to dissuade men from purchasing ranks they could obtain through merit. He also strengthened the time requirements for


specific ranks; a man who sought promotion to a captaincy, for example, had to serve at least six years. The Duke recognized the need for better officer training and was instrumental in establishing a Royal Military College, an institution that would eventually evolve into the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst.

Yet these improvements did not shield him from attacks from other, more radical reformers. To them, the Duke’s reforms were simply not enough. Though strict limits were in place for men to obtain promotions, some commissions were still sold to men already in the army system. As one disgruntled Briton argued, this system was detrimental to British interests; he pointed out that in France, “merit is the only ladder to promotion.” This suggested that the French Army was better prepared and more experienced than Britain’s, putting the French at a distinct, perhaps insurmountable, advantage. Even more to the point, the Duke did not keep a close watch on the promotions. After all, the Duke’s own mistress was selling commissions. This, above all else, the reformers could not stomach; being both unfair and immoral, it was doubly corrupt. The Duke of York was failing as a reformer for falling prey to the schemes of a married woman. The reformers who wanted to do away with the commission system entirely were the most radical members of Parliament. In actuality, the commission system would continue to shape the British Army until the Cardwell Reforms outright abolished it in 1870.59

59 Secretary of State for War, Edward Cardwell, initiated a series of reforms between 1868 and 1874 that fundamentally changed the British Army. Among the reforms, Cardwell ended flogging as a form of punishment, withdrew British troops from self-governing colonies, and shortened enlistment terms. A system of merit-based promotion replaced the practice of selling commissions.
Moral undertones colored the British reform movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Influenced by the rise of religious sects like the Quakers and Methodists, some parliamentarians took up the cause of reform out of spiritual zeal. These reformers witnessed the vagrancy that existed in Britain—excessive drinking! immoral gambling! unapologetic adultery!—with horror, interpreting it as a threat to the moral decency of society and, by extension, the virtue of the nation. Eradicating sin became a political crusade. William Wilberforce, perhaps the most famous of these evangelical reformers, led attempts to purify the nation’s soul. Thanks to his efforts, the Proclamation for the Discouragement of Vice was made in 1787 and the Society for the Suppression of Vice was established in 1802. Both sought to root out the immorality that reformers perceived to exist in British society. One of the most significant successes of this movement was the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire. Slavery was sinful: an empire that allowed an individual to legally possess the body of another individual undermined the revered ideologies of liberty that Britons held so dear in their patriotic hearts. Though the Slave Trade Act did not end slavery outright, it was an important step in ending the system. Sin on the personal level—trading in human flesh—became legally immoral.

These reforming crusaders could not resist linking the state of the British Army with its Commander-in-Chief’s private life. Keeping a married woman as a mistress was too egregious a sin to ignore, and they did not hide their criticism. Wilberforce was an active participant in the inquiry against the Duke of York. In a letter written to Lord Muncaster shortly before the House voted on the fate of the Commander-in-Chief,
Wilberforce confessed his unease with the immorality that had infected the Duke. “If we believe the Bible,” he began, “we must believe that the vices of the great, both directly and consequentially, call down the judgments of the Almighty.”

God, the great equalizer, judged all men by their sin without regard to rank or position.

But Wardle, the country-gentleman-turned-parliamentarian-turned-reformer, did not share the same motives as these moral radicals. To Wardle, the matter was intensely personal. The prosecutor had served as a dragoon in Ireland with Wynn’s Lambs, a British Light Dragoon troop organized by Sir Watkin Williams Wynn. Wardle saw action at Vinegar Hill during the uprising of the United Irishmen, but his troop was disbanded at the Peace of Amiens. His desire to be incorporated into the regular army never came to fruition. Instead, Wardle retired from military service. His experience as a dragoon and his failure to be accepted in the regular army might have fostered a sense of grievance. Wardle went looking for glory, rank, and success in the military, but found only disappointment.

The reform movement at the turn of the nineteenth century received a boost as the struggling elite class attempted to redefine itself within an increasingly suspicious, middle-class-dominant society. Following in the Wilkite tradition of the 1760s, critics like Thomas Paine, William Cobbett, and John Wade publicly questioned the legitimacy of the elites and deemed them irrelevant to a modern, industrializing Great Britain.

According to Linda Colley, to stay relevant, elites had to “demonstrate to themselves as

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well as to others that they were authentically and enthusiastically British” and to “assert their rightful place as patriots.”62 One critical way that these patricians succeeded was by taking ownership of the maintenance and protection of British culture: just as their medieval ancestors had protected England by pledging service to the king, so these Georgian patricians made themselves relevant by pledging themselves to British patriotism and defending the honor of the nation. Wardle could call himself a patriot since he fit into these notions of patrician patriotism at a time of war. He was defending the nation from above, rooting out corruption so as to make the nation safe and secure.

At the same time, Mary Anne Clarke’s actions, and, by extension, the Duke of York’s, challenged how elites attempted to be relevant to the nation as military leaders. Aristocrats had long been associated with military leadership: their main function as fighters went back to at least the middle ages, when they were ordered into the bellatore class. By the eighteenth century, “an unprecedented proportion” of elites found opportunities in the military, especially younger sons of powerful families.63 As Linda Colley has shown, serving in the military gave elites “a job and, more important, a purpose, an opportunity to carry out what they had been trained to do since childhood: ride horses, fire guns, exercise their undoubted physical courage and tell other people what to do.”64 It is notable that none of the men who sought promotions through Mary Anne Clarke was an elite. Thus, by offering a way for non-elites to more easily and

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63 Ibid., 183.
64 Ibid., 178.
affordably ascend the military hierarchy, Clarke challenged the aristocracy’s hegemony over elite military life, and this, in turn, challenged their relevance.

The bigger concern for the Duke’s critics was that he allowed his mistress to control something outside of the traditional female realm: the scandal was thus an expression of growing anxieties about female participation in politics. Women at the turn of the nineteenth century could not act publicly in the same ways that their male counterparts could. Despite this, elite women in particular found ways to assert themselves and their patriotism. Though they could not run for office, they could canvass for male members of their families. As Judith Lewis notes, “The presence of upper-class women in the nation’s political system was a fact of life perfectly familiar to eighteenth-century Britons.”65 These women were able to carve out small roles for themselves in the political culture of late-Georgian Britain. These roles were accepted because they mirrored how women could be involved in the political culture in a way that supported estates and the family economy.66 Whereas men could be elected to office or lead the nation, women could merely support their husbands, brothers, and sons in their public endeavors.

This compartmentalized definition of gender activity—men as actors, women as supporters—advocated a limited “petticoat influence”—in other words, women contributing to the political culture of Great Britain in small, clearly defined ways. Though an acceptable component of political life when kept within limits, petticoat

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65 Judith S. Lewis, Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.
66 Ibid.
influence could become too great; critics could see it as women overstepping their bounds, stepping out of their petticoats, and threatening the status quo that defined male and female roles. Petticoat influence thus caused anxiety, because it provided women a means to be political in limited ways, thereby undermining masculine responsibilities.

Perhaps the most famous practitioner of petticoat influence in the late eighteenth century was the Duchess of Devonshire. Born into the famed Spencer family and married into the illustrious Cavendishes, the Duchess led a privileged life. As a fashion trendsetter, party-goer, and confidante to men ranging from the Prince of Wales to playwright Richard Sheridan, she more than lived up to her reputation as a fixture of London high society. During the crucial Westminster election of 1784, when the aloof William Pitt the Younger faced off against the bombastic Charles James Fox, the Duchess gave her support in the only way she could: she tirelessly canvassed for Fox, lending her star quality to his campaign. Pitt’s supporters targeted the Duchess and launched a series of gender-based attacks against her. They labeled her an adulterer, prostitute, and kept woman. This vehement reaction to the Duchess was atypical in a culture that generally accepted female canvassing. The Duchess was in all likelihood targeted for a number of different reasons, but it cannot be ignored that the Westminster district was the most democratic one in London, if not all Britain: this was not an elite part of the city, but one that was staunchly middle-class, filled with hardworking, salt-of-the-earth male voters. In this way, what affronted critics was that the Duchess of Devonshire, blue-blooded as she was, lowered herself to consort with such company. According to Judith Lewis, “It was not the fact of the canvassing that seemed indecent,
but the way it was done. Standards of decency were being contested: standards of
decency that conveyed political meaning in a particular political context.67 Female
political participation was tolerated up to a point; a proscribed line could not be crossed.
If women crossed it, like the Duchess, they would be slandered.

A similar issue can be observed in army life. Women had a very defined—and
limited—role in the army. Officially, women operated within the background. They
served and supported Great Britain by serving and supporting soldiers and officers,
usually as camp followers. Their presence was often seen more as a nuisance than a
comfort to the army bureaucracy.68 Soldiers were discouraged from marrying while they
were enlisted. Officers had to receive special permission to marry, and additional
permission to have their wives live with them in the barracks or accompany them
overseas. Though women could not fight, they could dress their husbands for battle,
serving in the same domestic capacity they would have outside the military. In Vanity
Fair, William Makepeace Thackeray’s novel about Regency society, army wives are
depicted as vapid and superficial, more interested in the harrowing spectacle of military
life than its sobering realities.69 Other female camp followers were not quite as
respectable—prostitutes followed the soldiers at home and abroad, eager for business

67 Judith S. Lewis, “1784 and All That: Aristocratic Women and Electoral Politics,” in Women, Privilege,
and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present, ed. Amanda Vickery (Stanford, CA: Stanford University
68 For a discussion of women and the army, see Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele, and Jane Rendall, eds.
Gender, War, and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1830 (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan,
2010); Richard Holmes, Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket (New York: W.W.
69 In one of the most memorable scenes, Thackeray recreates the Duchess of Richmond’s famous ball on
the eve of the Battle of Quatre Bras. When trumpets announce battle, the event quickly breaks up, and all
the dashing young officers bid farewell to loved ones and make haste for war. The glamour and elegance of
the ball is put in sharp contrast with the realities of the battlefield, where scores of young men will lose
their lives.
from equally eager soldiers. The presence of prostitutes was not just a moral matter, but a health issue. Unchecked sexuality in the British Army—men sharing partners, prostitutes taking on numerous clients—led to the rise and recurrence of venereal diseases.  

Women were confined to the extremes of army life since they could interact with the military as only wives or prostitutes, not as participants in their own right.

Mary Anne Clarke defied convention by serving in a completely unprecedented capacity: she claimed to have taken over the Duke of York’s professional duties and directed the fate of soldiers and officers. Like the Duchess of Devonshire who was slandered for overstepping her bounds, Clarke was seen as having overstepped her bounds. This was petticoat influence in the most extreme, corrupt form. Here was a woman—a mistress, no less—who exerted influence and found ways to be powerful unbecoming of a lady. Her influence, Wardle claimed in his opening remarks to the House, extended to all realms of military life. As he explained, “Mrs. Clarke, in addition to promotions in the army, to exchanges, and appointments on the staff possessed the power of augmenting the military force of the country.” It was a two-way street: if women could navigate their way in the masculine realm, what was to stop men from being dragged into the feminine realm? When women like Clarke became too involved with matters that society dictated were beyond them, they stoked anxiety by demonstrating that “the boundaries separating men and women were, in fact, unstable and

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70 The British government eventually took an active role in the prevention of venereal diseases in the military. Beginning in 1864, Parliament passed a series of Contagious Diseases Acts that sought to stop the spread of venereal disease among British soldiers. Prostitutes were subject to invasive screenings, and any woman—not man—found to be infected with a disease would be quarantined in a hospital until cured. The injustice of the acts attracted condemnation from Victorian social reformers and feminists, most notably Josephine Butler.

71 Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 1st ser., vol. 12 (January 27, 1809), col. 186.
becoming more so.” This, above all else, was the crux of the issue: that the Duke allowed a woman to take control of an official institution to which she had no right of claim. Clarke’s inclusion in the trial was thus essential: Wardle needed her to show how incompetent the Duke had become in disrespecting his duties, so much that his own mistress could sell promotions as a means of financial support.

When he stood before his peers in the House of Commons that mid-winter day, Wardle clearly articulated his belief: that the British Army was wrought with corruption. Men who deserved to be promoted were overlooked in favor of men with deep pockets. Mary Anne Clarke and her bribery ring, Wardle claimed, were prime, irrefutable evidence that the system of unregulated army promotions had, quite simply, run amuck. He was also dead clear on his expectations: the investigation, he argued, should culminate in the removal of the Duke of York from the office of Commander-in-Chief of the army. *Someone* had to be held responsible for the rampant corruption. Wardle urged the House of Commons to establish a committee to examine his charges against the Duke. Wardle’s charges were plentiful. He cited specific examples and corresponding witnesses that would corroborate his allegations and prove the Duke’s failure as Commander-in-Chief.

Each allegation demonstrated the extent to which Mary Anne Clarke held unofficial power in the British Army. The first instance of corruption was the promotion of Captain Tonyn, whom Wardle claimed received a majority thanks to Clarke’s

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influence, for which he paid only £500 instead of the regulated £1,100.  

The next example was a case of exchange: Clarke had secured a swap of posts between Lieutenant-Colonel Brooke and Lieutenant-Colonel Knight. A third example was Major John Shaw, who received an appointment as Deputy Barrack Master of the Cape of Good Hope, demonstrating that Clarke’s influence “extended to appointment on the staff of the army.” Wardle attributed two final examples—Colonel French who secured a position levying and Captain Maling who enjoyed a quick succession of promotions—to the influence of Mary Anne Clarke. In all of these allegations, Wardle never admonished the soldiers involved with bribery. On the contrary, he credited some of the men with being fine soldiers. Of Captain Tonyn, Wardle insisted, “I understand [him] to be an officer of merit, and in alluding to him upon this occasion, I beg it to be understood that I mean no reflection whatever upon his character.” Wardle’s issue was not with the individual soldiers, but with the flawed system that somehow failed either them or the country. Though Captain Tonyn may have deserved a promotion, the existing bureaucracy did not reward his behavior; thus, he was forced to look outside the system, and so turned to Clarke. Just as Wardle refrained from criticizing some soldiers, so he withheld judgment on Mary Anne Clarke herself. Wardle’s criticisms were firmly anchored to the existing bureaucratic system, not necessarily those who used bribery and cunning to defy it.

In explaining the case of exchanges between Lieutenant-Colonels Brooke and Knight, Wardle provided a counter-example of a tragic, failed attempted exchange that

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74 Ibid., col. 184.
75 Ibid., col. 181.
got caught up in the webs of bureaucracy. Majors Macdonald and Sinclair were meant to be stationed in the West Indies and England, respectively. Macdonald applied to remain in England on account of his ill health, and Sinclair hoped to be sent to the West Indies for similar reasons. These “two meritorious officers” applied for an exchange and “sought their object by every honourable means.” The exchange never came through: Macdonald was sent to the West Indies, where he succumbed to the climate, and Sinclair died within a few months. Wardle told this tale to relate the inefficiency of the current systems of bureaucracy. The system failed Macdonald and Sinclair, and they paid for it with their lives. Since the system did not work, what other choice did men have but to seek promotion and exchange through bribery?

Wardle’s opening remarks to the House of Commons initiated a crusade to eradicate corruption from the British Army, to cleanse the office of Commander-in-Chief so that the virtue of the nation could be restored. This lofty goal was both personal and patriotic in nature. It linked private deeds with public concerns and articulated an expectation of morality in both spheres. Wardle and his fellow reformers had the freedom to call out their leader on bad behavior. But their calls for reform could not have been possible had it not been for the audacity of one woman. Mary Anne Clarke herself was the crucial component of the prosecution. Captain Gronow even claimed that Clarke’s actions were instrumental in creating a better-equipped army. Although the officer class was still poorly trained when he received his commission in 1813, it was better off than it had been before 1809, and he credits Mary Anne Clarke herself for producing “more effect on the English Army, than all the artillery of the enemy directed against the Duke
of York when commanding in Holland.” Reform, Gronow believed, paid off, and it came in the form of a petite woman, “remarkable for her beauty and her fascinations.” Without her story and allegations—really, without her—the investigation could not happen. Wardle and his cohorts—the reformers who sought to correct a grievous wrong—were entirely dependent on the whims of a woman to save the soul of Britain.

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76 Gronow, Reminiscences of Captain Gronow, 35.
77 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

PRIDE AND PROTECTION:
IMAGES OF THE GOOD WOMAN

Whatever might be the character, the morals, or the line of life pursued by the witness who had been before the House, there was a certain deference and respect due to the sex which should not be violated on any occasion.

- House of Commons Minutes, February 9, 1809

Mary Anne Clarke was called to appear before the House of Commons on February 1, 1809. Dressed “as if she were going out to an evening party” in a blue silk gown with white trim and a matching white muff, she meant to make an impression. Clarke was the third of six witnesses that day—sandwiched between doctors, baronets, and officers—yet underwent the longest examination and gave the most memorable testimony. Her answers were articulate, witty, and, at times, subversively sarcastic—on more than one occasion, she incited laughter from her captive audience and drew ire from the Chairman of the House, who ordered her to answer questions directly. To Mary Anne Clarke, this was just another performance in which she put her talents and skills to good use. She convincingly played a part that day: she was the entrancing female who brought a feminizing effect to the masculine House of Commons.

Over the course of the two hours that Clarke stood before the House, she made herself into a victor rather than a victim by operating within a gendered framework of assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes that separated and defined men and women’s

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78 The Morning Post, February 2, 1809.
interactions with one another. She charmed the men who sat riveted before her, out-witting them with every turn, and created an intimacy with them by letting them in on her jokes, allowing them to come to her defense when necessary, and making light of the questions instead of taking them too seriously. In short, she made herself non-threatening and transformed the House of Commons into a drawing room.

Indeed, the men appeared to respond to her flamboyant femininity. Clarke was summoned to the House again on February 7, 1809, but she had to wait several hours before the members were ready to question her. When the House finally called her in, Clarke reluctantly entered the room and, after requesting a chair, claimed, “I feel myself so very unwell, and so very much fatigued, that it is impossible for me to be examined this evening; I have been waiting here eight hours, and I am quite exhausted with the fatigue; my feelings have been very much harassed during the time.” The House obliged her, and released her from questioning for the remainder of the evening. When some members insinuated that they should lock her up for the night, lest she consult and scheme with her fellow witnesses, other, more gallant members leapt to her defense. Samuel Whitbread scolded such ungentlemanly insinuations and asked his colleagues “whether a female, in attendance for eight hours, and of course suffering much suspense, had not some claim upon the generous feelings of the house, without any reference to the immediate person to whom that feeling was extended?” Clarke thus was not just another witness called before the House; she was a female witness, one whose sex afforded her a unique position.

79 *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 12 (February 7, 1809), col. 436.
80 Ibid., cols. 437-8.
Clarke’s gender was inextricably connected not only to the House proceedings, but also to her representations within the popular press. Her supporters circulated a large body of material that defended and celebrated her as both a wronged woman and virtuous savior. These images operated within a clear rhetorical framework, linking Clarke to the cult of virtuous womanhood that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, was becoming increasingly relevant to British patriotism. By embodying pure femininity and motherhood that supported the nation, women upheld a “gender-specific model of sexual virtue.”81 In the early nineteenth century, women were legitimate, though restricted, members of the political power structure: political power was akin to property holdings, and through their husbands women were part of the elite property-holding strata. Just as inheritance laws largely prohibited women from inheriting property, however, so the British legal landscape prohibited women from having equal political rights with men. But if women could not be political actors, they could be patriotic ones. As patriotism disseminated from the elites through religion, warfare, and a strengthened monarchy, Britons had to decide how women, who had traditionally operated within the private sphere, would fit into these fledgling ideals. In this way, women carved out a role for themselves in national life: women could be patriots by lending their long-held domestic roles to the nation at large, caring for the nation just as they were caring for their families.82

82 For a discussion on the role elite women played in maintaining patriotism, see Judith S. Lewis, Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain (New York: Routledge, 2003). For more on how women legitimating their involvement in patriotism by imagining it as an extension of
The Mary Anne Clarke affair demonstrates the extent to which women could participate in patriotism. Indeed, just as Colonel Gwyllym Wardle thought of himself as a patriot for instigating an investigation that could eradicate corruption from the British Army, purify the nation, and strengthen it at a particularly vulnerable time, many Britons saw Mary Anne Clarke as a patriot, too, one who represented a spirit of truth and righteousness in the face of dishonesty. Clarke operated in a context of both expanding opportunities for women to be patriotic and increasingly compartmentalized definitions of male and female patriotism. The scandal happened in a distinct, complex context: with the mobilization of the army came the mobilization of society, including women. As more and more women became involved in the war effort, Britons re-defined the ways they could participate in the maintenance of patriotism and, by extension, the protection of the nation. Strong patriotism was tied to strong virtue: public actors were supposed to act honorably by upholding the differing responsibilities of their gender, garnering support from the common people, and defending truth at all costs. As we will see, patriotism was both complex and gendered, a powerful concept that had a profound impact on a society managing a war.

Female patriotism in Great Britain did not begin with the French and Napoleonic Wars. As discussed in Chapter II, elite women had found their own ways of championing patriotism in the preceding decades. Though women could neither hold office nor vote for men to do so, they could become politically active on the sideline of campaigns. They

canvassed for brothers, fathers, and husbands by carrying banners, hosting parties, and turning social events into theatres of political jockeying. Many observers, however, complained about this “petticoat influence,” demonstrating how insecure, unstable, and gendered definitions of patriotism were.

Political activity was stratified by class as well as gender. Elite women were the main participants in this developing political activism since they came from wealthy, landed families, yet they did not have a monopoly on maintaining and expressing patriotism. The war with France gave even middle-class British women the opportunity to exercise and express the patriotism that elite women had been developing over the course of the eighteenth century. One critical way that they served their country was by supporting and encouraging their men. Since women were fixtures of the private world, their influence could and often did incite men to go to war when necessary. Kathleen Wilson notes how “patriotic women had to promote the stoicism and love of country within the home that produced a manly and intrepid fighting service at the front.”

Women also played a crucial role in supporting men on the home front by sewing clothes for a growing army and raising money through subscriptions. Linda Colley concludes that these were “acceptable” contributions to the war effort, since they were extensions of women’s domestic duties. She also alleges, however, that this trend “represented the thin end of a far more radical wedge. By extending their solicitude to the nation’s armed forces, men who were not in the main related to them by blood or marriage, women

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84 One of the most important contributions of female patriotism at this time is evidenced in the Betsy Ross myth. Though historians have questioned Ross’s role in creating the American flag, the fact that a woman would receive credit is telling.
demonstrated that their domestic virtues possessed a public as well as a private relevance.”

In a time preoccupied with questions of civic virtue and heightened patriotism, the nation united under a common banner, giving women new opportunities to act publicly.

One of the most notable and widely discussed proponents of this kind of female activism was Hannah More. A staunchly conservative writer, More upheld the existing social and gender order rather than challenged it. In her *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-1797), More encouraged common Britons to come to the defense of their nation. In one story, “The Servant Man Turned Soldier,” More hoped to transform the revolutionary fervor that gripped the lower classes into ardent patriotism. She wrote that William, the title character, “had now and then happened to hear from the accidental talk of the soldiers, that those who served the great family he had lived with, were slaves to their tyranny and vices, had also heard, in the same casual manner, that the service of the King was perfect freedom.” By emphasizing that the act of pledging service to the Crown was the surest way to escape tyranny, More acted as an agent of British patriotism.

Other, more radical women were also preoccupied with issues of patriotism. Mary Wollstonecraft used female patriotism as a justification for British women’s rights in the wake of the French Revolution. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft argued that women should receive the same rights to education as men, especially since women were the managers of domestic life. “If children are to be

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educated to understand the true principle of patriotism,” she wrote, “their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations.” Wollstonecraft hoped to legitimize women’s rights by highlighting their crucial role in sustaining patriotism and, by extension, the British nation. But even for her, female patriotism was something that occurred within, rather than outside of, the home.

British female patriotism at the turn of the nineteenth century thus celebrated, rather than challenged, existing gender notions and divisions. The wars with France and the patriotism that it inspired allowed women to extend their private roles and responsibilities into the public sphere, transforming the nation into a large-scale family to which they tended. In this way, Britons defined patriotism in gendered terms: though women could become active patriots, their activity took place in limited, defined contexts. British society was changing throughout the course of the eighteenth century, aided by awakening Enlightenment ideology, expanding industrialization, and growing consumer markets, and exacerbated by the French wars.

Since women were able to extend private duties into the public sphere and gender roles were in flux during a time of war, the “separate spheres” paradigm of gender history becomes unstable in this context. Recent historical scholarship has been re-thinking separate spheres ideology, which dictates that men’s and women’s lives were irreconcilably segregated, and claiming that women found ways to carve out public roles.

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for themselves. 88 Between 1780 and 1850, “existing expectations about the proper roles
of men and women were re-worked with a significantly different emphasis” and lines
between “enterprise, family, home, masculinity and femininity were re-drawn,
negotiated, reformed and reinstalled.”89 Though there were lines that they could not
cross, women were becoming more patriotic and able to express this newfound
patriotism. These expressions, however, were limited to activities that they performed
domestically. A woman’s place was in the home managing, upholding, and preserving
family life, while a man’s place was outside of it, protecting and defending. Tied to these
prescribed roles was an unwritten contract of a division of labor in the maintenance of
family life. This “contractual” notion of gender spheres acknowledged that the man was
the head of the family in the public sphere, while woman was the embodiment of virtue
in the private one. This meant that virtue, a feminine value, came from the woman, not
the man. 90 Women were seen as vessels of virtue, and, as Kathleen Wilson notes, their
“bodies served as symbols of national virtue, superiority and martial potency.”91 Though
these limits existed, women used them “to assert their important role in British society
and to protect their rights such as they were.”92

88 For more on “separate spheres,” see: Lenore Davidoff, Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on
Gender and Class (New York: Routledge, 1995); Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, eds., Gender in
Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities (New York: Longman, 1997);
Vivien Jones, ed., Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity (New York: Routledge,
1990); Anna Mellor, Mothers of the Nation: Women’s Political Writing in England 1780-1830
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Amanda Vickery, “From Golden Age to Separate
Spheres? A Review of the Category and Chronology of English Women’s History,” Historical Journal 36,
89 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class
90 Colley, Britons, 264-74.
91 Wilson, The Island Race, 19.
92 Colley, Britons, 263.
The importance that British society placed on family life meant that at the heart of a strong, virtuous nation was a strong, virtuous family. As the first household of the nation, George III, his wife, and twelve children were the embodiment of British family life. In this way, the private values of strong family life extended into the public sphere and transformed it into a civic virtue. George III constructed a cult of monarchy around himself, built primarily on his role as father to the nation. By the 1780s the king had transformed himself into “Farmer George,” a symbol of stability for the people of Great Britain. At a time when France was beheading its king and queen for supposed crimes against the people, George III developed an intimacy with his subjects that stemmed from a sense of national domesticity and middle-class values. The growing eighteenth-century consumer culture extended to the monarchy as well: plates, bells, and bowls with the royal family’s image stamped on it were brought into homes, allowing the king into domestic spaces in an unprecedented way. As Linda Colley has shown, due to its increasing relationship with the royal family, the British public expected royals to provide a “steady background of domestic responsibility and, preferably, domestic bliss.” So successful was George III that Britons began to associate his domestic tastes with “middle-class enthusiasm,” a trait that would distance the royal family from the growing unpopularity of their elite counterparts. This crucial shift in the royal family’s role—as a relatable unit that personified the domestic virtues of its middle-class

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93 King George III and Queen Charlotte actually had fifteen children, only twelve of whom survived into adulthood. Nonetheless, twelve out of fifteen children was a remarkable number, given the child mortality rates of the time.


subjects—ensured its popularity and longevity: as long as it championed the values of its people and stood as a bulwark for domestic virtue, it would persevere.

The royal family’s championing of domestic virtue was challenged during the Queen Caroline affair of 1820. George IV was very vocal about his dislike for his German wife, and the two lived separate lives; so separate that Caroline lived abroad during most of their marriage. Their relationship deteriorated further after the unexpected death of their only child Princess Charlotte in 1817. In 1820, George sought a divorce from Caroline on the grounds of adultery. The public backlash was fierce, and Britons high and low sided with their foreign-born queen instead of their king. The outcry stemmed from notions of gender responsibility: as the king’s husband, he was also supposed to serve as her protector. By leveling attacks against her and questioning her fidelity, George IV failed in this role. As Tamara Hunt points out, “By the time George IV came to the throne, many people had ceased to look to the Crown for political initiative, and the furor over the Queen Caroline affair shows that the public expected its sovereign to exercise a different type of power: moral leadership.”

The British public especially expected the son of their revered “Farmer George” to pick up where his father left off and embody domestic virtue. They expected him to be an ideal husband to his wife, not the kind of man who would shirk his marital responsibilities and cast her off on

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96 Charlotte was only nineteen at the time of her death; she died in childbirth, and her newborn baby followed shortly thereafter. Charlotte was an incredibly well liked young royal and her perceived love-marriage to Leopold of Belgium, the future King of Belgium, only increased her popularity. Since she had been the sole heir to the throne, her death set into motion a scramble amongst George’s brothers to produce legitimate heirs of their own. Ultimately, the Duke of Kent would succeed: his daughter, who was born in 1819, would ascend the throne as Queen Victoria in 1837.

a whim. The line between public and private had never been so breached; the royal family was supposed to function not as some remote icon of power and majesty, but rather as an instructive example of domestic virtue and responsibility.

Queen Caroline’s most vocal, active supporters were women. They took to the streets and protested the trial en masse, holding their king accountable for his bad behavior. Just as women had found a way to be active patriots in supporting the war effort between 1793 and 1815, so too did they take an active role in checking the power of their king and upholding their standard of gender responsibility. By asserting a sense of morality that they expected their royal family to honor, women had the opportunity to take action by defending the moral virtues that were meant to protect and define them within British society.

In some ways, the Mary Anne Clarke affair and the public support that Clarke found from the common people of Great Britain was a precursor of the outcry in favor of Queen Caroline. One of the chief criticisms leveled against the Duke of York was that he had abandoned Mary Anne Clarke, and in doing so failed as her protector, thus breaking the gendered contract that defined male-female relationships both privately and publicly. Both Clarke and members of the House repeatedly referred to the Duke as her “protector.” As the Duke’s mistress, Clarke was entirely in his care; the Duke was responsible for supporting her financially, a task he fulfilled when he established her in the house in Gloucester Place, but nullified when he withheld her promised income
following the dissolution of their relationship. But it was not so much that he ceased being Clarke’s protector that rankled the Duke’s critics; rather, it was the manner in which he abandoned her, sacrificing honor for discretion. The print *The York March* (1809) shows a uniformed Duke of York marching away from an elegant Clarke, claiming, “If I must March, I must however. I shall leave my Baggage behind me!!”

Clarke, with an outstretched hand, is dressed as she was for her first appearance before the House of Commons on February 1. She pleads with him, “O you gay deceiver—to leave a poor Woman without Protection.” There is a fundamental difference here between how the Duke and Clarke see their relationship to one another. The Duke clearly

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99 Ibid.
sees his former mistress as “baggage,” something to be abandoned once it gets too cumbersome. The artist, however, argues in favor of a more gallant vision of male-female relations.

Charles Williams, *The Discarded Clark, or Eve Driven Out of Paradice*, 1807 © Trustees of the British Museum

Even less honorable was the Duke’s manner in ending the relationship. Instead, he employed one of his councilors, William Adam, to break the news to his mistress. This affront to gender responsibility appears in Charles Williams’s *The Discarded Clark [sic], or Eve Driven Out of Paradice [sic]* (1807). In it, Williams depicts an angry, antagonistic Adam in pursuit of a vulnerable Clarke. Adopting a tragic pose, she flees her “Commissions Warehouse,” the “paradise” that supported her financially when her
protector did not. Scattered at Clarke’s feet are two pieces of parchment that bear quotations, one from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to further transform Clarke into an Eve figure, and the other from Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, likening the Duke to the tragic military leader whose oligarchic arrogance led to his own downfall. In labeling her an Eve figure, Williams likens Clarke to a seductive influence, a woman who was fooled and led her partner astray. Yet, Williams does not condemn her action, but instead emphasizes how helpless she has become, how unprotected and *female*. While tensions between good and evil occur throughout the image, ultimately a sense of sensitivity and sympathy to Clarke wins out. Tellingly, Williams depicts the abandoned woman in a white dress, symbolizing Clarke’s purity and innocence. Clarke’s transformation into an innocent victim ultimately called for sympathy toward the wronged woman rather than judgment of her actions of selling commissions to support her lifestyle in a “paradise.” Clarke’s victimhood is further suggested, as her “protector” is nowhere to be found.

In emphasizing Clarke’s victimhood at the hands of her failed protector, these prints highlight the importance that Britons placed on gender responsibility. It was bad enough that a man of means would leave a woman so unprotected, but it was even worse considering that the man in question was the Duke of York. This stance ignores the issue of Clarke’s role in the bribery rings—that matters less than the fact she had been so victimized. Gender responsibility—and, more specifically, masculine responsibility—was central to the British nation during wartime; exemplifying that virtue equated protecting the nation. Just as war tested masculinity, so too did it test the strength of resolve and ability of British men to uphold the virtues of the nation they were defending.
The rhetoric of protection and abandonment is especially interesting in this context. If men like the Duke of York could not defend and protect their women, how on earth could they defend and protect the nation? Strength, resolve, and defense on the personal level served as a foundation for strength, resolve, and defense on the national level. Virtuous and strong was the nation that had a clear sense of gender responsibility; unprotected and vulnerable was the nation that withstood the abandonment of core national virtues. Mary Anne Clarke thus became a stand-in for Great Britain, and the Duke of York became a stand-in for the weak army.

Responding to the Duke’s ill treatment of Clarke, the people of Great Britain came to her defense. In *John Bull’s Address to Mrs. Clarke on the Late Conspiracy!!* (1809), John Bull stands before a beautiful, modest Clarke and offers his well wishes. The figure grips his hat in his hands as a show of respect for the wronged woman and starts off by saying, “My humble service to thee, Ma’am.”100 This is no insignificant gesture. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the image of John Bull had matured from a country bumpkin to a figure that not only represented the people of Great Britain, but also championed their beliefs and stood up against the forces that threatened them. A growing concern was for the morality of the nation as embodied by the morality of its leaders. Consequently, Britons gauged their leaders, including royals, on their personal behavior and private lives more mercilessly than on their political choices. The personal and the political literally became intertwined. Concerns over the morality of leaders stemmed from the belief that immorality, particularly amongst the elites, was a French vice that

100 Isaac Cruikshank, *John Bull’s Address to Mrs. Clarke on the Late Conspiracy!!*, 1809, British Museum, London.
ultimately led to France’s downfall in the form of revolution; the British people thus expressed their patriotism through their acts of moral fortitude, which John Bull embodied.\footnote{Tamara L. Hunt, \textit{Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England} (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 164-5.} In showing his support for Mary Anne Clarke, John Bull showed that the people of Great Britain sided with and respected her.

Yet it is curious that the common people of Great Britain would side with a woman whose lavish lifestyle contributed to her own ruin. The justification for this can be found in the print, too. John Bull’s speech to the elegant Clarke reveals two key points. First, John Bull wishes to thank her for having “spirit enough” to come forward with her allegations against the Duke of York and “blowing up such a Host of
conspirators.” Just as men like Wardle, Burdett, and Wilberforce saw the investigation against the Duke as a moral crusade, so too does John Bull credit Mary Anne Clarke with being an agent of patriotism. Her role in instigating the investigation was unmistakable, thus making her a true patriot. Second, John Bull sees her as a wronged woman: her gender is thus linked to the issue at hand. In almost the same breath, John Bull thanks Clarke for acting on behalf of the people of Great Britain and offers his sympathy for her as an abandoned woman who has been cast off. Interestingly, the issues of instigating the investigation and Mary Anne Clarke as a wronged woman are linked and seen as equivalent. As John Bull explains:

For if a man engaged to pay Forty Pounds a year for having taken away my Mare & used her till he be tired of her, then turns her a drift [sic] on a wise and bare common and refuses to pay that sum he agreed to pay, well then if I can’t Law him I should be obliged to expose his conduct to the World in order that he may not be suffered to take any more People’s Mares & serve them the same…

John Bull is less concerned with the issue of military bribery than he is with the personal conduct of the Duke of York. The Duke’s treatment of Clarke was thus more egregious than his perceived professional incompetence. Hence, a whole series of gender assumptions and responsibilities were sewn up in the Mary Anne Clarke affair. The patriotism that she exhibited stemmed from a wrong committed against her when her lover failed as her masculine protector.

Yet, John Bull and the people of Great Britain did not simply respect Mary Anne Clarke; other prints portray their support as a major factor in the outcome of the investigation. In Charles Williams’s They Have Been Weighed in the Balance, and Are

\[102\] Cruikshank, *John Bull’s Address to Mrs. Clarke*…
\[103\] Ibid.
*Found Wanting* (March 1809), the Duke of York is depicted as a scale, with Mary Anne Clarke on one side and the Duke’s men on the other. Inscribed on the scale are Admiral Lord Nelson’s words, “England expects every Man to do his Duty,” suggesting that the iconic admiral had become the measuring stick for patriotism.\(^{104}\) Five men are desperately throwing their weight onto the Duke’s side, but despite this, it is still high off the ground. Though Clarke’s side is weighed down only by her and Colonel Wardle, it is significantly closer to the ground than the Duke’s. A rotund John Bull approaches, carrying a metal weight inscribed with “*vox populi,*” or “people’s voice.”\(^{105}\) He is headed towards Clarke’s side. The use of a scale to metaphorically “weigh” the parties involved in scandals was a traditional image in the British popular press. It represented a sense of justice, truth, and fair play and was a means of providing a public verdict on the conduct of the elite.\(^{106}\) In depicting Mary Anne Clarke as “weighing more” than many of the Duke’s supporters, Williams indicated that her story was more believable and truthful than that of the Duke’s defenders. The print therefore clearly favors Clarke and depicts her as the embodiment of truth. Despite this, she is portrayed as being in a difficult position. The help that Wardle provides is clearly not enough. As Clarke’s figure sees John Bull, she reaches out to him, “O, Mr. Bull, pray give a pull!” Bull responds, “If I don’t throw in my weight, our dearest, sweetest Love will get the worst of it after all.”\(^{107}\) Since he carries the voice of the people—and embodies the people of Great Britain—Bull’s preference for Clarke over his prince is significant. Since the Duke had abandoned

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105 Ibid.
106 Hunt, “Morality and Monarchy in the Queen Caroline Affair,” 699.
107 Williams, *They Have Been Weighed*....
Mary Anne Clarke, the people of Great Britain themselves stepped up to protect and support her in her moment of greatest need.

Charles Williams, *They Have Been Weighed, and Are Found Wanting*, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum

Thus was Clarke elevated as a popular icon who proudly, nobly defended truth in the face of corruption. In Isaac Cruikshank’s *Ananias & Clavira, or Judgment Against Lying* (1809), a modestly-dressed Clarke stands before the House and points to a guilty General Clavering. She wears a veil, stands with authority, and asks accusingly, “Would you also defend a cause at the expence [sic] of Truth?!”108 Here, Clarke appears as a defender of truth and prosecutor of liars. The print alludes to the Biblical story of Ananias

Isaac Cruikshank, *Ananias & Clavira, or Judgment Against Lying*, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum

Thomas Rowlandson, *The Modern Babel, or Giants Crush’d by the Weight of Evidence*, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum
and Sapphira, a couple who sold their land and, instead of giving all of the profits to the apostles, withheld a portion for themselves. This practice was not dissimilar to the bribery ring that Clarke ran, yet Cruikshank targets the Duke’s supporters instead of Clarke herself—she is portrayed as an admirable, brave innocent juxtaposed against the terrible liars. Indeed, Sandon and Clavering appear as the wrong-doers in the print, a clear example of the artist seeing Clarke’s actions as both heroic and something to be praised. More to the point, in appearing as a defender of truth, Clarke becomes the embodiment of virtue, and ultimately a representation of pure, feminine patriotism.

The most classical expression of Mary Anne Clarke as a female patriot appears in Thomas Rowlandson’s print *The Modern Babel, or Giants Crushed by a Weight of Evidence* (1809). Rowlandson depicts a caped Clarke standing victoriously atop a pyramid of blocks, each of which is labeled with the name of a different witness who gave testimony against the Duke of York. Clarke’s block—and, symbolically, her testimony—is the biggest. The blocks are crushing the Duke of York, who lies pinned beneath them, hands clasped and eyes turned upwards to the mistress he had cast off. Clarke herself assumes a classical pose, cloaked in a cape with her right hand extended and pointing to the heavens; the dark clouds above have parted, revealing blue skies behind her. Here, Clarke is reminiscent of Britannia, the heroic female representation of Great Britain.

Rowlandson’s depiction of Clarke as Britannia fits into a specific historical context. Throughout the late eighteenth century, artists revived the image of Britannia to represent the victory of Great Britain’s virtuous spirit. But as historian Tamara Hunt
points out, Britannia never supplanted John Bull in popularity throughout the course of the French and Napoleonic Wars, since Britannia was sometimes used to portray a victimized Great Britain, an unpopular image during a time of war.\(^{109}\) Moreover, Britannia, despite her warrior garb, was sometimes a passive figure rather than an active one, in the same way that woman themselves were passive patriots: they could not fight for the nation, but, like virtuous Britannia, were keepers of the nation’s virtue. At the same time, *The Modern Babel* places Mary Anne Clarke within the turn of the nineteenth century’s patriotic iconography. This is especially appropriate since Britannia herself was a female representation of the spirit of the nation—the spirit, as an abstract ideal, could have female connotations—in the same way that, to some, Mary Anne Clarke was a female agent of patriotism. The public’s ability to see Clarke as fulfilling the role as the virtuous champion of the nation suggests that some credited her with not only acting patriotically, but also with acting in a way appropriate for a female patriot. *The Modern Babel, or Giants Crush’d by a Weight of Evidence*’s depiction of Mary Anne Clarke as playing the part of a female patriot demonstrates that there were opportunities—albeit limited—for women to be patriots at the turn of the nineteenth century.

British patriotism throughout the course of the Napoleonic Wars was thus a highly gendered concept. Being a patriot meant acting as a defender of national virtues, and women could do this, since virtue was so tied to the domestic realm. Women like Clarke operated in a specific context and under guidelines of acceptable expressions of patriotism. One strand of thought that judged the Mary Anne Clarke affair accepted the

Duke’s cast-off mistress in a sympathetic light. These supporters berated the Duke for abandoning her and thus violating the gender contract that bound together men and women in society. They also sided with Clarke for her perceived quest to bring the truth about corruption to light. In this vein, they saw her as a reformer who acted for the good of the country, and so transformed her into a version of Britannia. To some, then, Mary Anne Clarke was a patriot since she acted within defined gender roles, privileging virtue and truth over corruption and dishonesty.

The question remains as to the extent to which Mary Anne Clarke was consciously acting out of patriotism when she gave her testimony to the House of Commons in February and March of 1809. While she might very well have acted out of patriotism to purge the British Army of corruption, her role in selling commissions for personal gain makes such a motivation unlikely. Regardless, the fact remains that she was perceived as being a female patriot. Just as middle-class women could become publicly active under the guise of patriotism, so too could Mary Anne Clarke. She used the gender conventions that defined female patriotism to garner support and make her case. Yet, not all Britons were convinced. Many saw her as a troubled woman whose decision to become involved with the investigation stemmed from a need for personal vengeance. These views saw her not as a patriot, but as an enemy bent on disrupting the precious order of the nation.
CHAPTER IV
CIRCE THE CONJURER:
IMAGES OF THE BAD WOMAN

Mary Anne Clarke’s own precious confessions have displayed her as a most vile and profligate imposter, whose love for the constitution and the freedom for which it affords, can only mean that freedom which it allowed her of disgracing and plundering the country.
- Pierre McCallum, The Rival Queens

When Mary Anne Clarke made her first appearance before the House of Commons on February 1, 1809, the men questioning her repeatedly delved into her personal life. By exposing her questionable morals, the Duke’s defenders hoped to discredit her and her testimony. The Attorney General Sir Vicary Gibbs pressed her on the issue of whether she was still married. After Clarke twice skirted the question, the Chairman of the House directed her to answer it clearly. “I am a married woman,” she admitted. “There is no question which I will not answer, though it may be unpleasant.”

Gibbs’s question attempted to expose what he believed to be the main vulnerability of Mary Anne Clarke as a witness. She was a married woman who became the mistress of another man; surely, her scandalous, questionable morals made her an untrustworthy witness. Instead of finding evidence to prove the Duke’s innocence, Gibbs and his cohorts focused on exposing Clarke as a deceitful, fallen woman.

This fixation on Clarke’s private life spoke to a larger anxiety about how immorality in the domestic sphere could have consequences in the public one. Since the

110 Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 1st ser., vol. 12 (February 1, 1809), col. 283.
investigation into the Duke’s conduct was public, Britons high and low had access to the House proceedings. Newspapers like the Times and Morning Post reported on the trial and provided details of the colorful characters who had become players in it. Like the Duke’s defenders, they pored over details about her private life and consumed representations of her as something dangerous and threatening. Negative images of Mary Anne Clarke as a “bad woman” pervade the literature—both visual and written—surrounding the scandal, presenting her as a powerful, conniving femme fatale. These images were expressions of a culture willing to punish a woman for overstepping her bounds, as it imagined her in a number of deviant incarnations: as a seductress, sorceress, “unsex’d” female, and Jacobine. In all of these instances, Clarke’s gender was used against her to recast her in extreme, abhorrent roles and to imagine her as a fiend whose dangerous sexuality had corrupted the Duke. The popular press transformed her perceived moral shortfalls into exaggerated immorality. Unlike her supporters, who celebrated Clarke as a female patriot, her detractors represented her as a failed woman who operated outside the realm of decent femininity and thus threatened the nation. They made her into an anti-patriot, someone who put personal gain above patriotic inclinations. These representations were a far cry from the idealized female patriotism that some attributed to her; instead, she became a negative example against which true patriotism could be measured.

These negative representations came out of a context of increasing challenges to the social order. In the decade preceding the Mary Anne Clarke affair, women were pushing against the restraints that sought to contain them in a defined domestic sphere.
Some women began to adopt “pseudo-masculine dress” for certain activities, a trend that provoked an outcry claiming such actions violated proper femininity: men’s riding coats were refashioned into ladies’ riding habits and spencer jackets, overcoats with masculine-appearing lapels.111 These fashions were a far cry from the dainty neoclassical dresses that were the norm. More problematic in some ways were women like Mary Wollstonecraft. As discussed, Wollstonecraft argued that women should be granted the same fundamental rights as men, particularly the right to education. Though her argument was in line with existing notions of gender responsibility—an educated woman, Wollstonecraft wrote, made a stronger family unit—criticisms came fast and furious. One of her most prominent critics was Richard Polwhele, an Oxford-educated clergyman whose polemical poem, “The Unsex’d Females” (1798), was an attack on all radical women. Published in the conservative Anti-Jacobin Review, the poem equated progressive thinking with revolutionary activity, claiming that women who argued for more rights were shedding their femininity, since they did not belong in the masculine realm of education or politics. To Polwhele, this meant women had abandoned their sex: “I shud shudder at the new unpictur’d scene, / Where unsex’d woman vaunts the imperious mein; / Where girls, affecting to dismiss the heart, / Invoke the Proteus of petrific art.”112

Women who challenged the social order and acted outside their prescribed feminine roles were no longer women.

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In Polwhele’s vision, British femininity contrasted with French anti-femininity. He even compared “unsex’d” women to “Gallic freaks.”

Critics like Polwhele saw their concerns over an increasingly challenged femininity realized in the French Revolution. Ever-fearful of radical activity, many Britons witnessed the French Revolution as the terrifying zenith of gender anti-norms. After all, women played an early role in the revolution during the march on Versailles in 1789, clearly demonstrating the dangers of females who actively participated in the political realm. “Of all the modern French patriots,” George Greene, witness to the Revolution, wrote in 1802, “the female patriot is the worst”:

If you were to see them! to hear them! to feel the fire that flashes from their eyes when their favourite tenets are controverted! If you could hear the torrent of acrimonious accusation and virulent invective which they pour fourth [sic]?! In fact, to form any judgment of them you must borrow your ideas from the heathen mythology, and form to yourself the figures of Alecto, Tysphone, and Maegaeira, brandishing their scorpion rods and hurling their flaming brands. You have read of the fury of the Bachanals and the race of the Parthian dames; and were it possible that my adverse fate should ever place me in the power of this lady, who is one of those democratic zealots, I doubt whether I should meet with a milder fate than the lover of Euridice.

Greene likens female French patriots to terrible women from mythology, transforming them to violent, animalistic banshees whose patriotic yearnings were unnatural. Many Britons criticized French women for holding too much power: good British women were not supposed to be too powerful. The French Revolution and the subsequent war with Great Britain served as a catalyst that made “pre-existing anxieties about the position of

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113 Polwhele, “The Unsex’d Female,” line 20.
114 George Greene, Relation of Several Circumstances which Occurred in the Province of Lower Normandy, During the Revolution, and Under the Governments of Robespierre and the Directory.... (London: J. Hatchard, 1802), 114-5.
115 Colley, Britons, 250-1.
women [...] more intense.” Consequently, progressives who advocated more political
rights and a bigger social role for women were labeled “jacobins,” and their ideas were
branded “revolutionary.” Opponents to fledgling feminism even accused women of
“stepping out of their proper sphere” in order to discredit them and maintain the status
quo. These critics punished women who did not fit their definitions of femininity.

The treatment of Mary Anne Clarke by her detractors conformed to these
attitudes. They criticized Clarke on moral grounds and launched an assault against her
femininity. One charge alleged that she was nothing more than a common prostitute.
Such criticism used her sexuality to label her a debased deviant. In the early nineteenth
century, there were marked differences between a common prostitute and a kept mistress.
The chief difference was that a prostitute could be hired out to anyone, while an
individual man kept an individual mistress for his purposes alone. Typically, middle- and
upper-class men kept mistresses, so their standard of living was superior to prostitutes.
The long-term nature of their relationships also gave mistresses a financial security that
did not exist for prostitutes. In these ways, mistresses were a cut above prostitutes. Thus,
by labeling her a prostitute, Clarke’s critics attacked character and respectability.

Pierre McCallum, a former soldier in the British Army, actively worked to reduce
Mary Anne Clarke’s image to that of a common prostitute. In The Rival Queens
(1810), McCallum repeatedly referred to Clarke as a “harlot.” His attacks became even

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116 Colley, Britons, 253.
117 William Stafford, English Feminists and Their Opponents in the 1790s (Manchester UK: Manchester
118 McCallum’s name is published ‘M’Callum.” This work adopts the standardized spelling of his name.
119 Pierre Franc McCallum, The Rival Queens, or Which Is the Darling?: Containing the Secret History of
the Origin of the Late Investigation.... (London: J. Blacklock, 1810), 36.
more pointed when he encouraged readers to “let Moll Clarke alone for erecting a superstructure of lies to mount up to the temple of Torture. She can bite her mark deeper than any w---e in Christendom, even the Italian and French, who are noted for rapacity.”\textsuperscript{120} In giving Mary Anne Clarke the sobriquet of “Moll,” a common slang term for prostitutes, McCallum purposefully robbed her of respectability. Thus, Clarke became nothing more than a person full of vice and avarice, someone to be distrusted, ignored, and, most importantly, not believed.

Yet McCallum did not extend his attack to all parties involved in the prosecution of the Duke of York. The House of Commons’s investigation against the Duke was initiated by Colonel Wardle, not Clarke. But despite the fact that Wardle sought to bring down the Duke just as fervently as did Clarke, McCallum praised, rather than criticized him. McCallum saw in Wardle all the dignity that Clarke lacked: “I felt convinced that his motives were pure, patriotic, and highly honourable. With a strong and ardent mind, aided by truth, and an indefatigable zeal for the benefit of his country, I had no doubt but he would acquit himself with honour, and give universal satisfaction to the public.”\textsuperscript{121} McCallum saw Wardle as a noble figure, concerned with the eradication of corruption. There is a contradiction between McCallum’s portrayals of Wardle and Clarke: though both individuals attacked the Duke, McCallum criticized Clarke and not Wardle, thus drawing a clear distinction between the mistress and the parliamentarian, between the woman and the man. While McCallum preserved Wardle’s respectability, he dismantled Clarke’s.

\textsuperscript{120} McCallum, \textit{The Rival Queens}, 197-8. 
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 97.
Just as Wardle was the defender of the nation, Clarke became its predator.

McCallum continued his assault, alleging that she was not merely a passive figure, but rather one bent on actively destroying the nation:

Oh, Johnny Bull! Hot weather and heavy loads are very prejudicial to the constitution:—‘Tis a smoking June for three!—When will those harpies that daily devour thy victuals and defile thy table be driven away, and thou be restored to a comfortable meal? Pray Heaven it be soon!¹²²

Clarke’s actions were destroying the body patriotic of Great Britain. The nation’s very soul—as embodied by John Bull—was suffering under Clarke’s wicked menace. The powerful image transforms Clarke into the antithesis of patriotism: she becomes a vile dissenter who was crushing the spirit of the nation. McCallum further developed Clarke’s threatening figure by insisting that, “Mary Anne Clarke’s own precious confessions have displayed her as a most vile and profligate imposter, whose love for the constitution and the freedom for which it affords, can mean only that freedom which it allowed her of disgracing and plundering the country.”¹²³

Ironically, McCallum himself was disillusioned with military bureaucracy. While serving in Trinidad, he had witnessed the harsh practices of Governor Picton.¹²⁴

Embittered, McCallum made it his duty to seek recompense for what he believed was an unspecified wrong committed against him. He worked to bring down the military establishment, since he saw it as a corrupt body, full of “Yanky [sic] blood-hounds” who

¹²² McCallum, The Rival Queens, 184.
¹²³ Ibid., 135-6.
¹²⁴ Thomas Picton served as Governor of Trinidad from 1797 to 1803. His brutality climaxed in his allowance of the torture of Luisa Calderon, a fourteen-year-old free mulatto girl who was accused of having stolen approximately £500. He allowed a local magistrate to “picket” Calderon, or hang her by one arm with the remainder of her body balanced on a spike, in order to incite her to name accomplices. Picton was brought to trial for this in 1806.
valued “only money and not honour.” McCallum could have supported Mary Anne Clarke as a weapon in the cause of reform, but he chose not to. His chief criticism against Clarke was that she attempted to sully the name of Colonel Wardle and his wife: Clarke alleged that Mrs. Wardle had become the Duke’s new mistress in her memoirs, The Rival Princes (1810). McCallum railed against this accusation:

Another manufactured article, out of the tinker’s budget deserves the severest reprehension that language, within the bounds of decency, can bestow upon it. To a woman lost to all sense of decency, there is nothing so hateful as female reputation; originating undoubtedly from revenge for the contempt which modest women display towards the frail sisterhood.

Clarke’s femininity is inextricably linked to the charges leveled against her. According to McCallum, in besmirching the name of the Wardles—in attacking the family of the very man whom McCallum saw as the purifier of the military establishment and the nation—Clarke rid herself of all womanly decency. McCallum’s complaint stemmed from his belief that Clarke, in abandoning decency, abandoned the cause to purge the military of corruption and, by extension, the nation. Thus, Clarke’s affronts to the bonds of universal female sisterhood, decency, and veracity became affronts to Great Britain itself. It was this sense of decency that the nation, guarded by a corrupt military body, lacked.

Under the pseudonym of “Mentorius,” one Briton penned a critique of Clarke in 1807. His pamphlet Mentoriana, published as a public letter addressed to the Duke of York, encouraged him to purge the military of corruption. The author pointed out the Duke’s difficult position, reminding him that “a single act of oppressions might bereave

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125 McCallum, The Rival Queens, 69.
126 Ibid., 154.
you for ever [of the confidence of your men].”¹²⁷ In order to preserve his reputation, the Duke is advised to “endeavour at once to correct ever evil propensity” in his life. The “evil” in his life included his relationship with Mary Anne Clarke.¹²⁸ Mentorius openly expressed his dislike of Clarke:

Let me therefore intreat your Royal Highness never to entrust your honour to the keeping of a strumpet; avoid her as the serpent of Ceylon, whose embrace is mortal; for the venom of his tooth is not more fatal than the honey of her lip [...] Reflect on the indelible disgrace, the lasting infamy, that would be the consequence of having it supposed, that the Duke of York, the son of the British Monarch, the Commander in Chief of the British forces, was governed by the bribery of a avaricious and infamous concubine.¹²⁹

Mentorius connected the Duke’s inability to control corruption in the military to his inability to control immorality in his personal life. The author’s attack was not one-sided; rather, he blamed both the Duke and his mistress for living a life of sin. In the text, Clarke becomes a “strumpet” and “concubine,” derogatory terms that sexualized her femininity and again reduced her to a common prostitute. According to the author, her loose character was, like a disease, infecting the Duke. In using a serpent as a simile, the author invoked Biblical imagery, transforming Clarke into a corrupting Eve to the Duke’s foolhardy Adam.

The image of the serpent also distanced Clarke from notions of British identity. In likening her to the “serpent of Ceylon,” Mentorius made Clarke a dangerous curiosity from the East, underscoring a sense of foreignness from mainstream British society and

¹²⁷ Mentorius [pseud.], Mentoriana; or A Letter of Admonition and Remonstrance to the Duke of York.... (London: Tipper, 1807), 15. ¹²⁸ Mentorius was misinformed; Clarke and the Duke had parted ways at the end of 1806. ¹²⁹ Mentorius, Mentoriana, 11-2.
propriety: she was an exotic outsider, a poisonous creature from the fringes of empire. Moreover, Clarke’s dangerous femininity mirrored imperial femininity, or the feminine associations that many Britons linked to the colonies. Where Great Britain was the masculine, civilized center of empire, imperial outposts were feminine and uncivil, succumbing to passion like women. Clarke was thus divorced from all associations with the British nation; as an outsider, Britain was not hers to celebrate or defend. Attached to this was a sense that Clarke’s immoral behavior was corrupting the nation. Her role as a mistress and adulterer alienated her from the manners and morality that were components of Britishness. She was an outsider because her manner was unbecoming of what was expected of a true Briton. Britain and the patriotism that sustained it should be moral centers, celebrating virtuous actions rather than licentious liaisons. Consequently, Mentorius recast Clarke as a creature far from Britain to highlight how un-British her actions were. Mentorius’s metaphor fits into this context: by turning Clarke into a creature from the empire, he made her not truly British.

Patriotism in the early nineteenth century excluded those who did not fit an ever-changing mould of what constituted a Briton. Britain’s imperial expansion challenged notions of Britishness, since more and more aliens were becoming subjects of the Crown. As Kathleen Wilson has shown, Britons’ interactions with imperial subjects merely incited them “to stress the ways in which their nation was unique, culturally as

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130 In referencing the serpent of Ceylon, Mentorius brings to mind James Ward’s painting *Boa Serpent Seizing His Prey* (1803). In it, Ward depicts a terrifying, powerful boa wrapping itself around a noble steed and its rider. The pure white horse, futilely struggling against its sinister opponent, is the focal image of the piece, clearly emphasizing the dangers of the exotic to the interests of noble Britain.

well as topographically.”

Mentorius’s transformation of Clarke into a serpent from the empire served as a foil for both true Britishness and, by extension, patriotism. Sexual vulgarity and personal immorality, traits that Mentorius assigned Clarke, both were antithetical to virtuous patriotism. Clarke became a serpent precisely because she embodied qualities that were counter-points to pure British patriotism. Her behavior exiled her from patriotism, since it was consistent with that of colonial subjects, not true Britons.

Verbal diatribes complemented contemporary political cartoonists, who also attacked Mary Anne Clarke’s sexual mores. In Thomas Rowlandson’s Mrs. Clarkes [sic] Last Effort!! (1809), Clarke invites a line of men—officers, farmers, jockeys, and lawyers—to, “Come forward Gentlemen—you’ll all be welcome—every little helps.”

She sits, her legs crossed, on a chair outside of an inn—“The Original Cock and Breeches”—and her ankles are clearly exposed. There is no indication that she means to sell commissions to these eager customers. Rather, she appears to be selling her charms to them, since she seemingly has nothing else to offer. Filled with suggestive, sexual innuendo—the inn’s name, her crossed legs and exposed ankles—the print envisions Mary Anne Clarke not as a patriot or even reformer; she is instead a common prostitute.

In an increasingly moralistic society, such unbridled, blatant sexuality was dangerous, and this is exactly how other critics interpreted Clarke and her lifestyle. There is no greater expression of Clarke’s dangerous sexuality than another Thomas Rowlandson print, Sampson Asleep on the Lap of Dalilah [sic] (1809). The print depicts

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132 Wilson, The Island Race, 5.
133 Thomas Rowlandson, Mrs. Clarkes Last Effort!!, 1809, British Museum, London.
Thomas Rowlandson, *Mrs. Clarke’s Last Effort!!, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum*

Thomas Rowlandson, *Sampson Asleep on the Lap of Dalilah, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum*
the Duke of York, tragically, pathetically surrounded by his love letters, sleeping with his head in her lap. With a pair of scissors in one hand and the Duke’s long queue in the other, Clarke addresses a pair of officers, “Gentlemen you may now take him with safely, his strength is gone, I have cutt [sic] off his regulation tail and there is no danger.”\textsuperscript{134} In directly referencing the Biblical story Samson and Delilah, Rowlandson’s print creates a binary view of the tragic, wronged man and the conniving, wrongdoing woman. Clarke is the femme fatale who leads to innocent Samson’s downfall. Up through the middle of the nineteenth century, the British Army dictated that all enlisted men had to wear long pigtails, or “queues.” By chopping off his queue—the symbol of military life—Clarke not only severed his relationship to the army, she also unmanned him and thus made him vulnerable. Indeed, the print portrays the Duke as overwhelmingly vulnerable, an innocent betrayed by those closest to him.

In addition to accusing her of being sexually promiscuous, Clarke’s critics represented her as a sorceress, an unnatural deviant who wielded a magical, supernatural power over men. In \textit{The Modern Circe, or a Sequel to the Petticoat} (1809), Isaac Cruikshank depicts Clarke as Circe, evoking Greek mythology to represent her as a conniving sorceress. Circe appears in Homer’s \textit{The Odyssey} as a witch-goddess who transforms men into pigs. Cruikshank’s Clarke-Circe is likewise menacing and powerful, as she, pig-faced and grotesque, envelops a crowd of miniature men, all calling for her attention, with the Duke of York’s cloak. Colonel Wardle—Cruikshank satirizes him as “Waddle”—stands transfixed at her left, murmuring, “No fair Circe, transformed by you

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\textsuperscript{134} Thomas Rowlandson, \textit{Sampson Asleep on the Lap of Dalilah}, 1809, British Museum, London.
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we are spellbound at your pleasure.” Beneath the Duke’s cloak, Clarke is selling army commissions, and asks her customers, “Don’t betray that I’ve stolen the York Cloak to favor my designs and your wishes. Come under, I’ve made it weather proof to shelter you all.” The implication is clear: Clarke is secretly selling commissions under the “cloak” of the Duke of York, making detection unlikely. By wearing his cloak, Clarke herself becomes a stand-in for him. The Duke of York is literally out of picture—he is nowhere to be found in the print, just as Cruikshank might argue he was divorced from Clarke’s bribery scheme. Clarke is more than a wrong-doer; she is an abomination of femininity.

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135 Isaac Cruikshank, *The Modern Circe, or the Sequel to the Petticoat!*, 1809, British Museum, London.

136 Ibid.
Just as the mythical Circe transformed men into pigs, so the pig-faced Clarke transformed men into her devoted slaves, who lacked control and resistance when confronted by her. In partially calling the print, “Sequel to the Petticoat,” Cruikshank brings to mind petticoat influence and the perceived disastrous effects of having women become involved in politics. Between representations of the conniving *femme fatale* and references to the dangers of petticoat influence, the print satirizes women who act in the public sphere: they are grotesque, unnatural, and dangerous, since their femininity is distracting for men and leads them astray. In this way, Clarke unmans men by making them into something less than and unrepresentative of their own masculinity—the men in the print are less concerned with national and political affairs than the opportunities presented by a larger-than-life female. By stepping out of her gender role and taking on a public one, Clarke became literally unnatural and thus overturned accepted conventions that divided men and women’s spheres.

James Gillray also depicted a supernatural Clarke in his print *Pandora Opening Her Box* (1809). A sinister, darkly attractive Clarke stands before a mesmerized House of Commons. She has opened the “Opposition Stink Box,” out of which a chorus of serpents explodes, writhing and leaping toward the royal coat of arms. The Tories sit with their hands covering their noses, appalled at the scene; on the other side of the room sits an elated opposition, their cheering faces both evil and imbecile. Next to Clarke stands a pile of documents inscribed with words like, “Forged Letters,” “Love Letters from Mr. Waddle,” and “Scheme to Destroy the House of Brunswick,” all of which are stacked
against an open and seemingly empty container marked, “Broad Bottom Reservoir.”

All of the images used in *Pandora Opening Her Box* link Mary Anne Clarke to a disruptive, partisan political scheme. Clarke clearly appears as a figure of admiration for the opposition party, whose smiling faces cheer her on. Her noxious actions not only offend the Tories, but threaten the stability of the monarchy as well, since Clarke’s serpents are hell-bent on confronting the Crown. The scattered documents at her feet have not made it into the “Broad Bottom Reservoir”; together, the documents, the House investigation, and Clarke’s actions have all undermined any sense of cross-party unity and support. Instead of uniting the political parties in Great Britain, the Clarke affair has

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divided them. Gillray represents Clarke as a Pandora unleashing magical chaos into the British government, thereby undermining its stability and making the nation more vulnerable. When women involved themselves with politics, disaster ensued.

Mary Anne Clarke’s outsider status extended to her femininity as well. In addition to robbing her of her nationality, Clarke’s critics assigned masculine traits to her, thereby making her an outsider to her own sex. This “unsexing” of Mary Anne Clarke—the same process that made a woman unwomanly in “The Unsex’d Females”—transformed her into an object of ridicule, an anomaly to challenge the status quo of the nation—women could adopt masculine traits just as men’s incompetency could be attributed to acquired femininity. As discussed in Chapter III, gender conventions pervaded the nation; when they were challenged, so was the order of the nation.

An “unsex’d” Mary Anne Clarke appears in Charles Williams’s *Mrs. Clarke’s Breeches* (1809). She is dressed in a pair of breeches that are clearly too big for her, suggesting that she does not belong in the role she has adopted for herself, and turns out the empty pockets. “A fig for such breeches!” she exclaims. “There’s nothing in them!!”139 In representing Clarke in masculine attire—a cloak is draped on a chair next to her with a sword leaning against it—Williams argues that her actions are masculine rather than feminine, and her perceived concern for pecuniary gains only heightens this

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138 The scandal occurred in the wake of the broadbottom “Ministry of All the Talents,” the government formed under Lord Grenville in 1806. Grenville recognized the need for unity in a time of war and brought together opposing politicians like Charles James Fox, William Windham, and Henry Addington. Though the ministry was well intentioned, it broke up in 1807 when it was unable to agree on the issue of Catholic emancipation.

Charles Williams, Mrs. Clarke’s Breeches, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum

Thomas Rowlandson, The Road to Preferment through Clarke’s Passage, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum
claim. She is a masculinized female, someone whose actions, beliefs, and motives are entirely outside the realm of proper feminine concerns.

Like Williams’s Clarke, Thomas Rowlandson’s portrayal of Mary Anne Clarke in *The Road to Preferment through Clarke’s Passage* (1809) unsexes her. Clarke, dressed in a military coat with a cocked hat, stands before a tunnel marked “Clarke’s Passage.” An eager crowd awaits entry into it. Adopting a masculine stance, she stands before them like a ring-master, letting them know that business is booming and that “it is no use to rush on in this manner… the principal [sic] places have been disposed of these three weeks, and I assure you at present there is not even standing room.”¹⁴⁰ The print satirizes the back-alley way that some men may have secured a promotion in the Duke of York’s army, thanks to Clarke’s intervention. Yet, her role in selling commissions made her an outsider to her sex: Rowlandson depicts her masquerading as a man.

These tensions between gender roles comes to a boiling point in Charles Williams’s *York Commission Warehouse* (1809). Depicting “Clark’s [sic] Warehouse,” the print shows Mary Anne Clarke as the head of a business. She encourages expediency with the comment, “Now Gentlemen, you had better be quick. I have a few bargains to dispose of as the partnership is dissolving.”¹⁴¹ Clarke is credited with running her own business, and this suggests she has entered a masculine world, as British society did not see running a business as a feminine occupation. Moreover, the print portrays Clarke as a soldier with a plumed hat and sword; the military was also an exclusively masculine realm. The print thus accuses Clarke of acting outside the realm of proper femininity,

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Rowlandson, *Road to Preferment through Clarke’s Passage*, 1809, British Museum, London.
mirroring the way in which she has abandoned her sex by involving herself in an unnatural ring of bribery and corruption.

As Clarke gained masculinity, so the Duke lost his. In the same print, a portrait of the Duke—labeled “The Duke’s Head”—is turned upside down. Though only half of the portrait is shown in the print, it is enough to see the prominent horns attached to his head. The addition of horns—and of an upside-down painting that indicates a world turned upside down, a charivari—is a sure sign of cuckoldry. Directly below the portrait appears a fiddler, suggesting that he has become Clarke’s new lover; he states, “If you want de commissions, you must give me de note, den I go play de Fiddle to de white petticoat.”\(^\text{142}\)

The fiddler represents Domenico Corri, an Italian composer and subject of speculation.

\(^{142}\) Charles Williams, *York Commission Warehouse.*
throughout the investigation.¹⁴³ The print suggests that Clarke and Corri are lovers. In
cuckolding the Duke, Clarke unmanned him: he is lampooned for not being man enough
to hold onto his mistress. More alarmingly, the print illustrates how the Duke’s
cuckolding has cost him the respect of his troops. On the left side of the print stand a
piper and drummer debating which song they should play next. The piper suggests the
Duke of York’s march, but the drummer, facing the powerful Clarke and the sly Mr.
Corri, offers another selection: “No, no let’s play she’s off with another.”¹⁴⁴

The soldiers themselves are willing to laugh at their Commander-in-Chief, thereby undermining his authority. If, after all, he was not man enough to hold onto his woman, how could he be man enough to lead the British Army and protect the nation from the tyranny of Napoleon? More to the point, if the Duke’s soldiers ridiculed him, as indicated in the print, how could he command their respect and maintain his authority?

Mentorius expressed this concern as well. In pointing out the threat of a French invasion of Britain, Mentorius reminds the Duke that, “soldiers, though naturally brave and loyal, will always fight with redoubled ardor and alacrity when commanded by officers who possess their affections.”¹⁴⁵ The perceived cuckolding of the Duke had the potential to become a very real crisis: Britons wondered how he could adequately protect the nation when his own soldiers had lost respect for him.

The reversal of gender conventions—the militarized woman and the cuckolded man—suggests that the order of the world was itself reversed. In such an inversion of

¹⁴³ Clarke claimed that Corri was one of her agents who helped make deals to secure promotions. Corri would make introductions to Clarke and serve as a conduit for transferring notes and payment. The popular press repeatedly accused Clarke and Corri of being lovers.
¹⁴⁴ Charles Williams, York Commission Warehouse.
¹⁴⁵ Mentorius, Mentoriana, 15.
social norms, the nation had become insecure and potentially unstable. The nation’s military leader was ill-equipped to protect Britain from France. But this very insecurity indicated an assumption that Britons held regarding patriotism. Patriotism was shrouded in shades of gender conventions: defending and leading the nation was a masculine responsibility. The women who challenged these roles—who acquired masculine traits by acting outside of their prescribed gender role—challenged the security of the nation itself. By believing that Mary Anne Clarke had made the Duke of York a cuckold, the public acknowledged that a woman had the ability to impact national security.

Other critics accused Clarke of threatening the nation not only by lacking decency, but also by representing a revolutionary spirit. James Gillray’s print *Overthrow of the Republican-Babel* (1809) depicts the crushing verdict that acquitted the Duke of York from charges of corruption. In it, a Tower of Babel—made from sacks of “Jacobin principles,” “Parliamentary reform,” and “Nods and Winks to Buonaparte [sic]”—is blown over by the breaths of Canning, Castlereagh, and Perceval, appearing on clouds from the heavens. The “Royal Water Spout” unleashes a torrent of water to further topple the tower, knocking Mary Anne Clarke and Wardle from the summit. From the left of the print, a horde of belligerent men mounts the “Republican Ladder of Ambition” to reach the top of the tower.

Gillray thus depicts the Duke’s acquittal as a triumph of the Tories over the reform-driven republicans. Just as the Biblical Tower of Babel was meant to unite all humanity, so Gillray’s tower unites all republicans and emphasizes their hubris in going against the godlike powers of the rightful conservative order. The print depicts defiant
republicans whose powerful, virtuous leaders punish them. Gillray even links extreme republicanism to revolutionary sympathies. Around the horde of discontents, there appears a red, white, and blue banner with the words, “VIVE LA REVOLUTION,” prominently written on it.\footnote{James Gillray, \textit{Overthrow of the Republican-Babel}, 1809, British Museum, London.} The republican movement was thus a thinly disguised attempt to overthrow the established order, import the revolution to Britain, and thereby destroy the nation. In this print, reformers are nothing more than Jacobins. Indeed, as Philip Harling has shown, Tories often utilized French Revolutionary rhetoric to brand

James Gillray, \textit{Overthrow of the Republican-Babel}, 1809 © Trustees of the British Museum
their opponents as outsiders and threats to the nation. The print visually links the French Revolution and the reform movement, equating revolutionary danger with reformist change. On the other hand, the Tory political order—as embodied by Canning, Castlereagh, and Perceval—is seen as a divine saving grace; nation-protecting judgment, like a deus ex machina, appears from the heavens to topple the menacing, arrogant reformist agenda. Like the Tower of Babel itself, when that agenda scraped the sky and touched the royal family, it reached too high. To many Tories, securing the nation meant eradicating the reform movement, since it represented revolutionary danger and a direct threat to the nation.

Yet, even in its conservative iconography, Overthrow of the Republican-Babel still acknowledges Clarke’s case as an attempted reform. Prior to being washed away by the “Royal Water Spout,” Clarke had stood at the top of the tower, clearly the leader. The print implies that Clarke herself and the reform that her testimony necessitated were contrary to national interests. This is the worst kind of attribute: more than simply being a loose or “unsex’d” woman, Clarke is represented as a threat to the stability and freedoms of Great Britain. The critiques changed from attacks on her morality to attacks on her patriotism: she lacked patriotism since the reforms she represented would lead only to revolution. It is notable that, despite the fact that several female witnesses were called in to testify during the investigation, Clarke is the sole woman who appears in the print: just as the reformers reached too high in accusing a member of the Royal family of corruption, so Clarke herself reached too high in being a woman involved with politics.

Clarke’s critics used an arsenal of negative images to undermine her femininity and label her a “bad woman.” Her lifestyle became a point of contention, as her critics saw it as a threat to the moral fabric of Britain. They represented her as a corrupting, dangerous force. Mary Anne Clarke was targeted because she was a woman whose actions had no place in traditional definitions of femininity. As discussed in Chapter III, women were creatures of the domestic world, whose responsibility it was to uphold and maintain virtue at home so that the nation could be strong. Clarke, as a mistress who was estranged from her husband, automatically operated outside of this framework the moment she left Joseph Clarke and destroyed her domestic life. As a kept woman, she made a living off of a sexual relationship with a man who was not her husband. Though Clarke and the Duke had set up a simulacrum of a marital convention at Gloucester Place, this was not enough to exonerate her from the crime of rejecting family life, the fundamental unit upon which the nation was built. To her detractors the bottom line was that she was promiscuous instead of virginal, businesslike instead of maternal, and active instead of passive. She was a physical manifestation of the perceived dangers to the gendered social order found in the works of radical writers like Mary Wollstonecraft. Her actions were not just indiscreet; they were downright revolutionary. Accordingly, she became the face of anti-patriotism, the symbol of an unordered world turned upside-down.
CONCLUSION

AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER

She was not a ghost, nor a memory, nor a figment of the imagination seen in a dream long vanished, breaking the hearts of those who had loved her unwisely and too well. At seventy-six, she sat at the window of her house in Boulogne, looking across the Channel to an England that had forgotten all about her.

- Daphne du Maurier, Mary Anne

Mary Anne Clarke’s troubles did not end with her quest for vengeance. To generate an income, she published her side of the scandal in 1810 as *The Rival Princes* and prepared a tell-all manuscript that included anecdotes about her relationship with the Duke and other prominent members of society, but the royal family quickly bought up all copies and promptly burned them. She used the money with which they paid her off to send her son to military school. Her working relationship with Colonel Wardle collapsed to the point where she snidely anointed him the “mushroom patriot,” and he unsuccessfully accused her of printing libel against him and his family in *The Rival Princes*.¹⁴⁸ She continued to make enemies, and in 1813 was brought to trial, again for libel, by William Vesey Fitzgerald, found guilty, and imprisoned for nine months.¹⁴⁹ Following her release, she relocated to Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, where she was a diminishing source of fascination, as occasional visitors from Great Britain paid her court. To her credit, whenever they asked her about the Duke of York, “she spoke of him

¹⁴⁹ Clarke had written a public letter that slandered Fitzgerald and questioned the legitimacy of his appointment as Lord of the Irish Treasury and member of the Irish Privy Council.
with much kindness and respect,” apparently holding no grudges now that the
investigation was finished and the scandal well in the past. She lived out the rest of her
days in genteel poverty there until her quiet death in 1852. “A letter from Boulogne,”
reported the London Times on June 25, 1852, “states that the celebrated Mrs. Mary Anne
Clarke, who more than 40 years ago caused so much sensation in England, in connection
with the charges brought in the House of Commons against the late Duke of York, died in
that town on Monday last, aged 74.” No eulogy, praise, or condemnation: just an
objective sentence that communicated to the British public that Mary Anne Clarke,
former mistress of a prince, architect of a scandal, and one-time celebrity extraordinaire,
had died abroad.

Time has been good to neither Clarke’s memory nor the scandal’s. It took over a
century, for example, for the scandal to be resurrected in the 1954 novel Mary Anne,
written by Clarke’s descendant Daphne du Maurier. The scandal remains to be a
relatively unknown footnote in the broader histories of the Napoleonic Wars and late-
Georgian Britain. The reason for this is simple: scandals are occurrences that can be
nothing more than of-the-moment public escapades. As societies change, so too do the
standards by which the public measures those in the spotlight. Popular culture consumed,
and continues to consume, scandals in a succession: just as the Mary Anne Clarke affair
supplanted scandalous incidents like Nelson’s relationship with Emma, Lady Hamilton,
so too was the Clarke affair gone from the public’s imagination within a few months.

151 Times, June 25, 1852.
Though public memory has been short, the Clarke affair deserves to be remembered since it highlighted the British public’s expectations. In particular, the public expected gender conventions—protecting males, protected females—to be upheld even as they were consistently being challenged and redefined. Their appetite for sensation also revealed their tendency to see public leaders as being part of the same rules and standards that bound the rest of society. The men and women who were players in the scandal were not some distant figures, but flesh-and-blood people whose position and wealth did not afford them special treatment. The Duke’s investigation was essentially a public-relations debacle which cost him his job.

The Mary Anne Clarke affair brought to the surface other political, social, and cultural issues that underscored British life in the early nineteenth century. In particular, the scandal highlighted issues of gendered patriotism: being a patriot meant different things to men and women. Clarke’s critical role in the scandal proves the current scholarly view that women had some, though limited, opportunities to be patriotic at the turn of the nineteenth century. Indeed, patriotism itself was a fluid concept, one that was unstable and malleable for those who wished to invoke it. This can be seen in the fact that supporters and detractors alike represented Clarke as either a savior of or predator to the nation. This scandal also speaks to a larger issue of how Britons defined themselves, their society, and their nation in a time of anxiety and war. Ultimately, the issues that color the Clarke affair validate “scandals,” something that will exist as long as there are people to scandalize, as a legitimate historical topic.
After all, history is littered with scandals. The Mary Anne Clarke affair was not the first, nor would it be the last, royal scandal. Throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, the British royal family continued to weather storms. Each scandal exposed characteristics about the culture that consumed it. Surrounded by a media circus, for example, the divorce between Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1996 played out against the backdrop of infidelity, backbiting, and candid interviews that let the public in on the very private lives of a disastrously unhappy royal couple. The public expected to be privy to information, and so it forced its way into the floundering relationship. Though the Clarke affair occurred almost two hundred years before the Charles-Diana divorce, the same human issues surface: heartbreak, ruined reputations, promises unfulfilled, and a flat-out rejection of the royal family’s omnipotence.

“If we cast our eyes over the pages of history,” Clarke wrote in September 1810, “[we must] take into our consideration that man is quite the creature of circumstances.” Indeed, Clarke spent her life struggling to conquer and alter her circumstances, to create triumphs out of bleak situations. Clarke’s story is a multifaceted one: a poor city girl who climbed her way to the highest reaches of London society; an audacious mistress who took advantage of her connections and put money in her purse; a scorned woman who sought and found vengeance. The common thread that binds together these human narratives is the tale of a woman who constantly put pressure on the boundaries that limited her. Mary Anne Clarke was not just a woman who captivated society; she was also a woman who challenged society. Her participation in a scandal that halted her ex-

152 Mary Anne Clarke, *The Rival Princes* (London: C. Chapple, 1810), 68.
lover’s professional career demonstrated yet again that women could use their situation in life to their advantage. In light of the many representations that depicted her as neither imperfectly human nor complexly female, a new way to represent Mary Anne Clarke emerges: alongside Clarke the Patriot and Clarke the Anti-Patriot is Clarke the Survivor. Ultimately, she was just a person who fanned the flames of a scandal as a way to survive. Though her survival came at a price—she was ridiculed and scorned just as frequently and vehemently as she was praised—the cost did not outweigh the fact that her manufactured celebrity generated intense public fascination, so much so that she had a ready audience for her written works. She did not always have money; she did not always have respect; indeed, she did not always have her own roof over her head: but Mary Anne Clarke always did what was necessary to survive, even if it meant being a patriot and an anti-patriot, a kept woman and a virtuous maiden. Society’s lack of consensus on these ideas gave her an opportunity to be many things to many people, and this is how she survived. Though her name may not always be remembered, hers is too provocative a story to be forgotten.
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