

Newspaper Representations of Queen Victoria's Agency During the Hastings Scandal  
and Bedchamber Crisis of 1839

by

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B. A., University of Alberta, 2009

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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In 1839 Queen Victoria twice became the focus of a media maelstrom: In April, the publication of what came to be known as the Hastings Correspondence blamed the Queen for having taken part in the perceived persecution of Lady Flora Hastings. In May, Victoria's refusal to allow Sir Robert Peel to replace certain ladies of her bedchamber engineered Lord Melbourne's return as Prime Minister. Both of these events resulted in an outcry, both in opposition to the Queen and in support of her. Many historical works that deal with these events tend to recount them as either trivial anecdotes or as means to criticize Victoria's early years on the throne. However, some recent works have begun to rethink the condemnation of her actions. This paper reassesses Queen Victoria's role in the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis by examining how she was represented in certain London newspapers during these events. Instead of focusing on whether Victoria was right or wrong in pursuing the courses that she did, the emphasis is placed on how both the Tory newspapers, that opposed her actions, and the Whig newspapers, which supported her actions, sought to reduce the appearance of agency on Victoria's part. Papers of both political affiliations made constant reference to Victoria's youth, gender, and inexperience—all factors which also played into developing ideals regarding the roles of both the monarchy and women in the political process. The Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis are placed squarely within the midst of these issues. The possibility of a young, unmarried, and female monarch making decisions independent of male political guidance caused unease among newspaper writers grappling with the early nineteenth century's colliding concepts of political reform and cultural ideals.

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to the memory of Ada Hailes.

## Introduction

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1839, Lord Melbourne's Whig ministry resigned its commission. The House of Commons had been debating a Bill that would have limited Jamaica's self-government and placed it more directly under British governance. The Whigs were continually voted down, and by May 7<sup>th</sup> they only had a majority of five in the House of Commons. They felt that this did not demonstrate a satisfactory measure of confidence in the government, which led to the decision to resign. Melbourne announced the resignation in the House of Lords, while Lord John Russell did the same in the House of Commons. Queen Victoria accepted Melbourne's resignation and then summoned the Tory Duke of Wellington to discuss possible next steps. Though she initially wanted him to form a government, he felt that he was too old and recommended Sir Robert Peel for the job. Peel was accordingly sent for, and he accepted the offer to form a new government on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Scarcely two days later, Peel resigned his commission, and on the following day Melbourne was recalled.

On May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, explanations for the strange turn of events were given by Peel and Russell in the House of Commons, and by Wellington and Melbourne in the House of Lords. Through their speeches and additional rumours that had already reached the papers, it was eventually revealed that on May 9<sup>th</sup>, Victoria had met with Peel and that they had disagreed on the subject of the Queen's household appointments. Victoria's ladies of the bedchamber were viewed as primarily loyal to the Whig party, whether through marriage or blood relation. Peel's fledgling Tory government did not have a decisive measure of support in the Commons and he wanted the Queen to show her support by replacing some of her ladies with women who had more obvious Tory connections. She refused, and he resigned out of frustration.

This so-called Bedchamber Affair followed closely on the heels of a previous set of events that came to be known as the Hastings Scandal. In February 1839, Lady Flora Hastings, a member of the household of Queen Victoria's mother, the Duchess of Kent, shared a carriage with Sir John Conroy, the comptroller of the Duchess' household, on a journey back from Scotland. In March Lady Flora was noted to have formed some swelling in her abdomen and palace gossips assumed that she was pregnant. A medical examination revealed that she was not: in fact, the swelling was a tumour that would kill her a few months later. However, the issue found its way into the press when Lady Flora's mother, brother, and uncle all published correspondence in the daily papers, starting in April and continuing after Lady Flora's death in July. It also happened that the Duchess of Kent and the Hastings family were strongly associated with the Tory party, while the Queen's ladies, thought to be behind the rumours surrounding Lady Flora, were tied to the Whigs. The party tensions stirred up by the Hastings Scandal were fanned into an all-out press war between the Whigs and the Tories during the Bedchamber Crisis, closely connecting these two conflicts at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign.

The Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis have tended to be underestimated by historians. This is strange because, at the time, newspapers were consumed with the ordeal, obsessing over every aspect of it. Now, however, the crisis is generally only included in histories either as an example of how foolish Victoria was when she first came to the crown, or as a sort of morality tale on the dangers of untrained young women being in positions of power. As well, many histories still focus on who was right and who was wrong in the affair and continue to follow a general consensus with the line taken by the Tory newspapers at the time. Victoria was attacked for being callous about Lady Flora and for acting irresponsibly in refusing Peel's request; her political intentions were dismissed as the result of her inappropriate friendship with



Melbourne and unfounded dislike of Peel. These themes have endured in modern historiography on the subject. In examining the historiography relevant to this work, I have particularly analyzed the treatment of the main figures involved in both the Hastings Scandal and Bedchamber Crisis in biographical works, discussions and depictions of the relevance of Queen Victoria's gender in her personal and political life, and studies of the growth and power of the press as it related to the monarchy.

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Elizabeth Longford is the author of one of the most highly-regarded biographies of Queen Victoria, and she set the standard for declaring the Bedchamber Crisis to be of more interest to “the student of human nature than of politics.”<sup>1</sup> Longford also states that there is no doubt that the Constitution was “rent” during the event, which continues the trend set in 1839 of judging Victoria to be bent on getting her own way with no thought for political processes. The incident is put down to a series of misunderstandings. Longford connects the Hastings Scandal with the Bedchamber Crisis, stating that the latter would never have become so fraught without the former. She also mentions the renewed press outrage after Lady Flora's death and poses the question of how much Victoria was to blame for these early “scandals.” She concludes that they were mostly the result of the Queen being too headstrong and too willing to believe the worst about people whom she was predisposed to dislike. Longford mainly blames Melbourne for everything, as he tended to support Victoria's strong will and could not be bothered to meddle much in Palace affairs. He did not provide either a strong male presence or a strong ministerial presence in the Queen's life.<sup>2</sup> If Longford is not especially hard on Victoria, she does begin the trend of removing any agency from Victoria's actions. While the Queen certainly took the step of

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1 Elizabeth Longford, *Victoria R.I.* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 114.

2 Longford, *Victoria R.I.*, 123-24.

refusing Peel and not being too charitable toward Lady Flora, her actions are depicted as being the result of coaching and the influence of other people.

Cecil Woodham-Smith's biography of Victoria is an example of the harshest criticisms levelled against Victoria. The author certainly seems to agree with Longford's assessment, in that she deals almost entirely with the personal side of things and does not go into the political ramifications of either the Bedchamber Crisis or the Hastings Scandal. She does not mince words in saying that the Queen was, “an ignorant young girl....[with] no experience or judgement” when dealing with the Bedchamber Crisis, while the most important outcome of the Hastings Scandal was apparently that it resulted in a final confrontation and eventual reconciliation between the Queen and her mother.<sup>3</sup> When discussing Lady Flora's final illness, and Victoria's reluctance to see her, the Queen is described as not having yet “learnt compassion” and is characterized as a “heartless child.”<sup>4</sup> The Hastings Scandal and Bedchamber Crisis are treated as a kind of stepping stone on the way to Victoria realizing that she needed a man in her life and subsequently marrying Albert of Saxe Coburg.<sup>5</sup> Woodham-Smith mentions the savage attacks against the Queen and her ladies after Lady Flora's death, but she does not go into much detail.<sup>6</sup> This is also a common thread adopted by those dealing with the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis: While the media coverage certainly warrants mention, it is seldom the focus of study.

A more recent biography of Victoria by Walter Arnstein reflects sentiments that give the Queen much more credit. Though a concise work, it nevertheless contains a brief

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3 Cecil Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Life and Times, 1819-1861* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 165.

4 Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria*, 178.

5 Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria* 174-76.

6 Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria* 180.

acknowledgement that there may have been more to the Bedchamber Crisis than a fleeting whim. The author depicts Victoria as a very cagey tactician, as she realized that the bedchamber ladies would be an excellent issue on which to stand her ground. He states that she was not bullied into anything by Peel; rather, she bullied him and was not afraid to assert her authority.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, histories dealing with Peel and Melbourne tend to treat the Bedchamber Crisis as an unfortunate blip in the long political careers of both men. Victoria is not treated charitably at all. Peel was not much concerned with the Hastings Scandal, but he did have to deal with the fall-out. Books about him state that this was unfortunate for him and that his life would have been made easier if he had not needed to conduct his political duties amidst the gossip of the female-dominated Court. Accounts of the Bedchamber Crisis cast Peel as the hapless victim of Victoria's girlish whims. George Kitson Clark actually describes Victoria as being “like a child, simple and self-centred” in her affection for Melbourne and in her reaction to his resignation.<sup>8</sup> In the same vein, Peel's biographer, Norman Gash, describes Victoria as “sulky” when meeting Peel on May 8<sup>th</sup> and states that she was ruled by emotion and displayed a “disconcerting lack of logic.”<sup>9</sup> Peel is portrayed as simply trying to get on with his job and coming up against a woman predisposed to dislike him. While Peel's own cause is continually held up as being perfectly reasonable, Victoria's arguments in favour of keeping her ladies are not dealt with and she remains an unreasonable figure preoccupied with her own wishes, to the detriment of the nation.<sup>10</sup> While it is said that Victoria played a “decisive” role, it was, once

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7 Walter L. Arnstein, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

8 George Kitson Clark, *Peel and the Conservative Party* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1964), 417.

9 Clark, *Peel*, 419-423.

10 Clark, *Peel*, 423-424.

again, a role played without much knowledge or consideration.<sup>11</sup> She is depicted as irresponsible and thoughtless.

Meanwhile, Melbourne is said to have been just as hapless as Peel. While Victoria's affection for him led to destructive and thoughtless actions, his own affection and thoughtlessness is written off as excusable. While he indulged Victoria, her admittedly demanding friendship is painted as having been a drain on him. He is shown as being surprised at her decision during the Bedchamber Crisis and reluctant to clean up the Queen's mess. He is also depicted as largely blameless during the Hastings Scandal (odd, considering that the newspapers at the time placed him at the centre of it), merely having tried to deal with things as the women around him spun out of control. While he graciously tried to handle the fall-out from the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis, Victoria was constantly acting on her old grudges.<sup>12</sup> Even a more recent work on Melbourne still holds the line about Melbourne's one fault being that he was too indulgent toward Victoria and would not abandon her when her own misguided impulses led her to make mistakes. According to many historians, if Melbourne contributed to events at all, it was unwittingly. He paid the price for her blatant partisanship. His most recent biographer, L. G. Mitchell, emphasizes how dangerous it was for the monarch to hold one party or politician in higher esteem than others.<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging that Victoria considered herself free to act independently gives her an agency that few historians or biographers attribute to her possession of her own will, but this is accompanied by censure of her use of that independence.

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11 Norman Gash, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel After 1830* (London: Longman, 1972), 221-26.

12 Dorothy Marshall, *Lord Melbourne* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 139-145.

13 L. G. Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne 1779-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 240-243.

Queen Victoria's gender played a large role in how those around her thought she should conduct her personal and political life, a subject which several historians have addressed. In 1839 Victoria had only been Queen for two years, and the press still was not sure what to make of her. Margaret Homans states that, in trying to conflate the personal with the public, Victoria's gender added a dimension to the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis which meant that, if she asserted her rights as a ruler, she would not be viewed as a properly feminine woman; but if she presented herself solely as woman, she would not be taken seriously as a ruler.<sup>14</sup> There was no ready label to place on her: she was not a wife, a mother, or even much of a daughter (as her strained relationship with the Duchess of Kent was fairly well-known). In short, she filled none of the traditional labels open to an aristocratic woman or previous Queens Regnant, other than Elizabeth I, whose reign was so far in the past that it was not considered relevant to the situation. Thus, Victoria had to invent a role for herself that encompassed both her gender and her political responsibilities. She presented herself both as a Queen conscious of her rights and privileges, and as a young girl in need of guidance and friendship.<sup>15</sup> However, the media, accustomed to defining the monarchy to the public, could not accept Victoria's desired identity. Instead, they relied on the only labels deemed acceptable for a woman in her position: young, virgin, inexperienced. As will be noted below, these three adjectives were repeated over and over again, during the discussions of both the Hastings Affair and the Bedchamber Crisis.

Due to Victoria's unmarried status and youth, it is perhaps inevitable that some have drawn the comparison of a young lady stringing along two "suitors," Melbourne and Peel, without any real idea of the implications of her actions. Whoever "won" the Queen would not be

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14 Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne*, 14-15.

15 Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, "The Young Queen and the Parliamentary Bedchamber: 'I Never Saw a Man So Frightened,'" in *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family*, eds. Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 53.

her lover, but rather a father figure.<sup>16</sup> When it came to the Bedchamber Crisis, it has been argued that if Victoria had acted in accordance with what was expected after so many years of the monarchy's increasing domesticity and decreasing political involvement, she would have bowed to the wishes of the Commons without a second thought.<sup>17</sup> However, she held on to her power with defiant tenacity and baffled everyone with her apparent ignorance of certain trends that were becoming apparent in the political and cultural climate. In the early nineteenth century there were increasingly insistent calls for reform, particularly for more efficient means of governing the nation. The Reform Bill of 1832 assuaged some of these concerns, while aggravating others. The question remained of what exactly the monarch's role was supposed to be.<sup>18</sup> This political question, combined with developing cultural ideals about femininity, made the accession of a wilful female monarch more of an issue than it may otherwise have been. While everyone clamoured about how Victoria was both a king and a queen, it seemed that no one was prepared for her to actually act like a king of old. Her gender made it even more difficult for people to accept her as a true authority figure.<sup>19</sup> Charles Beem mentions that many of the male politicians were concerned about Victoria's youth, inexperience, and gender. She was practically unknown, having grown up in seclusion. It was thought that she needed more male guidance than she had previously received.<sup>20</sup> The fact that so many publications continued to

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16 Chase and Levenson, "The Young Queen," 60-61.

17 Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Feminization of the Monarchy 1780-1910: Royal Masculinity and Female Empowerment," in *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the Present*, ed. Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

18 For a detailed exploration of the tumultuous political issues of the nineteenth century, see Norman Gash, *Aristocracy and People: Britain 1815-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

19 Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 141-172.

20 Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 150-151.

dissect the Hastings Correspondence and the Bedchamber Crisis, long after the actual events occurred, points to a deep-seated fear both of unchecked feminine power and feminine weakness. They could not deny that Victoria had the power to affect government, but they were terrified that she was acting of her own volition. Or rather, they could not believe that she was acting of her own will and therefore spun events so that her actions could be attributed to the influence of others. They preferred to place the blame on advisors, constantly and carefully reducing her agency in the story. It also allowed certain Tory papers to assume they were correct in all their assumptions about women in politics—namely, that they were malicious gossip-mongers.

Mistrust over Victoria's gender and her actions during the Bedchamber Crisis were also tied to the ongoing issue of how involved the monarch should be in government. At the beginning of the Crisis, the more moderate papers seemed to treat the change of government as a matter of course. There were some harsh words for the opposite party, but no real personal attacks. It was only after the news of the confrontation between Peel and Victoria over the ladies of bedchamber and Victoria's involvement got out that the press became more vociferous. Before the crisis, Victoria's role in government was hardly mentioned in the papers at all, except in passing reference to “the Queen's Ministers.” It was only when she directly involved herself in the formation of the new government that the press was forced to take her character and actions into account. As long as she was in the background, the male ministers could work at running the country. Her meddling was seen as a dire disturbance. The idea that Victoria might consider events and make her own decisions accordingly brought to mind visions of past monarchs poking their noses into business they did not understand and making things difficult for those who knew how the country should be run. However, it was necessary for the editors to still appear as loyal subjects to the Queen. Esteem for the monarchy was still vastly important, and this combined

with the perception of Victoria as a weak woman. Thus, the papers could harshly condemn the men around her, while expressing nothing stronger than disappointment in the Queen herself, as though she were a wayward child not achieving her full potential.

Members of the media often did not credit Victoria with a largely political role, but this may have been wishful thinking on their part. While newspapers and periodicals insisted upon a reduced political influence on the part of the monarch, the Queen exercised far more political power than the public was given to know.<sup>21</sup> In some ways Victoria did have a limited understanding of how government worked: for example, she did not understand why Wellington could not immediately promise her that he would serve in the cabinet.<sup>22</sup> However, Charles Beem's approach to the matter places the Queen fully in control of her own actions. He states that Victoria used her knowledge of the political system to advance her personal interests. She considered Melbourne her friend and wanted him to stay in power. But she also understood her royal rights very well, and her act was premeditated based on her knowledge of the political system which, in this case, was better than Peel's. Household appointments were still confusing, in that they could be made for both political and personal reasons. The Reform Bill of 1832 had demonstrated that monarchical power was definitely decreasing, but no one knew by how much or where that decline would stop.<sup>23</sup> In her refusal to dismiss any of the ladies involved, Victoria proved that she felt she was the only one with any authority over her household; she did not consider them responsible to anyone.<sup>24</sup>

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21 John Plunkett, *Victoria: First Media Monarch*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

22 Longford, *Victoria R.I.*, 109.

23 Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 150-51.

24 Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 160-62.



There was also the issue of Victoria's obvious partiality for the Whigs, or at least for Melbourne. The Bedchamber Crisis further identified the Queen with the Whigs, which was an unforgivable development so far as the Tory press was concerned.<sup>25</sup> Yet after being reinstated, Melbourne's government remained in power for another two years without a similar crisis. Therefore Victoria may have been more aware of the political climate than anyone has given her credit for.<sup>26</sup> In fact, there was no reason why Victoria should have had confidence in a Tory government that was no more convinced that it could maintain a majority than had the Whigs.<sup>27</sup> In this line of thinking, Victoria's choice of keeping the Whigs in power can be argued to have been less a matter of partisanship and more a matter genuine political knowledge--albeit tempered by her very real friendship and partiality for Melbourne.

Victoria was not the first royal woman whose gender played a large role in how she was portrayed in the media. Though previous Queens Consort were obviously not associated with the same responsibilities as a Queen Regnant, their occasional interfering in politics was not received kindly. Far more often, the press depicted them as positively embodying traditional gender roles. Olwen Hedley talks about Queen Charlotte's carefully cultivated reputation as a philanthropist.<sup>28</sup> This was the only job open to her and allowed her to be viewed by the press as an essentially good-hearted person. As a mother, wife, and philanthropist, she was associated with traditionally feminine characteristics. This reputation ultimately allowed her to ride out the media storm when she was taken to task by newspapers for opposing the possible regency of her

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25 Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria*, (England: Ashgate, 1997), 86-88.

26 Arnstein, *Queen Victoria*, 43-45.

27 Clark, *Peel*, 425-426.

28 Olwen Hedley, *Queen Charlotte* (Great Britain: John Murray, 1975), 92.

son when George III became permanently incapacitated.<sup>29</sup> Arguably, Victoria may have run into trouble, in part, because she was not yet similarly associated with any such feminine or charitable roles.<sup>30</sup>

Reflecting Victoria's struggles with being taken seriously as a female ruler, Clarissa Campbell Orr delves more deeply into fears about the monarchy becoming “feminized” under George IV.<sup>31</sup> His mode of living was very much associated with that of a woman, from his preoccupation with dress to his lack of any real profession. These were negative associations. No one wanted a prince, a regent, or a king who acted like an overemotional woman.<sup>32</sup> Victoria's femininity was fine, as long as she was willing to be guided by men; but women *per se*, or feminine men, were not welcome in the role of regnant monarch.

William IV's reign was viewed as a return to domesticity—as pioneered by George III and Charlotte—engineered largely by William's wife, Adelaide of Saxe Meiningen. While most often portrayed as a quiet, unassuming woman who helped bring the monarchy back into the respectable fold, Adelaide also faced substantial criticism for her conservatism and opposition to the Reform Bill of 1832.<sup>33</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* was quite vociferous in painting Adelaide's perceived influence in a malicious light. She was depicted as the sole cause for reform delay, constantly pressuring the King to abandon the Reform Bill.<sup>34</sup> Anne Somerset's biography of

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29 Hedley, *Queen Charlotte*, 163-64.

30 For more on how Victoria and Albert cultivated a moral rather than a political authority over the nation through their charitable activities, see Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

31 Orr, “Feminization of the Monarchy,” 78-79.

32 Orr, “Feminization of the Monarchy,” 86-87.

33 A. W. Purdue, “Queen Adelaide: Malign Influence or Consort Maligned?” in *Queenship in Britain 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002).

34 Purdue, “Queen Adelaide,” 283.

William IV mentions the *Times* blaming the 1834 dismissal of Melbourne's Whig government on Adelaide.<sup>35</sup> Whether she was actually responsible, the fact that the press felt comfortable making such an accusation speaks volumes. Adelaide also faced her own household crisis regarding her Chamberlain, Lord Howe. He did not hide his Tory views or his attendance on the Queen, and the Whig community demanded, and eventually secured, his resignation. As with Victoria and Melbourne, a male household influence on the Queen was felt to be unseemly as it would lead to political interference.<sup>36</sup> However, like Queen Charlotte, Adelaide was ultimately able to overcome any bad press by transforming herself into a well-known philanthropist.<sup>37</sup> After removing herself from the political realm and taking on what was deemed a more gender-appropriate role, Adelaide was heralded as a model royal woman. By the time of the Hastings Scandal and Bedchamber Crisis, Adelaide's example was held up in Tory papers as worthy of emulation, a not-so-subtle hint to the young Queen.

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The importance of the media during and after the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis cannot be underestimated. The media kept the Hastings Scandal alive long after it was confirmed that Lady Flora was not pregnant, and the Bedchamber Crisis far longer than the four days that it actually encompassed. The press sustained and elevated both events and played a crucial role in relaying both issues to the public in the first place. While much of the information was initially speculation about rumours, the later facts that came out, in the form of correspondence and speeches in Parliament, seemed to justify the chosen spin of each

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35 Anne Somerset, *The Life and Times of William IV*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 189 and Purdue, "Queen Adelaide, 277-78.

36 Purdue, "Queen Adelaide," 281.

37 Orr, "Feminization of the Monarchy," 91.

newspaper. Newspapers were clearly divided along party lines, though some were more fair to one party than the other. Moreover, the people most directly involved, aside from Lady Flora Hastings' relatives, seemingly had no desire to keep the issues in the public view. This is why a concentration only on what was going on in the parliamentary sphere does not reveal the full scope of events. Peel, Melbourne, Russell, and Wellington, to name a few, appeared more embarrassed than angry about the situation. Apart from the formal explanations given in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the male politicians do not appear to have been overly concerned about keeping the matter in the public eye.

It is interesting, then, that the papers continued to pit them against each other on the Queen's and Lady Flora's behalf. The seeming lack of direction from any governmental forces (unless from behind the scenes) points to relatively recent developments that had enhanced the freedom of the press. John Plunkett discusses new laws and customs governing the press that had not existed before. He argues that the circumstances of the new media made the cultivation of uniquely public royal images an inevitable development.<sup>38</sup> New technologies and markets created a large upswing in demand for newspapers and periodicals. Modern English newspapers were influenced by beliefs that upheld the freedom to criticize political leaders. In an effort to encourage public participation in, and knowledge of, politics from which it may otherwise have been excluded, the press sought to demystify the monarchy and the processes in which it was involved.<sup>39</sup>

Richard Williams delves into the existence of the highly partisan Whig and Tory affiliated papers and sheds some light on how the Bedchamber Crisis was parsed. The Queen's

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<sup>38</sup> Plunkett, *Victoria*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Plunkett, *Victoria*, 3-4.

household had been a matter of media scrutiny since the beginning of the reign, and the Hastings scandal especially drew criticism from Tory newspapers, such as the *Morning Post*. After the Bedchamber Crisis had ostensibly passed, some papers even connected the two events, as many modern historians have also done.<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Longford states that the press had played a role since the first rumours surrounding Lady Flora began to circulate and contributed to the confusion over the subject due to the eagerness to be the first to report on the story. However, the newspapers lacked anything other than the Hastings Correspondence to go on, which resulted in many of the initial reports of the Hastings Scandal being based on sourceless rumours that kept finding their way into the papers.<sup>41</sup> During the month of March, while the Queen's party and the Hastings party exchanged letters about the incident, the public continued only to have the press' account of the situation, which was hardly based on fact. No clear statement was made by any of the people actually involved, until a letter written by Lady Flora was reproduced in *The Examiner*.<sup>42</sup> The Hastings Scandal was largely blown out of proportion by the press and used as a point on which to hang party contention. It was a way to discredit a Whig Queen and Court.

Victoria was a permanent fixture in people's lives, but her image could be manipulated or celebrated as publishers saw fit. Even if Victoria was aware of how she was being depicted, there was little she could do about it.<sup>43</sup> However, in spite of how Victoria's figure loomed over everything, there were still plenty of occasions on which she was criticized, disliked, or even ignored, especially early in her reign.<sup>44</sup> The newspapers and periodicals also fought over whose version of the Queen should take precedence and over publications to which Victoria herself

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40 Williams, *Contentious Crown*, 84-5, 86.

41 Longford, *Victoria R.I.*, 101.

42 Longford, *Victoria R.I.*, 102-03.

43 Plunkett, *Victoria*, 2.

44 Plunkett, *Victoria*, 8-10.

should pay attention. Her relationship with the press was not assured at the beginning of her reign, and her favour was cultivated, whether she paid attention or not.<sup>45</sup> There was pressure on Victoria to actively engage with print media. It was suggested that she should inform the papers of her activities, so that they could better represent the image that she wanted to be conveyed to her subjects. There was a desire for a personal closeness with the monarch that was new at the time. Victoria was not just being asked to accept that her life was to be independently represented by publications, but also to approve and even to participate in it.<sup>46</sup> Tory publications worried about the inflammatory results of publishing less flattering portraits of the Queen, as during the Flora Hastings scandal. If too many people knew that the monarch was acting foolishly, the people might demand a more responsible ruler.<sup>47</sup> The press was obsessed with the gossip and impropriety of the ordeals that Lady Flora had to endure and the Queen was heavily criticized for having not made a public apology. It was greatly feared that Victoria was being negatively influenced by those around her and that no one was available to rescue her.<sup>48</sup>

The intrusiveness of the new media also brought to light the issue of whether Victoria was even entitled to a private life. Victoria insisted that she had a public and a private life, but she was fighting a losing battle. It has been argued that, while the King was necessarily on display to the public, consorts could have a private home life. Yet this was also myth. The monarchy was public by nature, and it was well-established that the sovereign's life was fair game for the press.<sup>49</sup> Personal actions were often tied to political motives, no matter the

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45 Plunkett, *Victoria* 110.

46 Plunkett, *Victoria*, 121-22.

47 Plunkett, *Victoria* 128.

48 Richard Francis Spall, Jr., "The Bedchamber Crisis and the Hastings Scandal: Morals, Politics, and the Press at the Beginning of Victoria's Reign," *Canadian Journal of History* 22, no.1 (April 1987): 25-30.

49 Marilyn Morris, "The Royal Family and Family Values in Late Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal*

protestations. Thus it was incredibly hard for anyone to believe Victoria when she said that she never discussed politics with her private household. She may have said that she distinguished between the public and private worlds, but in the minds of those who living in a new press-driven era, such a pose struck many as practically impossible. Some even argue that royalty benefited a great deal from the increased attention. It made them familiar figures whom people were fond of simply because of their constancy.<sup>50</sup> However, the monarchy did not control the public's shaping of its royal image.<sup>51</sup>

To an extent, the media showed some awareness of the way that its spotlight could have intruded on Victoria's life. There was some consciousness of how her private identity could have been erased as a result of the public one that was forced on her.<sup>52</sup> Karen Chase and Michael Levenson depict the Bedchamber Crisis as being part of the struggle for a private sphere. They state that the episode was inevitable after Victoria ascended the throne, given that her gender and age only heightened the old struggle between the public and private bodies of the monarch.<sup>53</sup> Victoria initially wanted to stay as private as possible, but she accepted the need to adopt a persona and manner appropriate for a more public figure. She decided to portray an image of a strong, unyielding monarch—a traditional king—but this was not what the press wanted.<sup>54</sup> Victoria was well aware of the idea of male monarchs having “two bodies.”<sup>55</sup> She thought of

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*of Family History* 21 (1996): 521.

50 Plunkett, *Victoria*, 2.

51 Plunkett, *Victoria*, 2.

52 Plunkett, *Victoria*, 124.

53 Chase and Levenson, “The Young Queen,” 47.

54 Chase and Levenson, “The Young Queen,” 49.

55 For more on this ideology and the problems posed by the intersection of the monarch's “body political” (the inherited spirit of monarchy that inhabits the body) and “body natural” (the monarch's physical, earthly body) see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

herself both as a ruler of a nation and a woman with a private household, and she was scrupulous in keeping her two lives separate. She claimed that she absolutely did not think of the household as a political sphere.

At the time of the Bedchamber Crisis, the Whig papers could be seen to be upholding the private sphere as sacred, respecting the privacy in the home of the young Queen. They, and especially Melbourne, could play the role of sensitive father figures wanting only to give guidance within the confines of the home. Peel and the Tory papers were essentially forced to espouse the opposite view: that the monarch had no private life and must blend her public and private roles. To people of the former mindset, Peel could not appear otherwise than as a crass bully trying to invade a place into which he had not been invited. Eventually, however, the Whig defence rested less on the importance of the private sphere and more on the solemn rights of the monarch.<sup>56</sup> In insisting that she occupy separate public and private spheres for her political and domestic lives, Victoria became more comparable to a Queen Consort than a Queen Regnant.<sup>57</sup>

Victoria was hardly the first monarch to experience negative press, and her treatment certainly had its roots in previous reigns. John Plunkett mentions that one of the problems the press had with Queen Victoria in her early days as monarch was her perceived seclusion. She did not go out amongst the people very often, and this seemed to be an unwelcome throw-back to previous reigns. At some point in each of their reigns, George III, George IV, and William IV were all prevented in some way from being accessible or visible and therefore could not engender a sense of community between sovereign and subjects. George III's madness, George IV's terrible reputation, accompanied by his own increasing disinclination to go out in public,

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<sup>56</sup> Chase and Levenson, "The Young Queen," 55-56.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1867* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14-15.



and William IV's age when he ascended, as well as his controversial involvement with the Reform Bill, all resulted in periods of seclusion that angered a public becoming used to a more visible monarchy. As the monarchy increasingly lost any practical powers, a shift began to take place that resulted in the thought that its members could earn their keep in a more ceremonial function.<sup>58</sup>

The basis for many of the new attitudes towards and expectations of the monarchy arose from the reign of George III and his marriage to Charlotte of Mecklenberg Strelitz. With them, the monarchy entered a new phase of domestic respectability that was embraced by newspapers.<sup>59</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr details how George and Charlotte were able to withdraw to the privacy of Kew and Windsor, but even in so doing they gave their public reputation a sheen of respectability.<sup>60</sup> The idea of a royal family unit was further cultivated once George and Charlotte began having children. Their public appearances were due to a conscious effort on the part of the king and were dutifully reported and admired by the press. George's fidelity and publicly-displayed familial affection were of particular note.<sup>61</sup> The media played a crucial role in creating the idea of a morally correct royal family.<sup>62</sup>

Victoria's insistence on a private life was mirrored in Charlotte's own attempts to do the same. While she tried to form friendships through her interest in botany, she soon realized that she could not form friendships in the same way as other people because the monarch had to

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58 John Plunkett, "Civic Publicness: The Creation of Queen Victoria's Royal Role 1837-61," in *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, eds. Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 17.

59 Orr, "Feminization of the Monarchy", 78-79.

60 Clarissa Campbell Orr, "Queen Charlotte, 'Scientific Queen,'" in *Queenship in Britain 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 240-241.

61 Morris, "The Royal Family," 521.

62 Morris, "The Royal Family," 524-25.

appear to be above partisanship.<sup>63</sup> The problem of royal household appointments being seen as gateways to undue influence was likewise not new at the time of the Bedchamber Crisis. There were no purely personal relationships; everything had a political edge.<sup>64</sup> Like Victoria, Charlotte initially disliked having to view everyone around her as employees more than friends. She did not appreciate the satires and cartoons that appeared in the press illustrating the royal family's reputedly boring home life. She did not understand how the press could be so intrusive, and she chose to try and hide from prying eyes. But she had her husband had still set a precedent for a far more publicized royal image.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps the best example of intense media portrayal of the monarchy came with the issue of George IV and his wife Caroline of Brunswick. During their life together, there were several instances when the press was involved, whether through invitation or out of the the celebrity culture that had come to surround George IV when he was still Prince of Wales.<sup>66</sup> More than anything, the press feared that Victoria would turn out to be another disappointment, like George IV, while the intense media coverage of the Bedchamber Crisis was foreshadowed by Caroline's adultery trial.

Like Victoria, George IV, as Prince of Wales, Regent, and King, wished to have a private life separate from political duties. He seemed to assume that he could live like any other indolent, aristocratic gentleman and attempted to carry on his dissolute lifestyle and affairs in private. However, absolutely nothing prevented various pamphlets and papers from reporting his activities and judging him for them. There was outrage over the fact that he did not carry on his

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63 Orr, "Queen Charlotte," 240-41.

64 Orr, "Queen Charlotte," 245.

65 Nesta Pain, *George III At Home* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975), 44.

66 Flora Fraser, *The Unruly Queen: The Life of Queen Caroline* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 57, 71, 231, 234.

father's legacy of assuming a ceremonial role in service to the public.<sup>67</sup> Victoria also was accused of acting selfishly and not considering the needs of the nation. Her apparent lack of responsibility brought up fears that she would fall into a dissolute lifestyle, just like her uncle. The morality of the king was of great concern in the press. It was thought that the king should at least be a good person, but George IV decidedly was not. The press held him accountable for his actions and expected him to act in a morally correct way.<sup>68</sup> To do otherwise was to betray the legacy of respectability bequeathed by George III.

The media's ability to support and condemn the monarch, as well as to elevate issues associated with her, was first made apparent with regard to Queen Caroline. Her adultery trial saw the “most impressive display of public opinion since the days of Wilkes,” and newspapers certainly made up a large part of that display.<sup>69</sup> As with Flora Hastings' family, Caroline used the newspapers as a means to communicate her mission to the populace.<sup>70</sup> Once Caroline nominally became Queen in 1820, she was surrounded by a vast media coverage recording and parsing her every move, both negatively and positively. Continuing the trend begun with George III's family, news about the royal family sold well. It was very beneficial for the mass-circulated press to provide as much information about the new Queen's movements as possible. The monarchy was news simply by existing.<sup>71</sup> The rapidly increasing public interest in the monarchy, independent of governmental affairs, continued to ensure a media that felt entitled to scrutinize the lives of

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67 Fraser, *Unruly Queen*, 86-87.

68 Tamara L. Hunt, “Morality and Monarchy in the Queen Caroline Affair,” *Albion* 23, no.4 (Winter 1991): 709-11.

69 John Stevenson, “The Queen Caroline Affair,” in *London in the Age of Reform*, ed., John Stevenson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 117.

70 Stevenson, “The Queen Caroline Affair,” 120.

71 Fraser, *Unruly Queen*, 363.

royalty.<sup>72</sup> Caroline's popularity during her trial was fuelled by pamphlets. The press coverage, which she welcomed, gave her a huge advantage over her husband.<sup>73</sup> However, Caroline only had power for as long as the press backed her. As soon as she accepted a lucrative settlement after her trial, people lost interest in her. The press gave her power and then just as effectively took it away.<sup>74</sup>

Caroline's supporters in the press took the same general positions as did Victoria's. Caroline was portrayed as bullied by an uncouth man, forced into wrongdoing by his actions. However, where Caroline's detractors showcased her as immoral and naturally disposed to bad behaviour, Victoria was never spoken of as naturally bad. She was only surrounded by bad advisors and false friends. Caroline was undoubtedly guilty of adultery, but her cause was still taken up by those who viewed themselves as performing a chivalrous service. She was painted as defenceless, set adrift by the bad behaviour of her husband--much as Victoria was said to have behaved badly because of Melbourne's poor example. Ignoring Caroline's immorality and blaming her misdeeds on others effectively robbed her of agency.<sup>75</sup> This was a direct predecessor of well-meaning papers taking up Victoria's cause, which painted her as acting out of necessity and not through her own volition.

As with the Bedchamber Crisis, Caroline's trial provided an outlet for party politics. Peel himself stated that dissension within the royal family was bad for politics, as it provided a means for party division to play out vicariously through them.<sup>76</sup> Caroline's cause was espoused by

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72 Hunt, "Morality and Monarchy," 697-99.

73 Fraser, *Unruly Queen*, 405.

74 Fraser, *Unruly Queen*, 452-53.

75 Louise Carter, "British Masculinities on Trial in the Queen Caroline Affair of 1820," *Gender & History* 20, no. 2 (August 2008): 248-269.

76 Stevenson, "The Queen Caroline Affair," 140.

those who could use it to their own purposes. Her grievances against George provided a platform from which some could vent their own issues with him and, more particularly, the Tory party.<sup>77</sup> Caroline's trial showed how easy it was for something that was essentially personal to become a public and politicized matter. Virtually nothing else was talked about, and it was widely considered not to be just a matter of gossip but one of political expediency. This was clearly a forerunner of how much the Bedchamber Crisis would also take precedence over other issues.<sup>78</sup> Many of Caroline's supporters probably believed in her guilt, but it made more sense for them to back her and, in so doing, to oppose the King and the Tories. Once she had ceased being useful, her cause was dropped and she was just as open to attacks on her morality as the King was.<sup>79</sup> At any rate, both George IV and his wife had continually caused an uproar in the press and merited censure for their less-than-respectable ways.

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The above discussions of biography, gender, and the press all have bearing on the subjects of the Hastings Correspondence and the Bedchamber Crisis, but it is only recently that scholarship has started to give more consideration specifically to the Bedchamber Crisis and Queen Victoria's role in it. Arguably, two of the best treatments of the Bedchamber Crisis come from Charles Beem and Richard Francis Spall Jr. Beem correctly states that the Crisis “has long remained a misunderstood and easily dismissed political flare-up.” He points out that Victoria was well within her rights to refuse Peel's request. He also reminds us that Victoria was always conscious of her royal prerogative and that there is no reason to think that she acted blindly, with

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<sup>77</sup> Fraser, *Unruly Queen*, 388.

<sup>78</sup> Hunt, “Morality and Monarchy,” 701-03.

<sup>79</sup> Hunt, “Morality and Monarchy,” 713.

no political knowledge to back her up. It was, in fact, Peel who was in the wrong, since, though there was precedent for the monarch changing his or her household staff depending on which party was in office, there was nothing in the Constitution that made it mandatory.<sup>80</sup>

Spall's is the only work I found that is wholly dedicated to both the Bedchamber Crisis and the Hastings Scandal and Correspondence. Like Beem, he chides other historians for often treating the Crisis as an amusing story or glossing over it altogether. He seeks to place the event within the political context of the time and emphasizes its importance in relation to other political events and concerns, particularly linking it to the Hastings Scandal and the party divisions that accompanied that event.<sup>81</sup> Both Peel and Victoria were confused as to the other's respective position was; the case was not as open and shut as some would believe. His main argument is that the moral concerns of the Hastings Scandal bled into what should have been a purely political affair during the Bedchamber Crisis, with the press melding the two to a large degree. In his mind, the moral concerns magnified the issue and made it of much greater importance.<sup>82</sup> He also mentions the correspondence exchanges published in the *Examiner* and the *Morning Post* that formed the backbone for discussions of the Court and its supposedly inappropriate atmosphere.<sup>83</sup>

Of the historiographical works surveyed, Spall's work makes the most valuable connections between the Hastings Scandal, the Bedchamber Crisis, and the press. Yet it does not detail how the press specifically treated the Queen's person. Most of the sources dealing with the Bedchamber Crisis and the Hastings Scandal mention the media coverage that both events

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80 Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 142.

81 Spall, "The Bedchamber Crisis," 19-20.

82 Spall, "The Bedchamber Crisis," 35-39.

83 Spall, "The Bedchamber Crisis," 20.

garnered, but none make the press the focus of study. Only the Tory affiliated newspapers are mentioned, as they were the ones attacking the Court. Such papers were wont to blame Melbourne and the women supposedly under his thrall for Victoria's lack of judgement, claiming that the initial resignation on May 7<sup>th</sup> had simply been part of a plot of Melbourne's making. Yet although Whig newspapers expressed admiration for Victoria, they also portrayed her actions as being a spur-of-the-moment reaction to Peel's bullying. Both of these arguments make Victoria a passive participant in events; they magnify the ramifications of her decision but they also remove her voice. Neither side would countenance the idea that Victoria's decision was made as a result of her own conclusions before she even met with Peel. My thesis has surveyed the coverage of the question in the *Times*, the *Morning Post*, and the *Standard* (all Tory-affiliated papers), as well as the *Examiner* and the *Morning Chronicle* (both Whig-affiliated papers). An examination of these Whig and Tory London daily newspapers from April to December 1839 reveals how committed both sides were to removing Queen Victoria's agency and the power they sought to wield in so doing.

## Chapter 1: The Hastings Correspondence

The bulk of the events that comprised the Hastings Scandal took place in February 1839. However, discussion in the press picked up on April 16<sup>th</sup>, when Lady Flora's mother, the Dowager Marchioness of Hastings, had her March correspondence with Melbourne published in the *Morning Post* and the *Standard*, papers associated with the Tories. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, the *Standard* had also been given permission to publish a letter written from Lady Flora's brother, the Marquis of Hastings, to Melbourne, and this letter was included with the rest of the correspondence on the 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> The main theme of the correspondence was the Marchioness badgering Melbourne to get the Queen to commit to issuing a public apology to Lady Flora, while the Marquis echoed his mother's request in his own letter. The figures on whom Lady Hastings' complaints put a spotlight were Queen Victoria, Baroness Louise Lehzen (Victoria's close friend and confidante), Baroness Emma Portman, Marchioness Maria of Normanby, Marchioness Anna Maria of Tavistock, and Dr. James Clark. Back in February, Lady Portman, after possibly speaking to the doctor, had asked for an interview with the Duchess of Kent, though it was her husband who ended up asking the Duchess not to see Lady Flora anymore due to her blemished character. Dr. Clark was the one who had actually confronted Lady Flora about the rumours surrounding her and (along with another doctor) performed the "humiliating" medical examination that ended up exonerating her. Queen Victoria met with Lady Flora privately to express her regret for what had happened, but this was not enough for the Marchioness. In the correspondence, Melbourne continually stated that making reparations to Lady Flora was Victoria's top priority but committed to nothing more. His apparent insensitivity,

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<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, April 16, 1839.



and the sense that her daughter had been not been sufficiently repaid for the wrongs done to her, enraged Lady Hastings, leading her to expose to the rest of the England the lack of propriety of the Court, as embodied by Melbourne.

Most other newspapers reproduced the correspondence from these sources, including the *Examiner* and the *Morning Chronicle*, both papers associated with the Whigs.<sup>2</sup> However, the Whig newspapers offered no further commentary, in stark contrast with the *Post* and the *Standard*. Their silence was noticed by their contemporaries and the *Morning Post*, for one, stated that this must have been because the Whig papers could not hope to defend the actions that had resulted in feelings of disappointment and anger throughout the land. The *Post* triumphantly concluded that, by not defending “Melbourne's Court,” the Whig papers were actually joining in the criticism of it.<sup>3</sup> However, it was more likely that, on this occasion, the Whig papers were in agreement with the more moderate Tory paper, the *Times*. The *Times* also reprinted the complete correspondence and the *Standard's* commentary, but offered no further comments. By May 1<sup>st</sup> the *Times* took the step of advising other papers to let the matter lie, stating that Lady Flora’s reputation had long been restored and that there was no need to keep the matter in the public eye, when it could only cause the lady in question distress.<sup>4</sup>

Yet nothing could deter the *Morning Post* and, to a lesser extent, the *Standard*, from pursuing the subject right up to the eve of the Bedchamber Crisis. In fact, the papers insisted that the matter was much bigger than Lady Flora, involving the Queen's reputation, that of her Court, and the stability of the entire nation.<sup>5</sup> This section will therefore focus on only these two

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2 *Examiner*, April 21, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, April 16 and 17, 1839.

3 *Morning Post*, April 25, 1839.

4 *Times*, April 16 and 17, and May 1, 1839.

5 *Morning Post*, May 2, 1839.

newspapers: their stances on the Hastings Correspondence illustrate the Tory strategy on how to discredit the Queen and reduce her agency without directly attacking her, a tactic that would recur during the Bedchamber Crisis. In the language used to refer to Victoria, the emphasis on the influence of others and her separation from her mother, and in the projected consequences of Victoria's lack of leadership, this section of the Tory press simultaneously absolved Victoria of active responsibility while it condemned her for being too passive.

The adjectives used to refer to the Queen always involved her age, her gender, or her marital status. In fact, the most common terms used were “young,” “virgin,” and “youthful,” with “maiden,” and “female” also being deployed. This use of language was the most subtle way of questioning the Queen's ability to rule without directly insulting her. It forced the reader to constantly associate Victoria with her youth, her femininity, and her unmarried state—all things that were also associated with weakness. These factors, especially her age, were constantly held up as reasons why Victoria was so susceptible to bad influence and why she needed to be protected. Her household was said to be “not such a Court as ought to surround a Queen of youthful years.”<sup>6</sup> This kind of language effectively infantilized Victoria and reinforced the notion that she was simply too young (she was nineteen years old), and of the wrong gender, to either make decisions or be held accountable for events that occurred at her Court.

This deliberate association of the Queen with her youth and gender in order to remove her from an active role in her Court arose out of a growing Tory movement to reduce the political agency of aristocratic women and sequester them in the household arena as much as possible. Tory writers still had memories of the political activities of titled women during the late eighteenth century, and they certainly did not want the Queen to emulate certain Whig ladies

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<sup>6</sup> *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839.

(such as the Duchess of Devonshire) of that time. Such women had formerly been “generally regarded as members of the political nation according to the station in which God had placed them.”<sup>7</sup> Though still restricted by their gender their high social standing nevertheless allowed them to be actively involved in politics. However, the matter of gender eventually began to override the political privileges of class, and many aristocratic women became the target of resentful male Tory backlash in the press. Tory politicians also began to simply refuse to discuss politics in society, deliberately excluding women from the conversation.<sup>8</sup>

A woman's “primary identification, even in politics, was becoming gender,” with an ever greater emphasis on what came to be viewed as traditionally feminine traits of modesty and docility—both of which required a woman to remove herself from the public sphere as much as possible.<sup>9</sup> A figure who had seemed to embody these traits, and who was also still very much in the public mind, was Princess Charlotte, the daughter of George IV and Caroline. Charlotte had died in 1817 after giving birth to a stillborn son. The princess' death, occurring when she was only twenty-one and after she had only been married a short while, resulted in an “orgy of grief.” She had been considered a perfect picture of young femininity, and her death seemed to heighten the demand for young aristocratic women to conduct themselves accordingly.<sup>10</sup> Charlotte (and, for a time, her infamous mother) had been embraced by a press that sought to glorify her “vulnerable femininity that [provided] a welcome rationale for chivalric acts.” This ideal was likewise projected onto Victoria when she ascended the throne. In the minds of Tory writers,

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7 Judith S. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain*

(New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 429. See also Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life C. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

8 Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, 148.

9 Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, 150.

10 Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, 151.

notions of acceptable young womanhood for the Queen involved the image of a virginal, vulnerable girl, conscious of her duties yet open to male guidance.<sup>11</sup> Being properly feminine had come to involve approaching politics with reluctance.

The *Post* went out of its way to manufacture a personality for Victoria that emphasized her naturally “warm and generous nature.” As mentioned before, Victoria had lived a very private life before ascending the throne. The papers were not sure what to make of her, but they expected her to be a model of femininity. Victoria's virginity essentially placed her in a sort of suspended animation as a wide-eyed, trusting child; her virgin state was assumed to have given her a natural sympathy for the people around her. It was thought that if the Marchioness' concerns had been brought straight to Victoria rather than to Melbourne, then surely the Queen would have made amends right away. Victoria was assigned positive traits because of her virginity, but the only power they bestowed was that of placating an angry mother.<sup>12</sup> Though obviously not given access to the Queen or her words, it was known that Victoria believed enough of the rumours against Lady Flora to allow her to be dismissed from the Duchess of Kent's household. She also felt that it was more than enough to apologize to Lady Flora in private, and no matter how much Melbourne tried to assure Lady Hastings, a public apology was clearly not high on Victoria's list of priorities. These were decisions that Victoria made herself, yet her agency was erased in a quest to make her as acceptably “feminine” as possible. This could have been done in order to head off a situation similar to the Queen Caroline Affair, when a royal woman's personal life was scandalously splashed all over pamphlets throughout the nation. Caroline had pursued her own interests through whatever means were available to her,

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11 Homans, *Royal Representations*, 13.

12 *Morning Post*, April 22, 1839.

including becoming a sort of icon for other women of the lower social orders and their far more flexible customs when it came to sexual freedom.<sup>13</sup> It is unlikely that the Tory press wanted Queen Victoria to be similarly identified with a woman whose private life had become embarrassingly public.

Victoria's refusal to publicly apologize to Lady Flora could also have been tied to the image of a lack of appropriate concern for harmony in her domestic life. "Fear of household discord had...a hold on the imagination of the Victorian governing classes," and this may have fed into the need of the Tory papers to downplay Victoria's behaviour regarding Lady Flora. Though harmony in the home was primarily seen as being important for married couples, the fact that Victoria seemed indifferent to preserving domestic peace did not bode well for her much-hoped-for marriage.<sup>14</sup> It was therefore important for Tory writers to emphasize that the Queen could still regain a happy household if she was only willing to heed proper advice. The *Morning Post* often went out of its way to insist that, left to her own devices, Victoria would never have turned against Lady Flora. Victoria was assigned a certain feminine strength in warmhearted passivity, but it was made clear that this was also her downfall, as it left her open to the influence of others.<sup>15</sup>

While subtly reducing Victoria's power by constantly referring to her youth and femininity, the *Morning Post* actually tried to empower Lady Flora by playing up her virtue. This was the only (passive) power that they would acknowledge a woman could possess. By pitting Victoria against Lady Flora they threatened to rob Victoria of even the small advantage that her

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13 Anna Clark, "Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820," *Representations* 31 (Summer 1990): 47, 48, 51, 56, 60.

14 Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38-41.

15 *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

“virgin” nature should have naturally bestowed on her. The paper stated that all other good, virtuous women in England would sympathize with Lady Flora and the dilemma of her mother, while the men of England would undoubtedly wish to protect Lady Flora and women like her. The implication was that women opposed to Lady Flora lacked virtue and were therefore only worthy of the protection of a cad like Melbourne. Without virtue, a woman had nothing, and though Victoria was referred to as “virgin,” the fact that she kept company with women who would slander Lady Flora did not bode well for her.<sup>16</sup> Professing to care deeply for the Queen's quality of life, the paper implied that Victoria's personal happiness was bound up in the notion of female virtue. She could only be happy by allowing herself to be influenced by the right people and maintaining feminine ideals of modesty and passivity. Deviating from what was seen to be the norm for aristocratic females would cause the Queen “not merely to destroy her happiness, but to blight her reputation.”<sup>17</sup> Going up against the assured purity of Lady Flora, Victoria's respectability was threatened, and therefore also her authority.

It was considered a matter of national importance that the Queen be “shielded from contamination,” and one way that the *Post* and *Standard* eroded Victoria's agency was to blame her actions on such “contamination.”<sup>18</sup> While they merely claimed to wish to protect her reputation, they actually made her appear weak, foolish, and the captive of the wrong people. The Hastings Correspondence provided the perfect opportunity to malign Melbourne and his relationship with the Queen. As an unfit adviser to his monarch, he was blamed directly for the complaints of Lady Hastings; as an irresponsible guardian, his influence on the young Victoria was also lamented. This resulted in an image of Victoria as a mix of uncertain sovereign and

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<sup>16</sup> *Morning Post*, April 16, 1839.

<sup>17</sup> *Morning Post*, April 26, 1839.

<sup>18</sup> *Morning Post*, April 27, 1839.

wayward child. The papers contained several spreads dedicated to the Hastings Correspondence, and each time one could find letters, editorials, and reprints from other papers that blamed Melbourne for everything and wondered if Victoria was even aware of what had been done.<sup>19</sup>

Over and over, through editorials and letters to the editor, it was claimed that “[his] Lordship merely put this formal answer into her Majesty's mouth. One of Lady Hastings' requests was the dismissal of Dr. Clark from Victoria's service. The fact that this request was not carried out was blamed on Melbourne. He was also tasked with explaining why Lady Flora was asked to withdraw from the service of the Duchess of Kent for a time.<sup>20</sup> A letter to the editor admitted the possibility that Victoria may have wished Melbourne to respond as he did to Lady Hastings; but if that was the case, then Melbourne should have counselled Victoria otherwise. Either way, the true fault lay with him.<sup>21</sup>” It was, of course, possible that Victoria did not see the Hastings correspondence before it was published in the papers and that Melbourne took it upon himself to deal with the Marchioness entirely on his own. However, the fact remains that active involvement by Victoria was never even considered by the Tory press.<sup>22</sup> In a reprint from the *Morning Herald*, the *Standard* reinforced the idea that “no loyal subject will transfer to [the Queen] the blame which belongs to the evil advisers who surround her throne.”<sup>23</sup>

The *Post* was of the opinion that Melbourne's insensitive words to Lady Hastings arose out of the fact that he was only used to conversing with women with no inkling of virtue, and he was also given credit for having “supreme authority in the Court of [the] maiden Queen.” It was taken for granted that Melbourne was guiding Victoria, and the *Post* expressed worry over his

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19 *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839, *Morning Post*, April 29, 1839, *Standard*, April 15, 1839, *Standard*, April 24, 1839.

20 *Morning Post*, April 17, 1839.

21 *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

22 *Morning Post*, April 22, 1839.

23 *Standard*, April 24, 1839.

unfitness for that job.<sup>24</sup> The *Post* stated that Melbourne had always had a terrible reputation. His marriage to Caroline Ponsonby had resulted in highly publicized scandal due to Caroline's adultery and general instability. After their separation and her death, Melbourne had well-known relationships with Lady Elizabeth Branden and Caroline Norton, as well as other women. Though it is possible that he never had a sexual relationship with any of the women, his string of “friends” were usually married, and their husbands ranged from indifferent, to compliant, to downright hostile. Lady Branden's husband attempted legal action against Melbourne, but the case was dismissed. Mrs. Norton's husband also accused Melbourne of adultery. Norton's writ for damages resulted in a highly public trial, but the case was decided in Melbourne's favour.<sup>25</sup> Even so, a reputation as a philanderer clung to Melbourne, and the *Morning Post* feared that he would transmit his “looseness of principle” to the young woman under his tutelage. It was concluded that Melbourne had in fact created the “clique” at Court that surrounded the Queen.<sup>26</sup> Several other newspapers also lamented the fact that Melbourne's behaviour informed the Queen's and that there was no way to destroy the unfortunate relationship.<sup>27</sup> The bottom line was that, if the Queen were “surrounded by persons of ordinary virtue or even of decent manners,” she never would have credited the reports about Lady Flora. It was feared that she had been corrupted by irresponsible people around her, with Melbourne leading the way.<sup>28</sup>

While Melbourne came in for the largest share of blame, others were also deemed to be “reptiles...[lurking] within the precepts of the Royal abode,” namely the ladies of Victoria's

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<sup>24</sup> *Morning Post*, April 17, 1839.

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne*, 211-215, 222-224.

<sup>26</sup> *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

<sup>27</sup> *Morning Post*, April 22, 1839.

<sup>28</sup> *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.



household.<sup>29</sup> Unlike the Queen, who was insulted in a backhanded fashion, her ladies were openly slandered in the Tory press. Lady Tavistock and Lady Portman were first specifically named on April 22 in an excerpt from the *Northampton Herald*, which suggested that, if permitted, the two ladies should be brought before a law court and forced to explain what happened.<sup>30</sup> The *Morning Post* stated that “the serving wenches at a country inn would have behaved with greater delicacy” than the women in Victoria's social circle who had supposedly spread the rumours about Lady Flora.<sup>31</sup> A letter to the editor actually expressed fear for the Queen's safety while she remained in the company of such people as certain ladies of the bedchamber, as well as Dr. Clark. The ladies were described with particular vehemence as “unchristian, unwomanly, indecent, meddling scandal-mongers.” This condemnation of “petticoat” influence was not a new phenomenon. Since the early eighteenth century, the petticoat had been used as a symbol for women's domination in the household—even in Royal households. Queen Anne, in particular, had been singled out as being too easily led by female favourites. Since the petticoat was an undergarment, references to it also carried associations of impropriety of the exact nature with which the ladies of the bedchamber were being associated.<sup>32</sup> During the Bedchamber Crisis, accusations of “petticoat” influence would also carry more pronounced political implications, as “behind the image of the petticoat lay an accepted perception (frequently emerging as a deep-seated anxiety) that women did possess the potential

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29 *Morning Post*, April 29, 1839.

30 *Morning Post*, April 22, 1839.

31 *Morning Post*, April 26, 1839.

32 Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, “Introduction: The Petticoat in Politics: Women and Authority,” in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat*, eds. Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) 1-2.

for political influence.”<sup>33</sup> However, at the time of the Hastings Correspondence, the ladies of the bedchamber were still depicted as only being dangerous in the domestic sphere. Often referred to as “creatures” or “minions,” they were also assumed to be working at the behest of a malevolent male guide.

Like Melbourne, these ladies were assumed to have always been disposed toward bad behaviour and a dangerous influence on the Queen's young mind. They were also damned by their association with Melbourne, who frequently gossiped with and encouraged them.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Melbourne was given complete credit for the Queen's household appointments as yet another way to remove responsibility from Victoria. While it was true that Melbourne suggested all of the appointments, Victoria had to make the final decisions. The *Morning Post* maintained that the women continued to hold their positions in spite of the scandal only at Melbourne and his ministry's request, which was also only prolonging the scandal and making it worse.<sup>35</sup> No one called for Victoria to dismiss her ladies; instead, it was stated that it was either their responsibility to resign or Melbourne's, as First Minister, to dismiss them. At no point was Victoria actually credited with the make-up of her household. She was simply a victim of the machinations of others.

It was soon suggested that Victoria's helpless dependence on Melbourne and her Whig ladies made her blind to the fact that not only were they giving her bad advice, they were also actively plotting against her. From the first day that the Hastings Correspondence appeared, the *Post* introduced the idea that the slander against Lady Flora was actually part of a plot to discredit the Queen and make her appear heartless. Victoria, of course, was powerless to see

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33 Gleadle and Richardson, “Introduction,” 14.

34 *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

35 *Morning Post*, April 29, 1839.

through the ill-intentions of the people around her and could not see that she was being led to ruin. The paper was willing to grant the Dowager Marchioness the benefit of being able to see that “the insult inflicted upon her family was connected with a plot to...endanger the reputation of the sovereign” (one wonders why, then, she never mentioned such a thing in her letters), but Victoria was not credited with having had such insight.<sup>36</sup> The *Post* explained that the Whig coterie first led the Queen astray by providing bad advice and blocking anyone with good intentions, then remained silent when the Hastings Correspondence appeared. They were trying to pass the blame entirely onto her by leaving her open to criticism and not acknowledging responsibility for their part in persecuting Lady Flora.<sup>37</sup> The *Morning Post* claimed that Lady Hastings was deliberately provoked by Melbourne so that she would have no choice but to publish the correspondence. This was the end goal of Melbourne and the ladies of the bedchamber, ingratiating themselves to the Queen and cleverly hiding their character flaws from her.<sup>38</sup> What they hoped to gain by damaging the Queen's reputation was not discussed; the important thing was that the young, maiden Queen had been duped by evil-doers. Attacking perceived royal impropriety by blaming it on bad advisers was not a new tactic, but Victoria's youth and gender lent it an extra air of legitimacy.

Another part of the supposed true Whig purpose of the Hastings Scandal and the publication of the Hastings Correspondence was to further drive apart the Queen and the Duchess of Kent. The estrangement between Victoria and her mother was often lamented and blamed on the Whig faction at Court--as though Victoria and the Duchess had not been on bad terms for years. From the first, the *Standard* was inclined to believe that the Hastings Scandal

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36 *Morning Post*, April 16, 1839.

37 *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

38 *Morning Post*, May 1, 1839.

was a plot to remove the Queen from the good advice of her mother, whose “maternal influence...never has been exercised but for securing the happiness and honour of her daughter.”<sup>39</sup> The papers went to great lengths to extol the virtues of the Duchess of Kent in contrast to the values that were being ingrained in her daughter by the Whig faction. The Duchess was held up as a kind of maternal saint who had tried for years to form Victoria's mind in an appropriate mould, and whose hard work was now being undone. In fact, the educational system that the Duchess and Sir John Conroy had devised provoked Victoria to heavily resent both of them. Conroy became the comptroller of the Duchess' household after the death of Edward, Duke of Kent, in 1820. He and the Duchess raised Victoria in a strict environment designed to make her dependent on their guidance.<sup>40</sup> However, there was no way for the Tory writers to know this; they were operating under prevailing notions that designated mothers as the natural moral centres for their children. Reverence for motherhood was growing ever stronger. A woman's worth was closely tied to having children, and she was automatically elevated in the eyes of society simply by procreating (as long as this was done within wedlock and as part of a respectable family).<sup>41</sup> Thus the Duchess, no matter her shortcomings, was seen as superior to Victoria in every way. This was also not the first time that a less-than-exemplary royal mother had been lauded by the press simply because she was a mother. Caroline's defenders had also seized on the idea of a mother tragically separated from her child, despite the fact that she had been a largely indifferent parent to Princess Charlotte.<sup>42</sup>

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39 *Standard*, April 16, 1839.

40 Longford, *Victoria R.I.*, 36-37.

41 Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 179-180.

42 Clark, “Queen Caroline,” 62.

The fallout of the Hastings Correspondence was taken as evidence that Victoria clearly required the “protection of a mother's eye.”<sup>43</sup> It was never considered that Victoria was capable of ruling on her own. She must have guidance, and the Tory press insisted that only her mother should provide such guidance. Once again, this was inferred from the fact that Victoria was a young, unmarried woman. In matters such as this, the fact that she was a sovereign in her own right was ignored in favour of treating her as just another aristocratic daughter in danger of falling in with a bad crowd.<sup>44</sup> The fact that Victoria apparently did not refer the matter of Lady Flora's suspected pregnancy to the Duchess of Kent was, of course, put down to the meddling of Melbourne and his “creatures.” The notion that Victoria might have engineered a withdrawal from her mother's influence herself (which she had) was never entertained. The Tory press simply could not imagine why she might not want to confide in her mother, so her decision to live apart from the Duchess, like all of her other decisions, was taken out of Victoria's hands and attributed to the people around her.<sup>45</sup>

Previous reigns were mentioned and idealized in order to better illustrate the calumny that had apparently befallen the current Court. As perhaps could have been expected, the courts of Queens Charlotte and Adelaide were held up as paragons of the recent past.<sup>46</sup> This illustrated the ideal of having respectable, married women at Court--but in the role of consort, not ruler. A letter in the April 29<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Morning Post* claimed that such an event as the Hastings Scandal would never have happened in the previous reign because William IV would never have allowed anyone to gain a hold over him and dictate his actions. As usual, the blame was not

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43 *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839.

44 *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

45 *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

46 *Morning Post*, April 22, 1839. The staid and conservative nature of Charlotte and Adelaide's courts is well detailed in Orr, “Queen Charlotte,” and Purdue, “Queen Adelaide.”

exactly put on Victoria, but rather on the weakness of her sex and the opportunistic preying of Melbourne.<sup>47</sup> Considering how often the Tory press brought up their distaste for reform, it is interesting that they forgot how much they despised William IV for giving in to pressure to help pass the Reform Bill of 1832.<sup>48</sup> It is telling that the papers lamented that the dead King's niece was not made of the same supposedly stern stuff as the uncle whom they had so recently depicted as being bullied just as much as Victoria.

According to the *Morning Post* and the *Standard*, the consequences of publishing the Hastings Correspondence were not confined to petty squabbles between factions at Court; rather, they predicted that the public airing of the scandalous nature of the Queen's household would affect the entire nation. The *Morning Post* insisted that the country cared a great deal about the possible moral laxity of the monarch's Court, and its continued reports of the matter claimed that the correspondence had “excited an extraordinary sensation among all classes of the British public.”<sup>49</sup> The opinion conveyed again emphasizes that the ideal Queen embodied traditionally feminine characteristics and listened to respectable counsel. It was suggested that the people of England fell in love with an unspoiled, eager-to-please Victoria upon her accession, but that the people's affections were waning as they saw her adopt unsuitable counsel and care nothing for the suffering of a virtuous woman. In not caring for Lady Flora, Victoria apparently also did not care for the esteem of her people.<sup>50</sup> Right up until May 6<sup>th</sup>, just before the resignation of Melbourne's ministry, a letter to the editor in the *Morning Post* still echoed the paper's line about the matter of the originators of the rumours about Lady Flora to be of vast interest and

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47 *Morning Post*, April 29, 1839.

48 Philip Ziegler, *King William IV* (London: Collins, 1971), 214-222.

49 *Morning Post*, April 17, 1839.

50 *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839.

importance to the nation. However, the paper was also careful to point out that the people wanted to love their Queen, if only her advisers would not make it so difficult. They stated that the public would not rest until they could fully clear the Queen's name, just as Lady Flora had also been found innocent.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the hope that Victoria would re-inspire love in the hearts of her people, the *Morning Post* and the *Standard* also described in detail the potential damage that a displeased populace could do. The papers warned that the publication of the Hastings Correspondence could lead to rioting in the streets, and worse. The past decade had been filled with struggles over Chartism, reform, and other major political and constitutional issues, so their fears of instability were not out of place.<sup>52</sup> Conservative writers were probably also conscious and wary of the public outcry and violence that had occurred during the trial of Queen Caroline in 1820.<sup>53</sup> The papers brought up several violent and threatening images in order to prove how damaging the Queen's weakness could be. Unsurprisingly, much of the focus revolved around the Court. On April 16<sup>th</sup> the *Post* first brought up the rather threatening image of the country demanding justice for Lady Flora: “The nation will...speak loudly its determination that the Court of the Queen of England shall no longer be the focus of defamation and indecency.”<sup>54</sup> Such sentiments focused on the desire simply for the Queen to be under more benevolent influence and expressed worry for her well-being even while using violent terms to describe the nation's supposed desire for change. A reprint from the *Wilts and Gloucester Standard* stated that the palace needed to be

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51 *Morning Post*, May 6, 1839.

52 See Gash, *Aristocracy and People*.

53 As depicted in Stevenson, “The Queen Caroline Affair.”

54 *Morning Post*, April 16, 1839.

“purged” of Whig influence.<sup>55</sup> The main theme was that the ministers were at fault. The people of England would be happy if “adequate chastisement be inflicted where due”—that is, if she would only dismiss the Whig ministry.<sup>56</sup> However, a reprint from the *Manchester Courier* warned that the regular people of England might not be able to separate the nature of the Queen from the actions of her Court. When they were fed up with the actions of the ministers, they might become disloyal to the Queen.<sup>57</sup>

Other letters and editorials echoed the thought that the Queen had become too closely associated with her ministers, but also warned that, even more than simple disloyalty, the desire for justice could lead to attacks on the Queen herself. One letter brought up the image of Marie Antoinette, haunted right up to the steps of the scaffold by what had been done by the people permitted to surround her at Court.<sup>58</sup> The *Post* also commented that another experience of the lack of feminine propriety would undoubtedly make the people of England wish to change their laws entirely and favour “Salique” law, under which women cannot rule--Salic law had already barred Victoria from inheriting the throne of Hanover; her uncle now reigned there as King Ernest Augustus. They cited an author who claimed that the reigns of women were always noteworthy because “when a woman occupies the throne men are sure to govern,” but the *Post* was of the opinion that in this instance that fact had only resulted in disgrace. Once again, it was the Queen's lack of agency and assumed dependence on men that could lead the country to revolution.<sup>59</sup> It was said that corrupting the sovereign had led to a loss of dignity in the Court,

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<sup>55</sup> *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839.

<sup>56</sup> *Morning Post*, April 25, 1839.

<sup>57</sup> *Morning Post*, April 29, 1839.

<sup>58</sup> *Morning Post*, April 18, 1839.

<sup>59</sup> *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839.



which would result in the destabilization of the monarchy itself.<sup>60</sup> A letter to the editor in the *Standard* went so far as to state that the nation of England could not even call itself a champion of liberty when such goings-on were endured at the Court. Liberty, according to the writer, was “a misnomer. Say, rather, unbridled licentiousness.”<sup>61</sup> All of these warnings of instability and violence discredited the Queen and promoted the idea that only a miracle--or a return to docile femininity--could restore contentment. This idea suggested that a Queen who could not control her Court also could not control her country. Victoria being led astray could potentially lead the country to rise up in the name of decency. Thus, in a strange way, her lack of responsibility for her actions could make her responsible for anger and upheaval.

The subsequent Bedchamber Crisis was therefore foreshadowed by the intense, moralizing focus the press had already put on the Queen's household. The *Morning Post* stated that a large part of the blame for the Hastings Scandal fell not just on the shoulders of Melbourne or the ladies of the bedchamber, but also on the entire Whig Ministry which was responsible for appointing the Queen's household.<sup>62</sup> Though not yet credited with knowledge of their husbands' and relatives' political plans, the ladies of the bedchamber were portrayed as being a part of the moral dissoluteness of the Whig party. And, as has already been pointed out in the work of Richard Francis Spall, Jr., the moral concerns would inform the political.

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<sup>60</sup> *Morning Post*, April 27, 1839.

<sup>61</sup> *Standard*, April 24, 1839.

<sup>62</sup> *Morning Post*, April 24, 1839.

## Chapter 2: The Bedchamber Crisis

On May 8<sup>th</sup> the daily newspapers duly reported the resignation of Melbourne's ministry. The Tory papers noted the resignation with a certain amount of satisfaction, but with none of the vitriol that would be expressed in the days and weeks to come. At the time of the initial resignation, the matter was treated as a natural event, given the political situation.<sup>1</sup> Over the next couple of days the papers mostly concerned themselves with speculation over the formation of the new Ministry while they went over the legacy of the out-going Whig government. On May 10<sup>th</sup> rumours surfaced about possible difficulties arising out of the issue of the Queen's household, and on May 11<sup>th</sup> it was reported that Peel had resigned his commission. A great deal of initial anger ensued, sustained through the explanations that were given in the Houses of Parliament on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. The discussion continued right until the end of May, constantly reaffirming the Tory press' disapproval of Victoria's actions, even while it struggled to avoid actually attacking her authority. The subjects under discussion were largely the same as during the issue of the Hastings Correspondence, but with an even greater focus on the Queen as a danger to herself and the nation if she did not stop taking advice from the Whigs. While the Hastings Correspondence initiated a discussion about the morality of the Queen, of her advisers, and about her household on a personal scale, the Bedchamber Crisis brought the issue into the political realm. Victoria's inability to properly function in this political realm was demonstrated through detrimental references to her gender and age, and by assertions that she was unduly under the influence of her Whig ministers and ladies of the bedchamber.

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1 *Morning Post*, May 8, 1839, *Standard*, May 8, 1839, *Times*, May 8, 1839.

### The Tory Papers

The Crisis was kept alive in the Tory newspapers via references to the Whigs as “the bedchamber party” or through constant reminders that the Whig ministry had remained in power thanks to “potent petticoat aid.”<sup>2</sup> There was also mention of the Duke of Wellington trying to challenge the “feather-bed fortification.” This conjured up images of warfare and struggle and reinforced the notion that the Queen's actions could bring about political violence and strife.<sup>3</sup> These tactics continued throughout the month. By May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the *Standard* was still referring to the “new camarilla intrigue” and the “new chamber-plot ministry.” The *Times* scoffed at any suggestion that the matter should not be discussed anymore on May 24<sup>th</sup>. The *Standard* continued to take the matter very seriously, as it involved no less than “the morality of the means resorted to by the Queen's official advisers.”<sup>4</sup> Even when discussing political issues unrelated to the Bedchamber Crisis, as well as ones in which the Queen had no personal stake or involvement, such as Roman Catholic emancipation, the *Times* still alluded to “the counsellors of an inexperienced Sovereign.”<sup>5</sup> All of this points to the fact that the Bedchamber Crisis was not a brief flare-up. The issue remained in people's minds; or rather, it was specifically *kept* in people's minds by the press, which wanted to remind its readers of the Queen's poor decision-making and blame her for any dissatisfaction with the government.

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2 *Morning Post*, May 20, May 22, 1839.

3 *Morning Post*, May 28, 1839.

4 *Standard*, May 22, 1839, *Times*, May 24, 1839.

5 *Times*, May 15, 1839.

During its discussion of the Hastings Correspondence, the *Morning Post* dwelt heavily on the idea that Queen Victoria was a child in need of proper guidance. This theme endured throughout the Tory press during the Bedchamber Crisis. However, whereas during the Hastings Scandal it was thought that Victoria ought to go to her mother for advice, now the Duchess of Kent was not mentioned. Now the papers concentrated far more on the Queen's need for proper *male* guidance. The fathers of England were asked to stand in the place of the Queen's own deceased father—she must be removed from evil influences and treated like any other child falling into dangerous company.<sup>6</sup> A reprint from *John Bull* avowed that everyone was willing to acknowledge that the Queen could not help her youth and inexperience, but it also reproached the Whigs for having indulged her too much, allowing her to become akin to a wilful child. While her actions were still largely attributed to Whig influence, the paper also suggested that the problem might not lie solely with the ministry. There was an underlying fear that Victoria might ignore the advice of *any* set of male counsellors, and the Tory press was terrified of a young, female monarch who would refuse to submit to any measure of control.<sup>7</sup> Not only were only the male politicians seen as potential guardians for the Queen, a large portion of the coverage of the Bedchamber Crisis was also devoted solely to Whig and Tory papers setting *themselves* up as guardians by trying to dismantle each other's arguments as proof of loyalty and fitness to advise.<sup>8</sup> A letter to the editor in the *Times* claimed the freedom to address the Queen on matters relating to both her personal happiness and the good of the realm. The writer condescended to Victoria about how no one *wanted* to dictate to her, but “a young and ingenuous mind, full of innocence, and giving others credit for the same singleness of purpose as

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6 *Morning Post*, May 14, 1839.

7 *Standard*, May 20, 1839.

8 *Morning Post*, May 20, 1839.

animates herself,” may cause her to forget that “[she was] a queen; but [also] a human being and a woman.” The bottom line was that Victoria would never be able to escape the perceived failings of her gender or be able to prevent herself from tumbling into dangerous behaviour. Specifically, the writer assured her that, no matter how much she might insist that her ladies of the bedchamber were her personal and not her political confidantes, she would not be able to resist telling her troubles to her ladies in waiting, and some political secrets would come out. Certain ladies would be lying in wait to convince her that she should side with the Opposition, and Victoria would soon find herself enmeshed in all sorts of unconstitutional plots.<sup>9</sup>

Taking on the role of parent or guardian, the Tory papers rewarded Victoria for what they saw as good behaviour and punished her for bad. When Victoria behaved according to expectations, the *Post* did not use any gendered or ageist language to describe her. For example, when discussing her action of consulting with the Duke of Wellington and likely asking Peel to form an administration, she was described as acting “as best becomes the constitutional and patriotic sovereign of a free country.” Neither her gender nor her age were mentioned; she was simply a ruler dealing with a difficult situation.<sup>10</sup> She was also praised for removing herself from politics altogether and behaving as a proper young woman, as when the *Times* included a reprint from the *Liverpool Chronicle* reporting on a ball given by the Queen, during which she made a point of being pleasant to Peel's wife. The *Chronicle* explained that this meant that Victoria was “anxious to prove that her political sentiments did not interfere with her private feelings.” The paper further judged that this was an “amiable trait in Her Majesty's character” and held her up as an example to other young ladies of the country who “have lately allowed politics to obtain

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<sup>9</sup> *Times*, May 13, 1839.

<sup>10</sup> *Morning Post*, May 9, 1839.

too great an influence over them.”<sup>11</sup> All of this was in direct contrast to the reports of her refusals to Peel and recall of Melbourne, which constantly referred to her youth, inexperience, and bad judgement. When Victoria was acting ill, she was a young girl; when she acted well, she was a sovereign. And when she acted like an apolitical, conservatively acceptable woman, she was presented as exemplary. The difference in language is telling.

The *Post* was clever in the roundabout way that it referred to Victoria's gender and age in condemning her behaviour. It asked several rhetorical questions, wondering how anyone could think that such a young, innocent girl would ever participate in a scheme such as the Bedchamber Crisis of her own free will. It then stated that such an acknowledgement would also include the assumption that “the Royal mind is so slightly imbued with a knowledge of the Royal duties” or that she “preferred the indulgence of a frivolous inclination to the performance of a solemn duty.” While the paper emphatically stated that Victoria would undoubtedly never do such a thing, the notion that she *might* do so had still been planted in the reader's mind.<sup>12</sup> It implied that, though she had the appearance of a young, innocent girl, in reality Victoria might have been deceiving everyone.

A certain amount of anger stemmed from the notion that the Queen might have been playing on the fact that anyone who insulted her would automatically be seen as a villain. The *Times* emphasized that “loyalty towards the Sovereign, and delicacy towards her age, and sex, and inexperience, have hitherto imposed it upon each and all of Her Majesty's subjects as a duty, when speaking or writing upon such transactions, to employ the utmost possible forbearance and tenderness of language.”<sup>13</sup> This statement implied that the Queen might have deserved to be

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11 *Times*, May 30, 1839.

12 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.

13 *Times*, May 16, 1839.

much more harshly condemned, but the *Times* had essentially been forced to appear loyal and gallant. The *Standard* likewise lamented that it was constrained by etiquette, rhetorically asking “how often are we called upon to submit in respectful silence to the errors, and even wrongs, committed by parents and others to whom reverence is due?”<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that, in this one instance, Victoria was likened to a parent and not a child. However, the fact remains that, in the eyes of the Tory newspaper writers, Victoria was only owed reverence due to her position—not her actions. It was a happy accident for her that she became Queen, otherwise she would not be let off so easily.

One letter to the editor lamented the loss of the carefree, naive Victoria whom everyone loved when she first came to the throne. Her innocence meant that her one fault was that she was too kind and too trusting, which led to the current predicament. In short, while she once embodied all the desirable traits of femininity, she had become tarnished as she entered adulthood. This tied into the notion of prizing childhood and prepubescence for girls, while fearing what would happen once they gained some agency. While the letter writer held out hope that the Queen could still be rescued, it was clear that he also thought that the original affection that the nation had for Victoria could never be reclaimed. There was a reverence for the child-like Victoria, less so for the young woman.<sup>15</sup> Apparently, no one had expected her to turn out the way she had. The *Times* was shocked that Victoria had refused Peel's request, calling the Crisis “an extraordinary and unlooked-for obstacle.” While it was true that no one expected the changing of the ladies of the bedchamber to be an issue at all, there was an equal amount of astonishment that Victoria would defy Peel over anything. Any claim of agency on her part was

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14 *Standard*, May 16, 1839.

15 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.

not anticipated.<sup>16</sup> At this point, the role of the monarch was still in question, and it may have been expected that any monarch, regardless of gender, should really heed whatever his or her ministers said. Yet there was an extra degree of disapproval attached to this young girl paying no heed to her older, male ministers.

There was also much concern over the Queen being seen to forsake the needs of the country for her own private feelings. The Tory press was well aware that Victoria had been on very friendly terms with Melbourne, and when his resignation was first announced, the *Morning Post* cautiously noted that Victoria “manifested a deep anxiety to promote...the welfare of the State which overruled or rather extinguished...every other feeling.”<sup>17</sup> When her subsequent actions seemed to prove that she would stubbornly refuse to extinguish her feelings of friendship in favour of her duty, the Tory papers were displeased. There was a feeling of horror that the Queen “prefers her personal comforts to the welfare of her kingdom.”<sup>18</sup> From the first, the *Standard* reported that Peel's ministerial attempt had failed, “*not upon any public principle whatever in her Majesty's sentiments and those of her advisers differed, but merely arising out of the fact, that her Majesty refused to part with some of the ladies of her household.*”<sup>19</sup> Again, it was hinted that her behaviour was being excused largely out of consideration for her age and gender. People were inclined to feel sorry for the poor young woman who did not want to lose her friends, but “surely it would have been unpardonable in an elder statesman to be accessory to [her actions].”<sup>20</sup> It was implied that the Queen was entirely too dominated by her selfish impulses

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16 *Times*, May 11, 1839.

17 *Morning Post*, May 9, 1839.

18 *Morning Post*, May 15, 1839.

19 *Standard*, May 10, 1839.

20 *Standard*, May 16, 1839.



and feared that she would not be able to overcome them, particularly if her company continued to be dominated by the Whigs.

Putting her own selfish interests above those of her people was cited as an instance of the bad advice Victoria had been getting, and the *Standard* avowed that no Tory could have taught her to act in that way. Only Melbourne and the Whigs could have caused the queen to be so ignorant of her true duty, and only they would try to stand between her and the people. The paper also stated that the Whig publications that were crowing about Victoria's success in having withstood Peel were only further encouraging her bad behaviour.<sup>21</sup> It was said that her only support came from those who were themselves selfish and uninterested in the welfare of the people. There was a call for the Queen to start learning what her duties were from those fit to teach her, as she ought to have been “untainted” by bad examples.<sup>22</sup> The general consensus reached by the Tory press was that the Queen had been led to prize her own wishes above the needs of the nation, and this needed to change. Victoria's perceived selfishness could not be tolerated as the result of a girlish whim. It was said that the Queen's actions had effectively “paralyzed” state business, as “for three weeks...the public affairs will have been suspended, and the national loyalty put to a needless test, upon a question which, though very important on the one hand to the intended Administration, was a mere matter of personal fancy on the other, as related to the Queen herself.”<sup>23</sup>

Though the Tory papers were in agreement about what the Queen should *not* do, much of the difficulties of the Bedchamber Crisis were centred around the fact that the exact role of the monarch was still in flux. The papers were in agreement that the monarch was absolutely held to

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21 *Standard*, May 21, 1839.

22 *Times*, May 24, 1839.

23 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.

some sort of lawful standard that would prevent despotism, and he or she owed a certain amount of respect to the ministers.<sup>24</sup> Victoria may not have wanted to part with her friends, but she owed Peel a show of support. There was a question of whether the Queen's right to control the people who surrounded her every day was more important than the First Minister feeling confident in his ability to govern.<sup>25</sup> The Tory papers swore that the Crisis had taken place in direct opposition to the Constitution; in reality, the Constitution did not provide for the changing of the household with the ministry. It had become the custom, but it was not law. However, the *Times* and the *Post* both insisted that Victoria had blatantly ignored precedent, with the former stating that, "until a few days ago nobody would have dreamed of treating it as a disputable matter, that all public offices held at pleasure ought to be filled on the responsibility, that is, by the advice, of the Crown's principal minister."<sup>26</sup> Another constitutional issue concerned what right Melbourne had to come back into office. As was pointed out on several occasions, he had resigned because he felt he did not have the confidence of the Houses of Parliament. Nothing had changed, yet he resumed office anyway. The question on everyone's minds was whether the support of a single monarch was more important than the support of the representatives of the nation.<sup>27</sup> Lastly, the *Standard* published an extensive discussion of what a just ruler should do and stated that the monarch was supposed to be above party politics, as "it has ever been the wisdom of the British constitution...to withdraw the *personality* of the Sovereign from party disputes." Though in practice this had rarely (if ever) been the case, the theory was nonetheless a powerful one, and for Victoria to ignore it so flagrantly seemed to be a warning sign that she had no respect for the

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24 *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839.

25 *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839.

26 *Times*, May 22, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839.

27 *Times*, May 24, 1839.

constitution.<sup>28</sup> All of these discussions of the Constitution and royal duty either implied or outrightly stated that Victoria had no idea of how to rule properly. Being selfish was one thing. Being ignorant was quite another, and she was constantly depicted as ill-informed and inept. This line of thinking played on the idea that Victoria was unaware of the political role that she had to play and questioned her fitness to lead without supervision.

The real issue, as always, boiled down to the fact that Victoria was an unmarried female ruler. This introduced problems that built on the already murky issue of the monarchy's precise role in the constitutional order. Victoria claimed that she never discussed politics with her ladies of the bedchamber and that she kept her private household life entirely separate from her public and political role. However, the Tory papers first doubted that she had that ability; they were not even certain if the monarch, whether male or female, was entitled to a private life. The *Times* doubted that a British sovereign had the right to claim to act out of “a personal point of honour, or friendship.” While her generous spirit was commendable, the paper doubted that it was enough to keep politics out of her personal life.<sup>29</sup> The *Quarterly Review* expressed a wish that the monarch may feel free to discuss whatever she wanted in private society, but in order for this to happen, there must be no danger that the household would try to bring up politics. It was therefore safer for the Queen to be surrounded only by those affiliated with the current ministry.<sup>30</sup>

However, if the Queen's household ever did have the potential to be a private, personal space for Victoria, the Tory papers said that the opportunity for this went out the window with

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28 *Standard*, May 21, 1839, *Times*, May 23, 1839.

29 *Times*, May 18, 1839.

30 *Standard*, May 11, 1839.

Melbourne's decision to fill it with his own friends.<sup>31</sup> In doing this, he had let it be known that he considered the Royal household to be a political place. It was taken for granted that Victoria was entirely at Melbourne's mercy in the choosing of her ladies. Thus she was both pitied and blamed for allowing herself to be drawn into the current situation.

Still others took the stance that the Queen's household could never be free of politics and that Melbourne was merely following a trend, as “the choice of the servants of a Sovereign (unless the term be confined to menial servants) may, and often has a very serious influence on public affairs.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, Victoria could not think of her ladies of the bedchamber as friends; they were politicized employees and were no more private citizens than she herself. Victoria's insistence on a private life--her “feminine” need for familiar faces and friendship--was seen as a weakness. Such feelings left her open to being manipulated into accepting unsuitable companions as friends and then being coerced into keeping them, no matter what. Even in the personal life that she had tried to claim for herself, she was said to simply be acting in the service of others. Ignorant of what her public role ought to be, and assumed to be controlled in her private life, Victoria was credited with no agency at all.

From the first, the Bedchamber Crisis was never solely blamed upon Queen Victoria. The *Post* insisted that the entire crisis was either the “result of stratagem or of an erroneous impression.”<sup>33</sup> The idea of an “erroneous impression” was reinforced by the Crisis commonly being referred to as a “mistake” on Victoria's part, or by reference to her as having “misunderstood” Peel. At no time was it considered that Victoria might have formed her own plan and gone into her meetings with Peel looking for a reason to refuse him and to get her

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31 *Times*, May 13, 1839.

32 *Standard*, May 13, 1839.

33 *Morning Post*, May 20, 1839.

former ministry back. By the same token, Peel was held up as a man simply trying to do his job. His request was referred to in the most positive terms by the Tory press: “Sir Robert Peel's solicitation to Her Majesty was in itself of the most reasonable and respectful kind.” While he was depicted as having taken his time to carefully explain his reasons for wanting to change some of the ladies, Victoria's response was framed as abrupt, thoughtless, and unconsidered. While Peel took the time to consider her youth and inexperience, she showed no understanding of the pressure he was under and thought only of herself (and of the counsel that it was assumed she had been fed).<sup>34</sup> Refuting some of the Whig papers' claims that Peel tried to bully the Queen, the *Standard* stated that Peel could not possibly have tried to tyrannize the Queen since he was granted no opportunity to do so. The Queen was free to choose whom she wanted to form a ministry, and if that minister found that he could not work with the monarch, he could resign. Peel absolutely could not make Victoria do anything she did not want to do, so the Whig press should stop depicting her as a victim of Tory cruelty.<sup>35</sup>

Victoria was also depicted as having overreacted (or as having been pushed to overreact by her friends) to the prospect of losing some of her ladies. Peel never wanted to change *all* of her household; only a few names had been mentioned. Once again, the “feminine” tendency to become overemotional was played up, while the men claimed the rational position.<sup>36</sup> It was continually stated that Peel was acting out of straightforward political impulses. He was described as “statesmanlike,” while his “delicacy” in handling the situation was admired, and his explanation in the House of Commons was commended for its forbearance in not openly criticizing the Queen. Peel's calm demeanour and irreproachable character were always

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<sup>34</sup> *Times*, May 11, 13, 1839.

<sup>35</sup> *Standard*, May 16, 1839.

<sup>36</sup> *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839, *Standard*, May 16, 1839, *Times*, May 13, 1839.

emphasized. According to the Tory papers, Victoria could not seem to separate herself from her private emotions.<sup>37</sup>

The only cause Tories considered for the Bedchamber Crisis, other than Victoria's misunderstanding Peel, was that it was the “result of stratagem.” Despite Victoria's perceived selfishness and ignorance, the Tory press also pursued the idea, begun with the Hastings Correspondence, that the Queen was ultimately not responsible for her actions. Everything she had done was the result of her being held in “thrall” to her Whig ministers and her Whig-affiliated ladies of the bedchamber. This, of course, allowed the papers to criticize Victoria's actions without insulting her, as the *Post* was careful to constantly affirm that “[they] would be understood to speak not of her Majesty, but of the artful and unprincipled intriguers who have presumed to...cover the naked ugliness of their own schemes.”<sup>38</sup> A reprint from the *Morning Herald* lamented “the advantage taken of the youth and inexperience of the highest personage in the realm to make her the unconscious abettor of the Whig stratagem.” This statement basically acknowledged that Victoria's position offered her no advantage except what it could bestow on those who manipulated her. She had the title of Queen, but at all times she was still young and inexperienced, and her actions the result of bad counsel.<sup>39</sup> As a pawn in a plot, Victoria was reduced to an empty-headed, too-trusting vessel, who could have “neither capacity nor disposition for that discreditable species of ingenuity.”<sup>40</sup>

Predictably, given their nominal role in events, the ladies of the bedchamber and their relationship with the Queen were extensively discussed and criticized. The *Standard* wasted no

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37 *Morning Post*, May 14, 1839.

38 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839, *Times*, May 11, 1839.

39 *Standard*, May 13, 1839, *Times*, May 18, 1839.

40 *Morning Post*, May 20, 1839.

time in bringing up the Hastings Scandal as a means to discredit the “Whiggish” ladies of the bedchamber, while the *Post* stated that they were “poisonous slanderers and virulent persecutors of a noble and innocent lady.” As long as Victoria was surrounded by such people, she was perceived to be in peril.<sup>41</sup> Quite apart from the political reasons for Peel's request for change, the *Post* stated that new ladies ought to have been installed in the household anyway, if only to supplant “the obscene concoctors of the Hastings plot.” Peel was even compared to the innocent Lady Flora Hastings, sacrificed to the conniving plots of the ladies of the bedchamber. In fact, the Hastings Scandal was constantly referred to as the driving force behind the Bedchamber Crisis, and it was clearly in the minds of those discussing the current issue, as seen in the report of a meeting at Rochester, when three cheers were given for Lady Flora after deciding to send an Address to the Queen.<sup>42</sup> All of the old rhetoric about such ladies being unfit companions for the young Queen was recycled. They had no notion of how private matters should be handled and so could not suddenly claim that they enjoyed a wholesome, private relationship with the Queen. If they could not keep their mouths shut about the scandal of a potential unwed pregnancy, there was absolutely nothing to stop them from talking about state business.<sup>43</sup> On the subject of Victoria simply being loyal to her friends, most of the Tory papers scoffed at the notion that she could have been personally close to people whom she had only known for two years. The idea that Victoria did not necessarily consider them close friends, but was simply choosing a battle that she knew she could win was, of course, never discussed.<sup>44</sup> It was the considered opinion of many that the royal household “[inflicted] a wound upon the monarchy that can never be

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41 *Morning Post*, May 13, May 20, 1839, *Standard*, May 10, 1839.

42 *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 28, 1839, *Times*, May 25, 1839.

43 *Morning Post*, May 14, 1839.

44 *Morning Post*, May 15, 1839, *Standard*, May 13, 1839.

healed.”<sup>45</sup> The Hastings Correspondence had exposed this wound. The Bedchamber Crisis only made it worse, and the perceived moral failings of the Queen's ladies were now tied to Victoria's perceived political mistakes and not simply her moral ones.

During the uproar occasioned by the Hastings Correspondence, the ladies of the bedchamber had been depicted as morally stunted and even cruel. However, ruining the reputation of an innocent woman was one thing; allegedly interfering with the running of the country was quite another. It is interesting that, while Victoria was consistently denied any power except as a pawn for others, one letter to the editor in the *Morning Post* warned against underestimating the power of female influence when pressed on the sovereign. The ladies of the bedchamber had the ability to do great damage, and it would be tempting for any party to take advantage of that power. Admittedly, it was a negatively depicted power, one based on deception and coercion, and the letter writer concluded that it was to the credit of the Tories that they had not taken such women as allies.<sup>46</sup> Thus, while Victoria was not assigned an active political role, her ladies were described as the worst sort of political intriguers, consistently referred to as a “Camarilla” (the *Standard* went so far as to refer to them as the “Popish and Jacobin Camarilla”<sup>47</sup>), acting on behalf of themselves, their husbands, and their relatives in the Whig party. The Whig ladies were also said to be personally ambitious, bent on keeping their jobs no matter what the cost. It was said that the ladies refused to resign their positions and that they pushed the Queen to essentially force Peel to resign. This placed the initiative for the Bedchamber Crisis in the hands of the ladies, not Victoria.<sup>48</sup> What the ladies actually hoped to

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45 *Standard*, May 16, 1839.

46 *Morning Post*, May 13, May 18, 1839.

47 *Standard*, May 13, 1839.

48 *Morning Post*, May 15, 1839, *Standard*, May 13, 1839.



gain by staying close to the Queen was not specifically addressed, other than vague references to the fact that they would be able to push a Whig agenda on her and keep their male relations in power. Indeed, Melbourne's ministers were constantly referred to as “petticoat Whigs” who relied on women to keep their governmental posts. It became a kind of running joke in Tory newspapers to mention in passing that now all government matters had to be deferred to the ladies of the bedchamber, and the Whig ministry was afraid of making a move without first consulting the women who had put them back into power.<sup>49</sup> The *Times* even contained a mock letter of advice from Lord John Russell to the Queen advising her on how best to deal with the pressing issues of the time. It offered the solutions advised by the true rulers of the House—the ladies of the bedchamber. With reference to the rebellions in the Canadas, for example: “The state of Canada is a source of great embarrassment; but if the Marchioness of Tavistock be continued a lady of the bedchamber, no further difficulty in North America need be apprehended.”<sup>50</sup>

The ladies of the bedchamber were credited as the “backstairs” power behind the throne, but the negative influence on the Queen was also given a public face in the Whig ministry. Whig influence was taken for granted from the beginning of the Crisis. The *Post* was sure that Victoria had agreed that changes to the household were necessary when she first met with Peel and Wellington, but then something occurred between her evening and morning meetings with Peel that made her change her mind. It is telling that, from the first, the story told was that something changed the Queen's mind—she did not change it herself. Though she was “the chief manoueverer,” her leading role was performed, “of course, unconsciously.” As during the

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<sup>49</sup> *Morning Post*, May 22, 1839.

<sup>50</sup> *Times*, May 17, 1839.

consideration of the Hastings Correspondence, the Queen's "innocence" and "youth" were emphasized, robbing her of any agency.<sup>51</sup> The Tory papers were demonstrably angry at the Queen's actions, and because they blamed them on the Whig ministers, this allowed the Tory press to safely express some of that anger by declaring that the Queen's decision was "suggested to her, it is quite evident, by some intriguing and depraved minister."<sup>52</sup> There was, however, some contradiction in the lines of thought taken by the papers: Either the Whig ministers pushed Victoria to refuse Peel's changes, or they simply took advantage of her mistake. Either way, however, it was the ministers who looked bad and not Victoria, who was shown to be a merely a foolish girl in both versions of the story.

The Whig ministers were also depicted as fair-weather friends, as the *Post* asserted that their supposed support was fleeting thanks to the Radical element within the party. The paper warned that unless the administration continued to follow a revolutionary path, the Radicals would abandon the Queen who had put herself under so much strain to keep them in office.<sup>53</sup> The *Post* further posited that the Whigs neither respected the Queen as a young woman nor the dignity of the Crown, going so far as to state that "the Royal name was ostentatiously prostituted for the benefit of Whig ministers." This is telling language. While they never stated that the Queen herself had been prostituted, the implication was clear: the Whigs would sell the Sovereign's virtue in order to stay in power.<sup>54</sup> By advancing this argument, the Tory papers were able to position themselves as the only true guardians of what should be Victoria's only concern:

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51 *Morning Post*, May 13, May 20, 1839, *Times*, May 8, 1839.

52 *Times*, May 13, 1839, *Times*, May 16, 1839.

53 *Morning Post*, May 22, 1839.

54 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.

her feminine purity. The Whigs, by comparison, had dragged her into the morally filthy world of politics.

Right after his resignation, the *Times* admitted that Melbourne had done well in recommending that Victoria send for the Duke of Wellington and Peel, but he was eventually said to have “returned to Downing Street as Napoleon from Elba.”<sup>55</sup> The Tory press focused on Melbourne's perceived failures as both a personal guardian and political adviser to Victoria. As a politician he was said to never have been sincere in his resignation because he resigned before he was asked and then consented to return to office with indecent alacrity. Clearly, he was lying in wait for Victoria to execute his “deep-laid, dirty plot, got up for the sole purpose of driving Sir R. Peel from the Palace.” Melbourne's statements—that he only took office again in order to serve the Queen and defend her wishes—were likewise twisted in order to say that he only served the Queen in order to remain in power.<sup>56</sup> Melbourne was blamed for not having explained to the Queen (as though she were a simple child) her duties as ruler. He was also censured for taking no responsibility for his actions and essentially setting Victoria up for a fall. Melbourne's irresponsibility in not fully preparing her for the change in office, as well as his lack of scruple in taking advantage of the situation, obscured any idea that Victoria might have *deliberately* misunderstood Peel and that Melbourne had been forced to go along with what she decided on her own.<sup>57</sup> An open letter to Melbourne accused him of “treachery to [his] sovereign and treachery to [his] country.” The writer was sure that Victoria wanted to place the running of the country in more capable hands but was prevented by Melbourne's “poison.” This line of thinking

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<sup>55</sup> *Times*, May 9, 1839, *Times*, May 28.

<sup>56</sup> *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 16, 1839, *Standard*, May 11, 1839.

<sup>57</sup> *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839, *Standard*, May 15, 1839, *Times*, May 18, 1839.

was echoed in the *Standard*, which also assumed that Melbourne had long been indoctrinating Victoria not to trust any politician but himself.<sup>58</sup>

Melbourne's perceived political failings were also linked to his personal character, which was derided. As had been the case during discussions of the Hastings Correspondence, it was inferred that Melbourne was sweeping his own personal scandals under the rug of Victoria's unblemished "virgin" name. A sharp contrast was drawn between "innocence in its bloom and profligacy in its decay." This line of attack provided a menacing picture of a predatory Melbourne leeching the purity out of Victoria and replacing it with poison.<sup>59</sup> The *Times*, meanwhile, metaphorically deemed Victoria to be a "child in the arms of its nurse," to be nurtured by a "hardened man of the world." Just like the rest of his ministry, Melbourne was depicted as a false friend: a man who had never been loyal to anyone and who only wished to expose the Queen to as much public shame as possible.<sup>60</sup> Melbourne was said to have both ensconced the Queen in a small community, "modelled upon the principles of oriental seclusion and exclusiveness," and exposed her to the public by dragging her "from opera to concert, and from concert to opera." His approach was said to have been designed to divorce Victoria from her modest upbringing and to teach her to depend only on the friends who surrounded her with frivolity and gossip.<sup>61</sup> Again the Tory papers sent conflicting messages, as Melbourne was simultaneously decried for "[living] in the Palace to corrupt his Royal Mistress" and for "[betraying] her" when it proved that she could not be corrupted due to her innate purity.<sup>62</sup>

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58 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839, *Standard*, May 9, 1839.

59 *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.

60 *Times*, May 13, 1839, *Standard*, May 17, 1839.

61 *Standard*, May 11, 1839.

62 *Morning Post*, May 20, 1839.

Apparently she was in peril both because she was in imminent danger of being led astray and because her inability to be led astray would anger her potential corrupters.

The consequences for the Queen being in thrall to Melbourne, his ministry, and the ladies of the bedchamber would be dire, according to the Tory press. Indeed, the hand-wringing and warnings over the Hastings Scandal may have been a bit premature, because the Bedchamber Crisis seemed to signify that people had a whole new reason to think the Queen was heading for disaster. Threatening, doom-laden language once again came into play. There was disappointment that the Queen had gone wrong at such a young age and worry about what this boded for the rest of her reign. It was suspected that she did not have a good grasp of the gravity of her actions, and the *Times* warned that “These [were] not times for stretching Royal prerogative; and the disposition to exercise questionable power does not promise a happy reign.” This one “mistake” could have enormous consequences, as the papers fearfully contemplated the prospect of having a young “despot” on the throne.<sup>63</sup> One letter in the *Morning Post* stated that Peel's resignation was the result of “the most fatal mistake [the Queen] has made since she came to the throne.”<sup>64</sup> Her tampering with the government's ability to run the country was seen as setting a dangerous precedent, and there were calls to ensure that such a thing could never happen again. There were also calls for an investigation into the actions of the Whigs, which set out to attach themselves to the Queen, succeeded, and had now ruined her in the eyes of the country. This had marred the respectability of both the political party and the monarchy.<sup>65</sup> Victoria was called upon to play a ceremonial political role by Peel, but Melbourne coached her to appear more active. Yet this perceived agency—a false front, of course, as the Queen was

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63 *Times*, May 21, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 11, 1839, *Standard*, May 17, 1839, *Standard*, May 20, 1839.

64 *Morning Post*, May 11, 1839, *Standard*, May 17, 1839.

65 *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.

known to be enthralled—had disrupted government, while keeping to a background role would have ensured it running smoothly.

In reality, it appeared that the average British person was not particularly fussed about the Bedchamber Crisis. Some towns got up addresses to the Queen, but the Tory-leaning ones generally expressed nothing stronger than a wish for Peel to be recalled. There was disappointment in what had happened, but no threats of violence.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, any lack of public demonstration that greeted the returning Melbourne administration was said to indicate a deep unhappiness rather than quiet approval or simple indifference. Such demonstrations of support as did appear were dismissed as “pretended” or (when it was pointed out when Victoria's name was not mentioned specifically) as a sign that even the Whig supporters did not necessarily care about her.<sup>67</sup> The Tory papers blamed some of the inaction on the fact that the Whigs were so practised at hiding their misdeeds. However, it was said that “the manoeuvres of the Queen's ante-chamber...[had] travelled, or [were] still travelling to the furthest shores of this island.” Making the Crisis known to “every cottage in the land” would undoubtedly result in spontaneous uprisings. Yet the papers did not admit that they were the ones stoking outrage over the Crisis and thus creating upheaval, rather than merely reporting it. They even had the temerity to lament that they only wished that the people could remain ignorant of the Queen's actions rather than “lose the respect and admiration of one of her subjects.” But alas, they were obliged to report the news.<sup>68</sup>

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66 *Times*, May 24, 1839, *Times*, May 25, 1839, *Times*, May 21, 1839.

67 *Morning Post*, May 27, 1839, *Standard*, May 16, 1839, *Standard*, May 24, 1839.

68 *Standard*, May 18, 1839, *Times*, May 16, 1839, *Times*, May 13, 1839, *Standard*, May 14, 1839, *Standard*, May 23, 1839.

The Tory papers attempted to conjure the image of a nation on the verge of revolution. They claimed that “*the people will not bear to be governed by an irresponsible female Cabinet.*” If Victoria misbehaved, the people would notice. There had not yet been riots, but there was no guarantee that there would not be any.<sup>69</sup> The Bedchamber Crisis was further said to be not just “a question of ladies of the bedchamber—it [was] a question of the salvation of the monarchy and of the preservation of order throughout the empire.” The empire itself was in danger, and in creating such a fuss about their employment, the ladies of the bedchamber had in fact set themselves in opposition to it. Moreover, Victoria had passively let it happen.<sup>70</sup> It was emphasized that the people of England wanted to respect their “virtuous and high-minded—though it may be for a moment mistaken—Queen,” but this was difficult when they were asked to countenance the “perverse cupidity of an empty-headed heartless fribble.” If the Queen refused to see that her friends and advisers were causing her to do wrong, then she could not be surprised that “the stern obligations of truth and justice compel [the English people] to disapprove of the conduct of their Queen...the reproof which they have pronounced has not been loud or insolent...but it has been serious.”<sup>71</sup> There were comparisons to the beginning of her reign, when she had been cheered everywhere she went. The *Times* reported an outing taken by Victoria and her mother, during which the Duchess of Kent was greeted with cheers but the Queen with silence. The Duchess of Kent, it will be remembered, had been praised for her maternal and womanly sympathies during the Hastings Scandal. This was meant as a clear lesson to Victoria that she needed to start acting more like an inoffensive symbol of femininity, like her

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69 *Standard*, May 14, 1839, *Standard*, May 23, 1839.

70 *Standard*, May 18, 1839, *Times*, May 13, 1839.

71 *Standard*, May 30, 1839, *Standard*, May 18, 1839.

mother, or risk having the silence turn to outright jeers.<sup>72</sup> It would therefore be for Victoria's own good if the people would not humour her whims, as she needed to learn that the love of the people was not unconditional. If they turned against her, it would be entirely her fault.

To further drive home the potentially violent consequences of disappointing the people, comparisons were made to other situations. Revolutionary France was invoked, with one letter stating that the Bedchamber Crisis had introduced “that very worst trait of the old regime in France, that petticoat influence should be permitted to interfere with...the duties of the Throne.”<sup>73</sup> There were also comparisons to reigns, both foreign and domestic, known for their dissolute nature. When mentioning the courts of Louis XV of France and Charles II of England, the *Times* at least tried to qualify the comparison, stating that, “if not the gross personal immorality” of those bedchambers, they could at least see “an equal measure at least of political profligacy.”<sup>74</sup> Harkening back to the use of the word “prostituting,” the paper did not openly suggest that the Queen was actually living in a den of sexual sin, but the association was there to be made. Victoria was placed in a line of rulers who had all had favourites to the detriment of their reigns, two of whom, Edward II and Charles I, had been deposed and killed. To counter the threatening spectre of these examples, the papers emphasized that they were only looking out for the Queen's “comfort and safety” by reminding her of these instances. She could not protect her friends from public censure, and it was better to let them go while she could still salvage her formerly good reputation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Times*, May 28, 1839.

<sup>73</sup> *Morning Post*, May 13, 1839, *Standard*, May 23, 1839.

<sup>74</sup> *Times*, May 24, 1839.

<sup>75</sup> *Standard*, May 13, 1839, *Morning Post*, May 23, 1839.



By far the comparison most often cited as a warning was the reign of Queen Anne. Anne's "favourites" had also been women in her household, and their "backstairs influence," like that of the current ladies of the bedchamber, was said to have resulted in "all the dark events of the latter years of our last female Sovereign—events that clouded the glories of its commencement...and all but gave back Great Britain to Popery, slavery, and the expelled Stuarts."<sup>76</sup> The *Standard* also brought up a similar situation that had occurred in 1834, when Melbourne was previously in danger of being forced out of government (under William IV), yet retained office. At this time he was also set to be replaced by Peel. The paper praised William for having been on the side of the people in wanting Melbourne gone and lamented that the current monarch had proven sadly susceptible to the minister's machinations.<sup>77</sup> For all of these comparisons to other reigns, there remained a steady line of thought that Victoria's case was, in fact, unique. It was said that her actions were "a natural error in a youthful Princess, having no direct precedent to guide her."<sup>78</sup> Victoria had only previously known Queens Consort. The only Queen Regnant of any proximity, Anne, was married at the time of her accession. No one was sure what to make of a young, unmarried Queen who was also a King.<sup>79</sup>

The Tory press was not only concerned about potential threats from the people, but from the Radical faction that had joined with the Whigs to form a sort of coalition government. They feared that, in keeping the Whig ministry, the Queen had also kept the dubious Radicals who sought to lead the country into revolution and ruin. The Radicals were said to have fooled Victoria with their false loyalty, but the *Post* knew that "they who now [mingled] protestations of

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<sup>76</sup> *Morning Post*, May 16, 1839, *Standard*, May 13, 1839, *Times*, May 15, 1839.

<sup>77</sup> *Standard*, May 11, 1839, *Standard*, May 16, 1839.

<sup>78</sup> *Times*, May 21, 1839.

<sup>79</sup> For more on the problems associated with Regnant Queens, see Beem, *The Lioness Roared*.

loyalty with demands for revolutionary measures [awaited] but the hour of triumph to cast their loyalty upon the surge of rebellion.”<sup>80</sup> The paper was sad that the Queen would favour such allies, when the Tories were always loyal and constant in their affection to the monarchy, yet she ignored them.

Another projected consequence of the Bedchamber Crisis was that the issue had caused England to be held up to ridicule across Europe; as the *Times* lamented “what a ridiculous caricature do we at this moment present to the world.”<sup>81</sup> First of all, the idea of the government being beholden to the machinations of ladies of the bedchamber was said to be absurd, as it gave “two or three insinuating female gossips... a voice more potential over the fortunes of the British Empire than that of the House of commons.”<sup>82</sup> The Tory papers stated that the situation demonstrated a lack of respect for governmental processes, and such disregard for what the people wanted was disgraceful for a nation proud of its recent advances in being responsible to the people. The Crisis also suggested that the administration was willing to set aside several pressing issues in order to make a power play. Finally, the fact that there was to be no investigation into the Whigs' plot supposedly exposed the British nation's “inconsistency and vacillation” and made it appear weak.<sup>83</sup> Victoria's allowing the Whigs to dictate her actions had resulted in international disgrace.

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### The Whig Papers

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80 *Morning Post*, May 24, 1839.

81 *Times*, May 18, 1839, *Standard*, May 24, 1839.

82 *Times*, May 24, 1839.

83 *Times*, May 20, 1839.

Though fully supporting the Queen's actions, the Whig press, here represented by the *Examiner* and the *Morning Chronicle*, denied Victoria any true agency just as effectively as did the Tory papers. In their insistence on the feminine and the deliberate removal of Victoria from the political sphere, the Whig papers showed that they were just as unready as the Tories to deal with the prospect of a young, unmarried woman taking her own initiative in affairs of state.<sup>84</sup>

Like the Tory papers, the Whig press also dwelt on the subject of Victoria's youth and gender. Both factions cited these as reasons why the Queen required guidance; but whereas the Tories were fearful of what she might be led to do, the Whigs were hopeful. This attitude was understandable, since it was the Whig politicians who were currently in Victoria's favour. It was specifically stated that Victoria was deserving of support because she was “a woman—a young, ingenuous and confiding woman.”<sup>85</sup> Her refusal of Peel was said to have ultimately arisen from “the simple fact, that in the proud bosom of a Queen was found the truthful beating of a woman's heart.”<sup>86</sup> However, no matter how much the Whig papers celebrated the fact that “the Queen [had] electrified the country!,” it was still made clear that Victoria's youth and gender were viewed as limitations that she had been obliged to overcome in standing up to Peel. The *Examiner* was triumphant in stating that Peel “probably thought that he had to deal with the timidity and inexperience of a girl circumstances of novelty,” but the Queen had proven able to rise above her natural inclinations.<sup>87</sup> The paper was more than happy to support the Queen's

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84 *Examiner*, May 12, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 8, 1839, *Examiner*, May 19, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 14, 1839 and May 15, 1839.

85 *Examiner*, May 12, 1839.

86 *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

87 *Examiner*, May 12, 18, *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

“firmness” and “excellent understanding;” but it was clear that, as pleased as it was, it was also surprised at her “courage and spirit.”<sup>88</sup>

While the Tory press was afraid that Victoria was not experienced enough (or even constitutionally able) to interfere in government affairs, the Whig press tried to remove her from that equation altogether. Where the Tory press insisted that the ladies of the bedchamber were political entities and that the entire Bedchamber Crisis was a political conflict, the Whig papers insisted that the ladies in question were all close friends of the Queen and that the crisis was a more personal one. They accused Peel of “abruptly breaking away the props of confidence, and rending the ties of early attachments.”<sup>89</sup> While this argument was ostensibly pursued in support of Victoria and her actions, it actually removed her from the political setting and confined her within a traditionally feminine arena. It effectively declared that Victoria did not care for political concerns and was not a political being; she was simply like every other young aristocratic girl concerned about losing her friends. Expressions of domestic femininity were apparently necessary to the Queen's life, with the *Chronicle* asking “what is life without the sympathies of friendship—without the circle in which the restraints of ceremony may be laid aside—and the feelings of the heart be safely indulged?”<sup>90</sup> These were Victoria's only true concern: the “feelings of the heart,” not the governing of the nation. It was even admitted that Victoria had no quarrel with Peel's other points: “with respect to Sir Robert Peel's political arrangements, she had nothing to do but assent to them.”<sup>91</sup> In this way, it was made clear that Victoria did not concern herself with wholly political matters.

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88 *Morning Chronicle*, May 14, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839.

89 *Examiner*, May 12, 1839, *Examiner*, May 19, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.

90 *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.

91 *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.

The *Morning Chronicle* steadfastly refused to acknowledge that the Royal household was political in nature, sniffing that “We have never understood that Ministerial responsibility extended to the affections and domestic enjoyments of the Sovereign.”<sup>92</sup> They admitted that the monarch had bowed to the wishes for household changes in the past, but there was nothing in the constitution that required Victoria to do so. What advantage Peel could possibly hope to gain other than showing himself to be a cruel tyrant? The Queen's purported claim that if “[the Tories] could not draw the line between Ministerial responsibility and improper interference with the domestic comforts...of the Sovereign, she could,” was defended by the Whig press.<sup>93</sup> They allowed for the fact that she had a personal, domestic sphere entirely separate from her political role, but they also gave the impression that the domestic sphere was the one where she truly belonged. “The Queen has given the country a pledge of intellectual and moral character that will bear higher sway than her sceptre.” This further drew attention to her purity as being more important than any sort of political thought.<sup>94</sup> The *Chronicle* acknowledged that Victoria had come up with the idea to deny Peel's request on her own and that “it had been utterly unanticipated by her own advisers.” This admission of agency was refreshing, except that it was continually accompanied by references to her “strong heart” as a motivation—not her strong head.<sup>95</sup> She was permitted to take responsibility for her actions, but only as the result of traditionally feminine emotions. Despite the many references to her clear-headedness, her refusal was still put down to her innate spirit or intuition, not to any capacity for critical thinking. “But

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92 *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.

93 *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.

94 *Morning Chronicle*, May 17, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839.

95 *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839.

whatever the intentions of the Tories, the demand was personally offensive.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, it still came down to a personal insult to the Queen: an attack, not on her political rights, but her personal ones.

Whereas the Tory press depicted Melbourne as an irresponsible cad, the Whig press set up Peel as a tyrannical bully who was scorned for leaving his office simply because he could not have control over the royal household. The *Chronicle* sneered that “all will not satisfy him with their patronage so long as he is debarred from filling the Queen's bedchamber with his female nominees.”<sup>97</sup> Their version of events initially had Peel saying nothing about household changes until he was sure of his commission. Then “the wily Tory leader intimated to his Royal Mistress that she must submit to a complete change of her household. ... The palace he treated as his by right of conquest.”<sup>98</sup> Peel failed because he tried to push the Queen too far. Victoria only reacted to his demands; at no point was the idea entertained that she went into her meetings with him with a plan to force him to resign. Thus, while the Whig papers were ready to support the Queen in her actions, they only supported her as a young woman who found enough courage to stand up to an unkind man, not as an intelligent woman who knew how to manipulate a situation that she resented. Peel was demonized for not being considerate of “the sex of the Sovereign, her extreme youth; the strangeness and embarrassment of change to her, unpractised in such mutations; the natural desire to retain some familiar faces around her.”<sup>99</sup> A letter to the editor chided Peel for not having explained things more clearly to the Queen instead of just trying to crush her spirit. He should have “yielded even a little to the very natural and very amiable feelings of his young

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96 *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839.

97 *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839.

98 *Examiner*, May 12, 1839.

99 *Examiner*, May 12, 1839.

Sovereign.”<sup>100</sup> His lack of respect for her potential political acumen, however, was not mentioned.

The *Examiner* was eventually obliged to admit that Peel had not demanded a full change of the Queen's household but only that a few new appointments be made. The Whig papers also acknowledged that it might have been Victoria's constitutional duty to submit to taking on Peel as her first minister, but they also maintained that it was monstrous of him to expect her to demonstrate her support when she felt nothing of the kind.<sup>101</sup> The paper also conceded that Peel also had not been trying to assert control; he had simply been looking for a demonstration of support from the Sovereign.<sup>102</sup> Yet the paper still insisted that Victoria had every right to be alarmed, as “the halter was to be set around the neck of every one of the Queen's friends...to be hauled out of the Palace whenever it suited Sir Robert Peel.”<sup>103</sup> The paper was sure that Peel would never have stopped at mere household appointments, but would go on to make whatever changes he needed in order to demonstrate that he was truly in charge of the nation. In this case, the royal household was certainly politicized, but not by the Queen. While the paper admitted that Peel's purpose was entirely politically motivated (though they still assigned a certain deviousness to his actions), it was not stated that the Queen could have had any idea of his intentions. While Victoria's “clearness and...quick understanding” were said to have enabled her to realize that “her friends would hold their positions about her person on no securer tenure than

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100 *Morning Chronicle*, May 18, 1839.

101 *Morning Chronicle*, May 14, 1839.

102 *Examiner*, May 19, 1839.

103 *Examiner*, May 19, 1839.

the companions of Ulysses held their lives in the cave of Polyphemus,” the emphasis was still on the fact that she saw the ladies of the bedchamber as only her friends, not as political figures.<sup>104</sup>

There was also fear of what might have happened if Victoria had given in to Peel and a sense of relief that she had “escaped the most grievous mental thralldom in which a Sovereign could be placed by party jealousies.”<sup>105</sup> Her continued ability to withstand Tory dominance was not guaranteed, however. Just like the Tory press, the Whig papers feared that Victoria was too open to influence. When the *Chronicle* had to admit that Peel had not demanded the change of the Queen's entire household, it also stated that Peel did not go so far because, “even to the inexperience of the young Queen, the right of dismissing her whole Household must have appeared as startling as it was unconstitutional.”<sup>106</sup> Again, Victoria was working against her inexperience and lack of knowledge; Peel could fool her, but only so far. And there was a fear that he may have learned enough from this experience to try again, only with better knowledge of the limitations of his influence. There was still the looming threat that “the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel would not merely deprive the Sovereign of the power of action, but of the liberty of thought.”<sup>107</sup>

The *Examiner* hardly mentioned Melbourne at all in relation to the Queen, but the *Morning Chronicle* contained a reprint from the *Courier* claiming that Victoria “[had] called upon [him] to preserve her from the degrading bondage which it [had] been attempted to impose upon her.”<sup>108</sup> Melbourne was portrayed here as a kind of hero. The Whig papers were careful to never admit that Victoria might have acted on Melbourne’s initiative (in contrast to the Tory

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104 *Examiner*, May 19, 1839.

105 *Examiner*, May 19, 1839.

106 *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

107 *Morning Chronicle*, May 16, 1839.

108 *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.



press), but they were willing to depict his support as absolutely necessary in carrying out what she had done. Indeed, all of the Whig ministers were called upon to support Victoria in her bid against Peel. No matter how personally courageous they found the Queen to be, the *Examiner* was still afraid that “if the Queen should be deserted in this trial...there is not a doubt that her Majesty must bend to the Tory yoke.”<sup>109</sup> Victoria’s personal stand would be meaningless without the support of the men around her. The threat of Tory “thralldom” was still very real in the eyes of the press. The *Chronicle* was likewise relieved that the Whigs chose to support the Queen, because if “her Majesty yielded to the demands...there is no extremity to which [the Tories] might not have pushed their exactions.”<sup>110</sup> The Queen’s moment of courage could not be relied upon. Without male Whig support, “the Tory thralldom she has spurned must be forced on her, however bitter the degradation.”<sup>111</sup> It was up to the reinstated ministers to win over the people enough to obtain a decisive majority and so keep the Tories out. The Queen had done all that she could do. The political path was completely up to the actual politicians; Victoria had no part in it. The Tory press continually pointed out that the monarch was supposed to be above party politics. Yet there was a difference between the Queen choosing to maintain a neutral stance and her being pushed aside (however gently) by those who did not consider her a political being due to her age and gender. The Queen had taken a stand for herself and her friends, but it was up to the ministers to convince the nation that she had acted for the best.

It is interesting that the Whig papers continually separated the Queen from political concerns, given how vehement the Tory papers were about the selfish nature of her actions. The Whig press could not say that Victoria acted with the interests of the people in mind, as she

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109 *Examiner*, May 26, 1839.

110 *Morning Chronicle*, May 11, 1839.

111 *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

probably did not. Yet it still identified her with them, in so far as she “vindicated her own freedom—the freedom to which she is entitled in common with the meanest of her subjects.”<sup>112</sup> Little effort was made to show her as being concerned for the governance of the nation, though the *Chronicle* continued to group the sovereign and the people together in being at the potential mercy of a Tory ministry which “[aspired] at sovereign and people alike in its iron grip.”<sup>113</sup> Such language implied that the Queen had no more agency than the average citizen, standing in danger of being placed in “thralldom” by one party and requiring the rescue of the other. This language may have been meant as a way to humanize the Queen and make the people sympathize with her, but it also made her appear as being as helpless as the people she was supposed to rule. The *Chronicle* also attempted to illustrate Victoria's presumed sympathy with the people by stating that “the immediate motive [for the Bedchamber Crisis] might be the impulse of a true and generous nature, but it coincides alike with the dictates of sound principle.”<sup>114</sup> Victoria might not have been thinking about the people, but she was acting for them all the same.

The Queen was identified in several letters to the editor as having essentially shown her support for reform in refusing Peel, and Reformers were called upon to express their support for her in turn.<sup>115</sup> There had never been a hint of Victoria's actual political agenda, if she had one, and once again she was being appropriated as a symbol by those who did not really know her. It was stated that “nothing less than the spirit so opportunely displayed by the Queen, and the chivalrous feeling which it has aroused, could have again brought together the various sections

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112 *Morning Chronicle*, May 17, 1839.

113 *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

114 *Morning Chronicle*, May 21, 1839.

115 *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839.

of the Reform party.”<sup>116</sup> Victoria's cause was thereby identified with that of reform, and several addresses of support asked Victoria to appoint liberal ministers who would advance the cause of Reform.<sup>117</sup> Such addresses demonstrated that many people were either motivated to request further support for the Queen due to a political cause that she did not necessarily support or that they were up in arms about the insult offered to a young girl and pleasantly surprised by her courage.

The *Examiner* contained samples of addresses to the Queen expressing support. Far from the fear and condemnation seen in the addresses published in the Tory press, here there was only “admiration of the firm, high-minded resistance of the Queen.” Whig addresses also expressed disgust that Victoria had been asked to part with her friends.<sup>118</sup> Unlike the *Examiner's* and the *Morning Chronicle's* editorials, which tried to view the Bedchamber Crisis in a solely domestic light, many of these addresses celebrated the Queen as standing up for her political rights as a sovereign and did not often mention her gender or her youth. However, there were still instances of the Queen being firmly kept in the metaphorical box of a young, helpless girl. One address from St. Marylebone avowed the town's support for the Queen against “an attempt [that] has been made to banish from your presence the female friends for whom your Majesty entertains affection...and to make you a state prisoner in your own palace.”<sup>119</sup> The appeal to male chivalry had effectively caused the Queen to be likened to a maiden in a tower in need of rescue. This was obviously an effective means of garnering support, but it also made Victoria into a kind of fairy-tale figure. In its own appeal to the people, the *Examiner* discussed the fact that the monarch

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116 *Morning Chronicle*,” May 20, 1839.

117 *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 17, May 18, May 20, May 21, May 22, May 23, May 24, May 25, May 27, May 28, May 31, 1839.

118 *Examiner*, May 19, 1839, *Examiner*, May 26, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

119 *Morning Chronicle*, May 13, 1839.

must accept the services of the representative of the party with the majority of support in Parliament and further stated that Peel had not proven that he had a wide enough support base. The paper then asked for the people to show their support and again depicted Victoria as an unprotected girl. They asked whether “the people maintain the cause of the Queen and her liberal Administration, or of the Tories and the humiliation of the Sovereign.”<sup>120</sup> Such statements made it clear that these writers saw the Queen's administration as liberal, but they saw Victoria as simply a young woman who had been humiliated.

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References to the Bedchamber Crisis continued throughout the rest of 1839. The Whig papers continued to carry commentary on the Bedchamber Crisis on various occasions.<sup>121</sup> Their pieces tended to state that the Tories still resented Victoria's rejection of them, and that in their bitterness, all they could do was continue to insist that she had played Peel false. The Whig writers stated that the Tories still wanted her to pretend a confidence in the Tories that she did not feel. However, papers such as the *Morning Chronicle* continued to praise the Queen for sticking to her principles.<sup>122</sup>

In the Tory press, the Crisis was still referenced as an example of why Victoria and her Whig ministers were unfit to rule. Addresses were still sent to the Queen expressing disapproval of her “late conduct.”<sup>123</sup> Well into December, there were continued references to the existence of the government hinging on whether the Ladies of the Bedchamber were kept happy, or to the belief that matters of government were allowed to hang in the balance while the wishes of the

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120 *Examiner*, May 26, 1839.

121 *Examiner*, June 16, 1839, *Examiner*, July 7, 1839, *Morning Chronicle*, August 17, December 5, 1839.

122 *Morning Chronicle*, June 28, July 1, 3, October 17, 1839.

123 *Morning Post*, June 1, 1839, *Morning Post*, June 7, 1839, *Times*, June 27, 1839.

Ladies were sorted out.<sup>124</sup> There also continued to be much discussion in the *Morning Post* over the rights and wrongs of the Bedchamber Crisis, as the paper still insisted that Melbourne's ministry had no right to regain power, and that “the Sovereign's predilection for certain Ladies of the Bedchamber is a ridiculous reason.” Other papers joined in, voicing their ongoing disgruntlement with Peel having been so misunderstood and the lack of proper political guidance for the Queen.<sup>125</sup> While the Melbourne government was continually taken to task for the political issues arising out of the Bedchamber Crisis, there was little more discussion about Victoria's own political role, as she was further infantilized out of relevance. She was still referred to as a helpless victim, sometimes at the mercy of her ministers and sometimes of her ladies of the bedchamber, but always as a pawn used for the whims of others.

The Tory and Whig papers had both used the Bedchamber Crisis to reduce the appearance of the Queen's agency: the Tories by arguing that Victoria was too susceptible to the bad guidance of the Whigs, and the Whigs by depicting Victoria as reactive instead of active. Though the Crisis was no longer at centre stage after the month of May, its effects continued to be felt. Combined with renewed interest in the Hastings Scandal, the Crisis would continue to influence Queen Victoria's representation in the press for months to come.

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124 *Morning Post*, June 7, July 26, August 15, November 5, December 13, 1839, *Morning Post*, September 5, 1839, *Standard*, June 10, July 3, 1839, *Times*, June 8, July 1, 1839.

125 *Morning Post*, June 3, 1839, with further discussion of the matter in the *Morning Post*, June 7, 1839, *Morning Post*, June 29, 1839, *Standard*, June 1, 1839, *Times*, June 27, November 22, 1839.

## Chapter 3: The Aftermath

The Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis had repercussions for Queen Victoria's reputation and representation in the newspapers throughout the rest of the year. From June to December it became increasingly clear that the Queen was being found wanting in the developing categories of femininity that were thought to be her only options to adopt in a public persona. She was essentially caught between the esteemed examples of Lady Flora Hastings and the Dowager Queen Adelaide. Lady Flora continued to be held up as a model of pure, maidenly innocence, while Adelaide emerged as a pillar of dutiful, matronly respectability. The Hastings Scandal came to the forefront again in the summer months, when Lady Flora fell increasingly ill and then died. Feeling spurned by the Queen during the Bedchamber Crisis, the Tory papers lauded the known Tory tendencies of Queen Adelaide, prompting a minor scuffle with the Whig press that came to a head during the Fall. The Whig papers continued to support Victoria, but mostly through continued emphasis on her traditional femininity. As the year wound down, Victoria never did manage to gain her own voice in the press, and the decisions that she made during the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis continued to be either attributed to the work of others, or to her inexperience and youth.

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### The Tory Papers

#### **Lady Flora**

As Lady Flora grew ill again, and especially after her death on July 5<sup>th</sup>, portions of the Hastings Correspondence were reprinted, along with some new additions. These were supplied

by Lady Flora's uncle, Hamilton Fitzgerald, and the Marquis of Hastings. In this way, still more details about the Hastings Scandal were brought before the public in an effort to tell the whole story and further implicate the ladies of the bedchamber in the matter. In a letter to her uncle dated March 8<sup>th</sup> Lady Flora expressed the feeling that she and the Duchess of Kent were the targets of a plot. She referred to herself as a victim, and mentioned that "a certain foreign lady" was "pulling the wires" due to her well known hatred of the Duchess. The letter also stated that Ladies Portman and Tavistock were most often mentioned as being in league against Lady Flora. She further stated that she placed herself under the care of Sir James Clark while she was ill, who told her that the ladies of the palace suspected that she was pregnant and asked her if she had been privately married. She maintained that she had nothing to hide, and he said that a full medical examination was the only way to fully clear her name. She discovered that the Queen had been informed but not the Duchess of Kent. Lady Portman told the Duchess that the Queen would prefer not to see Lady Flora for the time being. Lady Flora was sure that Victoria did not realize "what she had been betrayed into." Meanwhile "the Duchess was perfect" in her actions, apparently never believing that Lady Flora had done anything wrong.<sup>1</sup>

In September the Marquis of Hastings published some further correspondence of his own. He said that he only now felt comfortable publishing the full account of what had happened to his sister. Lady Flora had formerly asked him to remain silent, as she did not want to lose her place in the Duchess' household and felt that making a fuss would only make her more of a target to those who wished to get rid of her. This additional correspondence included a formal statement from Lady Flora about the events leading to her examination, which contained the further note that Lady Portman apologized to her for the discomfort, but she was just doing her job and the Queen herself had raised the matter. The Marquis tried to see if any legal proceeding

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1 *Times*, August 12, 1839.

could be undertaken on his sister's behalf but his legal advisers concluded that there was not enough evidence on which to build a case. Not satisfied, he then went after Melbourne to make sure that discussion of the entire affair had been confined to the ladies of the household. He also had an audience with the Queen, during which he let her know that he felt she had been badly counselled.

Having written to Melbourne and seen the Queen, the Marquis was still determined to find the source of the rumours against his sister, so he wrote to Lords Portman and Tavistock to discuss the supposed actions of their wives. The Marquis of Tavistock was annoyed and stated that he knew nothing about the matter. After speaking to his wife, he wrote that she had been made aware of Lady Flora's possible condition from another source and was told to bring the matter to Melbourne, as she did not know how to act. Lady Tavistock's own statement on the matter also reflected this. Lord Portman revealed that his wife was more than willing to meet with Hastings to discuss matters, but Hastings refused. Lady Portman then wrote her own statement, which reflected Lady Tavistock's but went one step further, by emphasizing that she did not get her information from Baroness Lehzen, who was Hastings' chief suspect.<sup>2</sup>

Sir James Clark, maligned by Lady Flora in her letters as a "tool" of wicked women, and also depicted by her brother as an insensitive and indelicate ogre, finally had his own statement published in the *Times* on October 9<sup>th</sup>. He stated that he had attended Lady Flora when she first fell ill and was later recalled by Melbourne after Lady Tavistock had imparted the matter of Lady Flora's appearance to him. Acting on the information given to him, Dr. Clark Dr. Clark then pursued the course already detailed by Lady Flora's letters. However, he protested that he was not trying to humiliate her, but was genuinely concerned about her condition, given her altered

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<sup>2</sup> *Times*, September 16, 1839.



appearance, and could not help her without an examination. He stated that, since the publication of the Hastings Correspondence, the term “medical examination” had been used to infer all sorts of things, most of them indecent, but he had initially meant to imply nothing but an external examination, during which Lady Flora would be fully clothed, so that he could feel the growth in her abdomen. However, since she refused to acquiesce, he felt forced to tell her about the rumours, and Lady Portman had given permission for him to mention her by name as one who had noticed Lady Flora’s appearance. She still refused to be examined, so Clark went to the Duchess of Kent. The Duchess agreed that it would be best for the examination to be performed, but Lady Flora asked that Sir Charles Clarke also be present. Neither doctor found evidence of pregnancy, and Clark expressed regret that he could not find the true cause of her illness. He also denied that he had ever acted indelicately or inconsiderately, assuming that Lady Flora only felt that she had been bullied by him because she had been under a great deal of physical and emotional strain.<sup>3</sup>

All of these further statements came on top of regular references to the Hastings Correspondence in the Tory press, which had continued throughout the Bedchamber Crisis. Notices about Lady Flora’s declining health first began to appear in late June. From then on, there were constant updates on her health and the list of people, mostly relatives, hurrying to see her before she died on July 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup> At her own request, an autopsy was performed on her body to provide proof at the very last that she had never been pregnant. Her illness, death, and ultimate innocence caused the comparisons between the “saintly” dead woman and the “sinful” living Queen to reach their peak in the Tory papers.

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3 *Times*, October 9, 1839.

4 *Morning Post*, June 26, 1839.

The virtues of Lady Flora and how deeply the public felt about her death were exaggerated, the better to contrast with the Queen and her lifestyle. The *Post* contained several spreads from other papers attesting to the flawless character of Lady Flora.<sup>5</sup> Even her published letter to her uncle produced raptures about the expression of the letter, which was described as “one of the most engaging and attractive that [had] ever met [the writer's] eye, qualities which it [derived] from the artless, and pure, and generous mind of its amiable and unfortunate writer.”<sup>6</sup> There was seemingly no aspect of her character that could not be put down to her inner purity. The *Post* carried a full report of Lady Flora's funeral at her family's ancestral home in Scotland. The paper emphasized the throngs of people who turned out at every stop along the procession to express their sorrow at her death and their anger at the manner in which it took place. It was stated that “one feeling seemed to pervade every bosom—a feeling of deep sympathy and pity for the victim of Court intrigue, mixed with bitter indignation against her persecutors.”<sup>7</sup> The whole matter was summed up as “the chief courtly transaction in the reign of our maiden Queen,” while Lady Flora's death was said to serve as a “solemn warning and admonition” to Victoria that “power has often been prostituted to defend oppression and to cancel crime.”<sup>8</sup>

The Tory papers sought to try and frighten the Queen into changing her ways by overstating how admired Lady Flora had been and how much of a blight her death would cast on the reign. Lady Flora was pronounced to be the “victim of a depraved court,” and her personal purity, already extensively discussed during the publication of the Hastings Correspondence, was once again lauded. She was referred to as a saint or a martyr on more than one occasion. It was pointed out that she had no bad words for her persecutors on her death bed and that she had a

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5 *Morning Post*, July 11, 1839, *Morning Post*, July 16, 17, 22, 1839

6 *Morning Post*, August 10, 1839.

7 *Morning Post*, July 10, 1839.

8 *Morning Post*, July 16, 1839.

“purity of mind and firmness of purpose unexampled in her sad condition.”<sup>9</sup> Even the decision on her part to have an autopsy done after her death was referred to as “saintly” by the *Morning Post*. It stated that she must have been caught between her feelings of female delicacy and the need to clear her name, not just for her own sake, but for her family's as well.<sup>10</sup> One of Lady Flora’s virtues was apparently her careful attention to her reputation, which she realized reflected upon those with whom she associated. The comparison between her and the Queen was thus made ever more clear: In her continued association with her “depraved Court,” Victoria seemingly did not care about what the actions of her friends said about her.

The general unsuitability of the Court, and the Queen's unfortunate association with her Whig friends, were topics that continued to be discussed in the Tory papers. In June the *Morning Post* re-introduced the subject of the entire Hastings Scandal and the Court in earnest when it published a series of letters on the subject, written by “A Barrister,” going over in minute detail the wrongs perpetrated against Lady Flora Hastings by certain courtiers. The writer was aghast that the Hastings Scandal had “converted the palace of the Queen of England, once the residence of Queen Charlotte, into the seat of vilest intrigues” and stated that the people of England are “at all times jealous and watchful alike over...the purity of the Sovereign.”<sup>11</sup> Not only was Victoria's perceived “purity” free to be policed by whomever might wish to do so, but she was also specifically found lacking in comparison to her revered grandmother. Much was made of the character of the Court—a “depraved” place—with which the Queen was inescapably associated. While continuing to protest that the paper was merely pointing out the poisonous atmosphere in hopes of saving the Queen from it, the fact that she was a part of—was indeed the nominal leader

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9 *Morning Post*, July 9, 1839.

10 *Morning Post*, July 8, 1839.

11 *Morning Post*, June 7, 1839.

of—a place continually described in the most negative terms, did not cast her character in the best light.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the discussion of the Hastings Correspondence in April, when the Queen was staunchly depicted as having been ignorant of the plots of her wicked friends, there was now a palpable undercurrent of hostility in some of the articles about Victoria. One account detailed the lengths to which the Duke of Wellington attempted to be a father figure and offer his sound council to the Queen. Having rejected such a potential friend and guardian, considered the best that the Tory party had to offer, the Tory papers seemed to be of the opinion that Victoria had an opportunity to get herself away from Melbourne and his ilk but was too stupid or too blind to take advantage of it. While there were still references to the need to “rescue” the Queen, a more general feeling of disgust with her insistence on associating with such people became more pervasive. The Duke of Wellington had done all he could, and now “who [could] doubt he was right?...he will leave her to those who have poisoned her ear—til the nation has removed that poison.”<sup>13</sup> When going over how the Queen had snubbed Lady Flora during March and April, when suspicion about Lady Flora’s condition was at its peak, one paper stated that “we feel that we have no right to impute this brutality to Her Majesty, and that we have the most complete and undeniable right to impute it to Lord Melbourne,” who was aware of her conduct and in a position to advise her if he saw her doing wrong.<sup>14</sup> Melbourne was still blamed for the Queen's bad behaviour, but it now was hinted that the papers would much rather blame Victoria, if only they had the “right.”

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12 *Morning Post*, July 10, 1839, *Morning Post*, July 16, 1839, *Morning Post*, July 20, 1839.

13 *Morning Post*, June 3, 1839.

14 *Morning Post*, September 21, 1839.

Given this new and more vocal suspicion that the Queen would never leave her Whig associates, some Tory writers began to doubt whether Victoria ever could have been ignorant of the treatment of Lady Flora. This growing belief that the Queen must have been cognizant of her Whig friends' actions found its way into statements that there was a "suspicion" throughout the country that the plotters against Lady Flora "acted solely under the direct and personal authority of their Sovereign."<sup>15</sup> While the Ladies of the Bedchamber generally continued to be blamed for the entire ordeal, Victoria now came in for her share of responsibility. It was said that the Court was never this bad until she insisted on retaining her Ladies and "thence has resulted, in part, that recklessness of conduct which has brought so much unpopularity upon their Royal Mistress."<sup>16</sup> If not personally responsible for hounding Lady Flora to her grave, she certainly permitted the growth of an atmosphere hostile to Lady Flora and indeed to all decent women. A reprint from the *Cumberland Pacquet* was particularly damning in painting a picture of the saintly Lady Flora suffering on her deathbed while "her calumniators were caressed and protected by Royalty."<sup>17</sup> Another reprint from the *Morning Herald* also mourned "the virtuous and ill-fated lady, whose untimely doom [occurred] beneath that roof where female innocence ought to have found its best protection."<sup>18</sup> Such a statement further emphasized that Victoria's Court was no place for "proper" ladies and that the Queen had shown no interest in protecting an innocent woman.

The protection of Lady Flora seemingly fell to the Duchess of Kent, who, from the first, was praised for being "upright, just, and affectionate."<sup>19</sup> The maternal affection that the Duchess evinced for Lady Flora was often emphasized, as well as Lady Flora's gratitude for such

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<sup>15</sup> *Morning Post*, June 7, June 19, 1839.

<sup>16</sup> *Morning Post*, July 9, 1839.

<sup>17</sup> *Morning Post*, July 12, 1839.

<sup>18</sup> *Standard*, December 11, 1839.

<sup>19</sup> *Morning Post*, June 26, 1839, *Times*, June 22, 26, 1839.

attention. This implied that, in a way, Lady Flora was a better daughter to the Duchess than Victoria. The Tory press had long tried to portray the Duchess as a loving mother rejected by a daughter being led astray. Lady Flora, however, was more than willing to be mothered, accepting attention where the Queen had refused advice. Due to Lady Flora's flawless character and attendance on her mistress, the Duchess of Kent was "unremitting in her attentions to the noble invalid, and [did] not go out."<sup>20</sup> Spending her days either by Lady Flora's side or looking after the comfort of the members of the Hastings family who came to visit, the Duchess' sacrifices and good works caused the *Post* to point out that the Duchess' "conduct throughout, [they] rejoice to say, has been perfect."<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to Lady Flora's grateful receipt of the Duchess' affections in return for years of loyal service, some Tory writers pointed out that Victoria seemed bent on making her mother as unhappy as possible. Sir John Conroy resigned from the service of the Duchess of Kent at the beginning of July, and the *Morning Post* stated that he resigned after being made aware that Victoria disliked him (the paper could discern no reason for her dislike) and that her aversion to him was also the reason for the Queen's much lamented estrangement from her mother. The impression given was that Victoria had acted on a whim. This allowed both the Duchess of Kent and Conroy to appear as martyrs: the Duchess for giving up a trusted employee and friend at the same time she was dealing with Lady Flora's illness; and Conroy for giving up his job.<sup>22</sup> The *Times*, at least, stated that Victoria should not be censured for disliking Conroy, when William IV had despised him and must have had good reason for doing so, while a reprint from the

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<sup>20</sup> *Times*, June 27, 1839.

<sup>21</sup> *Morning Post*, July 1, 1839.

<sup>22</sup> *Morning Post*, July 5, 1839.

*Observer* also pointed out that Conroy was hardly a figure of popular sympathy.<sup>23</sup> Even so, the *Post* had effectively portrayed the Queen as a selfish daughter.

This selfishness continued to be played up in contrast to the actions of the Duchess, who sacrificed her comfort and her social life, while Victoria seemingly did neither. It was occasionally noted when Victoria and her household were “in consequence [of Lady Flora’s illness] absent from the drawing-room,” but otherwise the Queen’s lack of constant attendance on the dying woman was noteworthy.<sup>24</sup> The *Morning Post* specifically drew attention to an instance when cards were issued in the Queen’s name that commanded certain persons to attend a ball at Buckingham Palace. Since this occurred in the midst of Lady Flora’s prolonged illness before her death, the paper was appalled at the lack of feeling accompanying such a gesture. It professed to assume that a person within the Queen’s household must have sought to create mischief in her name and issued the invitations without her knowledge.<sup>25</sup> The ball was postponed the next day, but the *Post* still stated that it would have been better if the invitations had been forgeries. The fact that the invitations were ever issued at all associated the Queen with “indecent and inhumanity.” As usual, the paper tempered its harsh words by ascribing the callousness of the initial invitations to the Queen’s advisers and the kind decision to revoke the invitations to the Queen herself.<sup>26</sup> However, the matter was not permitted to drop; it was dredged up again by “A Barrister” in an ongoing series of letters to the *Post*. At this point, Victoria was further removed from responsibility (everything was blamed on the Lord Chamberlain, who was in charge of social events), but she was still associated with “the absence of every other thought

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<sup>23</sup> *Times*, July 6, 8, 1839.

<sup>24</sup> *Morning Post*, June 22, 1839.

<sup>25</sup> *Morning Post*, June 25, 1839.

<sup>26</sup> *Morning Post*, June 27, 1839.

than for the amusement and ill-timed enjoyment of the passing hour” and therefore held responsible for “[damaging] the cause of Royalty.”<sup>27</sup>

The cause of Royalty was presumably also being damaged by how thoroughly un-English the Court was becoming, at least in the view of some Tory writers. Lady Flora’s letter to Mr. Fitzgerald pointed a finger specifically at “a certain foreign lady...[pulling] the wires,” which was clearly a reference to Baroness Lehzen, who was from Hanover. Lehzen had been Victoria’s governess and she still served in the royal household as the Queen’s closest confidante.<sup>28</sup> This gave the *Morning Post* ample ammunition to portray the Queen as being specifically under “foreign” influence, as well as bad influence in general. Victoria was depicted as less and less truly English, while Lady Flora was consistently referred to as an “English rose” in the many poems and reports written after her death. Lehzen’s influence was said to be doubly dangerous because her actions could not be punished by the country.<sup>29</sup> It was also blamed for the former estrangement between the Queen and the Duchess of Kent. The extent of Lehzen’s evil reach was inferred from “the fact, that to avert the public exposure that would inevitably have followed any successful attempt to refer this odious calumny to its proper source, ladies, who have been the innocent instruments of the destroyer, and even Majesty itself have consented to place themselves in a false position, rather than that public odium should settle on the right head.”<sup>30</sup> In the face of the much more ominous prospect of foreign malevolence, Ladies Portman and Tavistock were termed “innocent instruments,” but the Queen was still seen to be at fault for subjecting herself to bad guidance.

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<sup>27</sup> *Morning Post*, July 4, 1839.

<sup>28</sup> Longford, *Victoria R.I.*, 56, Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria*, 100.

<sup>29</sup> *Morning Post*, August 10, 1839.

<sup>30</sup> *Standard*, August 10, 1839.



Even if the Queen was not personally responsible for the acts supposedly committed against Lady Flora, her continued association with those suspected of having a grudge against Lady Flora still made Victoria suspect. There was some cause for thinking that the Queen might simply have not cared for Lady Flora's comfort, as a notice was printed that Victoria was determined to keep James Clark as her physician no matter what opposition was raised to his presence at her court. She was said to have "expressed her resolute determination to have her wishes complied with."<sup>31</sup> To the Tory papers, this illustrated a willfulness of character that clearly had not taken into consideration Lady Flora's discomfort in the doctor's presence. Victoria was given the excuse of "youth and unconsciousness," but it was argued that "if the Queen *saw* the character of some of her courtiers and guests, she must drive them from her presence. Would not your wife or daughter do so, honest English reader?"<sup>32</sup> The Queen's only defence involved her being ignorant. Her "innocence" of the situation was not the same as Lady Flora's own much vaunted innocence. Victoria's sprang from a wilful blindness, not from any strength of character. If she gave any indication that she was aware of the supposed persecution of Lady Flora, then it was her responsibility to turn out the perpetrators like any "honest English" daughter. To do otherwise was to shirk her moral duty.

The *Morning Post* was further outraged when it became clear that Lady Flora was not long for this world. A discussion took place in the paper over how long a time would elapse between her death and when her remains would be removed from Buckingham Palace. The paper insisted that "an universal feeling of indignation will arise on the mere mention of such a discussion in present circumstances" and ascribed the perceived tactlessness of such a question

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31 *Times*, September 20, 1839.

32 *Standard*, November 16, 1839.

to those who “constitute at this moment the Court of England.”<sup>33</sup> Again, contempt of Lady Flora was attributed to the Queen's household, and Victoria herself seemed unable or unwilling to put a stop to such acts of indecency.

Despite Victoria's apparent heartlessness, it was pointed out that Lady Flora harboured no hard feelings toward her. In fact it was stated that, during the initial incident of the Hastings Scandal, one of the causes of Lady Flora's misery was the prospect of “banishment from the presence of her Sovereign forever.” That was said to be the reason why she submitted to the examination to determine whether she was pregnant. In other words, Lady Flora was devoted to the Queen's service, despite being a member of the Duchess of Kent's household. Yet it seemed that Victoria did not step in to defend her either when she was the subject of vicious rumours or when she lay dying.<sup>34</sup> The Tory press even went so far as to avow that “the previous kindness of Her Majesty towards Lady Flora had been intended merely as a bribe to ensure silence on the part of that lady's friends, and that, their silence being broken [by Mr. Fitzgerald's letter and the Marquis making enquiries], the heartless bribe was at once withdrawn, and ruthless barbarity substituted in its place.”<sup>35</sup> A reprint from the *Manchester Courier* implied the Queen's supposed cruelty more heavily, stating that even in the midst of her illness, Lady Flora was “nevertheless compelled” “[to follow] the Queen in the round of dissipation and pleasure.” Such social obligations--which, had she failed to comply with them, would have left her open to yet more rumours about her absence--only exacerbated her illness. In this way, the press suggested that

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33 *Morning Post*, July 5, 1839.

34 *Morning Post*, July 9, 1839.

35 *Morning Post*, September 21, 1839.

Victoria's apparent enjoyment of societal functions helped to doom Lady Flora, who was forced to “bear up against her woes.”<sup>36</sup>

It was not until Lady Flora began to decline at an alarming rate that Victoria was credited with any sympathy for the dying woman, though it was credit grudgingly given. When the *Morning Chronicle* published a notice that the Queen had been careful to postpone dinners and the appointments of musicians, in case any noise should disturb Lady Flora, the *Post* did not hesitate to sneer at these paltry acts of kindness, sarcastically applauding this “magnanimous self-denial” of the simple frivolity of galas and music. This line of thought was echoed in a reprint from the *Cumberland Pacquet*, which further mentioned that the Queen made “necessity a virtue” and only parted with her frivolities reluctantly. Her supposed sacrifices, it was said, could not possibly compare to the agony of being hounded to death.<sup>37</sup> While the Duchess of Kent was lauded for her constant attentions to Lady Flora, it was only “from the period at which the death of Lady Flora was distinctly foreseen [that] her Majesty has endeavoured...to excite a similar feeling.” In other words, the Queen only bothered herself about Lady Flora once it was clear that she was going to die.<sup>38</sup>

Victoria also received some praise for having at last “awakened to the capability of reflection” and the realization that her advisers were steering her wrong. It was hoped that the Queen's renewed association with the pure character of Lady Flora might be a positive influence on her. One paper was positive that an interview that the Queen had with Lady Flora “cannot have failed to produce a permanent and a salutary impression upon the mind and heart of that

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36 *Morning Post*, July 16, 1839.

37 *Morning Post*, July 6, 1839 and July 12, 1839.

38 *Morning Post*, July 10, 1839.

party who alone is likely to survive it long.”<sup>39</sup> This established Lady Flora as the dying martyr and Victoria as the misguided sinner who had much to learn. It was also implied that if Victoria had only learned her lesson sooner, the present sad situation would not have occurred.

It was further suggested that the Queen ought to have made some public show of distress over the circumstances that led to Lady Flora’s death, or at least some demonstration that she was aware of the guilt of the members of her household and felt badly about it. The *Morning Post* even stated that it would not be satisfied until Victoria had sanctioned a formal enquiry into who had originally started the rumours about Lady Flora. It was said that Victoria owed this to her mother, the Hastings family, and to herself in order to show that she was not as callous as some may have thought.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the months during which discussion of Lady Flora’s ordeal took place, the Tory papers continued to insist that they did not want to show disrespect the Queen while praising Lady Flora. Still, it was made clear that, whereas Lady Flora inspired love by her blameless character, Victoria was mainly loved out of a sense of loyalty to the Crown, and not necessarily loyalty to her person, as “nothing can weaken the respect due to Royalty.”<sup>41</sup> The *Standard* mostly vowed silence on the entire renewed scandal, acknowledging that the Hastings family, and probably Lady Flora herself, would not want the painful subject dwelt upon. It also stated that respectful silence was due to “one whom we are all bound to love (a debt cheerfully paid) and to respect.”<sup>42</sup> While Lady Flora’s suffering was too sacred and too deeply felt by everyone to be kept in the public eye, discussion of the Queen’s own grief and possible guilt was

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39 *Morning Post*, July 1, 1839.

40 *Morning Post*, July 12, 1839.

41 *Morning Post*, July 11, 1839, *Morning Post*, July 22, 1839.

42 *Standard*, July 6, 1839.

withheld only from the respect owed to her position. No matter how “cheerfully” such obligations might have been felt, they were still obligations: not respect freely given.

It should be mentioned that the *Morning Post's* dogged, seemingly obsessive coverage of the aftermath of Lady Flora’s death, not to mention its rehashing of the entire Hastings Scandal, was not necessarily echoed by other Tory papers. The *Times* in particular suggested that the *Post* was acting out of a desire to “[abuse] the Court ladies apparently and the Queen in reality” and that, if it were really interested in allowing Lady Flora to rest peacefully, it would let the matter drop. Early after Lady Flora’s death, the *Standard* also made the decision not to publish many of the submissions it received paying tribute to the dead woman, stating that “enough, and more than enough, [had] been printed upon this melancholy subject. The premature death of an amiable and virtuous lady is, unhappily, too common an event to be naturally the subject of such extensive and prolonged interest.”<sup>43</sup> The *Post* reacted by aggressively stating that “We are not in the habit of quitting our ground when once we have taken it.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, starting on September 16, the *Post* contained daily articles rehashing the entirety of the Hastings Scandal in minute detail. No new evidence was brought to light, however, and very few new opinions were produced.<sup>45</sup>

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### **Queen Adelaide**

The Tory papers had always carried reports and minutes from meetings and gatherings of various Tory groups. In the months after the Bedchamber Crisis, they began to point out that, while toasts to the Queen were “drunk with applause” at those meetings, those to the Queen

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43 *Standard*, July 11, 1839.

44 *Morning Post*, July 13, 1839.

45 *Morning Post*, September 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, October 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 1839.

Dowager were “drunk with very loud approbation.” Similarly, “the health of her Majesty was received with the ordinary manifestations of loyal respect and affection; that of her Majesty the Queen Dowager with a burst of enthusiasm which the spectators assure us it would be impossible to describe.”<sup>46</sup> Other examples were reported as occurring at both small and large gatherings.<sup>47</sup> Far from cautioning its readers over such obvious preferences for the Queen Dowager, the Tory papers seemed to delight in continually pointing out Victoria's supposed growing unpopularity, with one letter to the editor stating that a Royal outing resembled more a “funeral procession than a joyful pageant; and few were the cheers with which her Majesty was greeted.”<sup>48</sup>

These protestations of approval for Adelaide were justified by stating that the people were only responding to that “sense of the character and virtues of Queen Adelaide [which] never fails to inspire.”<sup>49</sup> Like Lady Flora, Adelaide was apparently able to inspire loyalty and devotion simply by dint of her steady character, as it was stated that “the Queen Dowager...possesses every quality which the British people are habituated to respect and love.”<sup>50</sup> It was argued that Adelaide had never tried to set herself up as a rival to Victoria but “enjoys [popularity] now, and in the noblest form, precisely by her generous rejection of the vanities, artifices, and intrigues of such a personal ambition.”<sup>51</sup> This was in contrast to the young Queen, who, in the Tory version of events, was rapidly losing the respect of her people. One paper actually felt the need to “complain of the cruel injustice to the reigning Queen, involved in the attempt to contrast her with one of the best of human beings.” Victoria could not hope to

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46 *Morning Post*, November 11, 1839.

47 *Morning Post*, August 15, 1839, *Morning Post*, August 30, 1839, *Standard*, July 22, 1839.

48 *Morning Post*, August 29, 1839.

49 *Morning Post*, October 16, 1839.

50 *Morning Post*, November 23, 1839, *Standard*, November 20, 1839.

51 *Times*, December 25, 1839.

measure up to the standards of her aunt; such comparisons were simply unfair. However, the Tory papers held out hope that the Queen might emulate the Queen Dowager, “from whose example she may learn whatever can adorn the character of a woman and a Sovereign.”<sup>52</sup> If Victoria would only change her ways, the presence of such a pillar of respectability would not seem to be such a threat to the Queen.<sup>53</sup>

Adelaide was also said to be more popular given memories of the composition of her Court when she was Queen. It had not been a haven for Whig ideologies and gossip. One lengthy diatribe stated that the people at the present court would never have been allowed at those of Charlotte or Adelaide. While the paper was careful to state that Victoria only allowed undesirable people at her court because she was kept in ignorance of their true character, the paper clearly longed for the halcyon days of propriety when mature, married (and Tory) women presided there.<sup>54</sup>

When some Whig papers began to point out the Tory slant in favour of Adelaide, the *Post* fired back that it was not Adelaide's fault that “she happens to be more popular than Ministers, and more warmly approved of by the public than any one of station, however eminent, who is known to favour the present ministers.”<sup>55</sup> The *Standard* echoed this reasoning, stating that “it has become the policy of hangers-on of the Court to attack the Queen Dowager, because she is popular, as if her popularity detracted from the respect due to the Queen Regnant.”<sup>56</sup> A reprint from the *Britannia* insisted that, though bad decisions that could have been avoided with “a small degree of prudence and forethought,” Victoria had become the least popular monarch in British

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<sup>52</sup> *Standard*, November 22, 1839.

<sup>53</sup> *Standard*, November 21, 1839.

<sup>54</sup> *Standard*, November 23, 1839.

<sup>55</sup> *Morning Post*, November 21, 1839.

<sup>56</sup> *Standard*, November 20, 1839.

history. It further stated that, out of revenge, the Whig papers had decided to attack Adelaide.<sup>57</sup>

The Tory papers also tried to put themselves in a good light by pointing out “how distasteful such attempts must be to a high-minded Sovereign...To injure, if that were possible, the reputation of Queen Adelaide, they wound the best feelings of Queen Victoria.”<sup>58</sup> Also, when censuring the Whig newspapers attacking Adelaide, the *Times* stated that no Tory person, association, or publication had ever done the same to Victoria. Even when criticizing her household, they were always respectful to the Queen's person.<sup>59</sup>

Further measures taken to stave off Whig anger over the elevation of Adelaide included the insistence that her popularity had nothing to do with politics. She was beloved for her “good sense” and her relation to the well-liked William IV, a king who just happened to have had Tory inclinations. It was emphasized that “no one can pretend that her Majesty the Queen Dowager mixes herself up with party politics” and that she did not actively campaign for the affections of the nation. If large numbers of Tories just happened to appear wherever she went, that must simply mean that the majority of the nation was, in fact, Tory. This enabled the papers both to subtly criticize the Queen's character and to continue to insist that Melbourne's mandate did not reflect the wishes of the people. They could also dismiss the protests of the Whig papers as sour grapes, sniffing that “the excellence of [Adelaide's] character obtains that public approbation which *they* cannot command, because their character is precisely the opposite.”<sup>60</sup>

Once again, Victoria was being punished in the Tory press because of her youth. It acknowledged that she was due a certain amount of respect because she was Queen, but it was made clear that, unlike Adelaide, she had not yet done anything to actually earn respect. She was

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57 *Standard*, November 25, 1839.

58 *Times*, December 25, 1839.

59 *Times*, December 26, 1839.

60 *Morning Post*, November 21, 1839.



also criticized for her “youthful” activities, which were seen to be frivolous and irresponsible. When the Queen Dowager was said to have slandered Victoria during her travels abroad, one of her supposed complaints concerned the amount of time that the Queen spent at the theatre and opera. While the *Standard* denied that Adelaide ever said a bad word about the Queen, it still took the time to state that “the topic of censure fabricated for Queen Adelaide is not, however, injudiciously chosen.” The paper went on to state that she would only have been saying what everyone was thinking when the Queen was “dragged from theatre to theatre, night after night...for the purpose, as it is now pretty well ascertained, of alienating her from her earlier and more quiet friends, and fastening the bedchamber ladies' chains upon her.”<sup>61</sup>

In the end, the *Times* scoffed at the efforts of “Ministerial” papers to disparage Adelaide’s reputation and noted that here had always existed between the Queen and her aunt “the most affectionate mutual regard.” The paper demolished the charges against Adelaide, and finally pointed to the fact that, as of the publication of the day's issue, the Queen Dowager was staying with Victoria at Windsor.<sup>62</sup>

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### The Whig Papers

#### **Lady Flora**

The Whig papers expressed regret over Lady Flora’s death and disgust that her death was used by some to further party politics, but they certainly did not lionize her. The *Examiner* published the Fitzgerald correspondence as a “vindication of Lady Flora, and as a vindication only, for [the paper] did not see any circumstances to warrant suspicions of malice purpose and

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61 *Standard*, November 21, 1839.

62 *Times*, December 12, 1839.

conspiracy.”<sup>63</sup> These sentiments were echoed by Lord Tavistock in a letter to the *Morning Chronicle* wherein, aside from denying that his wife had ever told tales about Lady Flora to the Queen, he insisted that further discussion of the matter “can now have no possible object but that of pandering to a morbid appetite for scandal.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the paper had no idea where publications such as the *Morning Post* were getting their ideas about the supposed plot against Lady Flora at the Palace. Instead, the Whig papers argued that Lady Flora was undoubtedly innocent, but her illness had resembled pregnancy and the ladies of the bedchamber thought that they acted correctly in bringing this to the attention of the Queen and the Duchess.

Despite their professed distaste for discussing either the Hastings Scandal or Lady Flora’s death, the Whig press still felt obliged to defend Queen Victoria. The papers seemed to decide that the best defence for Victoria was to build up her image as a dutiful young woman and daughter in an attempt to restore that sheen of traditional and respectable femininity which the Tory press was stripping away. When Lady Flora died, the Whig papers emphasized that “the attentions of her Majesty and her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent have been unremitting and kind in the extreme during the whole of Lady Flora’s distressing illness” and that “Buckingham Palace has been entirely closed...by the express orders of her Majesty.”<sup>65</sup> In this way, the papers tried to depict the Duchess and the Queen as having worked in tandem to try to ease Lady Flora’s suffering, and the Queen's attentions were actually credited to her mother's upbringing. The *Chronicle* used the event as a way to show that mother and daughter were, in fact, more united than ever, despite the Tory papers' insistence that the entire Hastings Scandal had been a means to drive a further wedge between them. It was important to portray the Queen

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63 *Examiner*, August 18, 1839.

64 *Morning Chronicle*, August 19, 1839.

65 *Examiner*, July 7, 1839.

as a dutiful daughter who had learned kindness and consideration from her mother. The *Morning Chronicle* asserted that “it will be felt that all the maternal care of such a Mother, through many widowed years, has been applied to form and cultivate the mind of the illustrious lady who now occupies the British throne...we, in common with all well-wishers of the Royal Family, do ardently desire to see [the Duchess] live long and happily—the dearest relative and most attached companion to her child and Sovereign.”<sup>66</sup> If the Tory press was trying to present Lady Flora as a better daughter-figure to the Duchess than her own daughter, then the Whig papers were doing their best to portray Victoria as an obedient and dutiful child. Victoria's youth was further presented as a reason why the Tory newspapers should leave her out of the discussion. Lady Flora's death should not be used to “avenge the disappointments of faction by malignant and cowardly innuendos against the personal character and conduct of a youthful Queen.”<sup>67</sup> By focusing on the Queen's youth, the Tory papers could be maligned for threatening the character of a person who was practically still a child.

The Whig papers sought to cultivate an image for Victoria every bit as unsullied as Lady Flora's, and they did this partially by depicting her as a victim of vicious Tory lies. The *Examiner* challenged the Tory claims that Lady Flora suffered because of the Queen's callousness by stating that Victoria was the one who was being attacked. While Lady Flora was depicted as a victim and a martyr in the Tory papers, in the Whig papers it was the Queen who was portrayed as the ultimate in injured femininity, as she was said to be “the only lady in her realms who can be so cruelly defamed and rancorously persecuted” and that she was “hunted by a pack of liars—it is made a sport to pursue her reputation, and to raise a yell of savage delight

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66 *Morning Chronicle*, August 12, 1839.

67 *Morning Chronicle*, July 11, 1839.

when the fangs of falsehood fix on her, and mangle her repute.”<sup>68</sup> This conjured up a vivid image of the Queen as the ultimate damsel in distress. Lady Flora may have suffered in silence and ended her days passively, but Victoria was depicted as being actively hunted down. However, it was also maintained that Victoria remained able to rise above petty party politics and that she “pursues a course full of beautiful contrast with the hypocrisy that strove in vain to subjugate her to its power. Long may she preserve the generous frankness of her moral being, uncontaminated by the influence of statesmen.”<sup>69</sup> It was not enough to simply state that the Tory papers were completely unjustified in their accusations of cruelty on the Queen’s behalf; the Whig papers also felt the need to emphasize Victoria’s soundness of character and the fact that she was “uncontaminated.” The *Chronicle* offered a picture of Victoria as contrite and willing to act in a most maidenly manner: “an example to her sex of unsullied virtue, while tears so fitly and eloquently proclaimed her kindness and her eagerness to atone for unintentional wrong.”<sup>70</sup>

It was continually pointed out that Lady Flora herself wrote about “Her Majesty’s generous desire to make every reparation for the temporary injustice done to her.”<sup>71</sup> The *Chronicle* stated that some of the women in the land may have been taken in by the *Post*’s insistence on the culpability of the Queen, but their fears could certainly be laid to rest by Lady Flora’s own words, which told of Victoria trying to make amends, and because Lady Flora was convinced of Victoria’s sincerity. There was apparent certainty to be found in Lady Flora’s words, though doubt could be suspected of the Queen. Though the Whig newspapers never once intimated that Victoria may have acted irresponsibly, they still acknowledged that people were more likely to believe the words of the sainted Lady Flora. The people were reassured that “if

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68 *Examiner*, July 7, 1839.

69 *Morning Chronicle*, July 11, 1839.

70 *Morning Chronicle*, August 12, 1839.

71 *Examiner*, August 18, 1839.

they have felt a somewhat feverish apprehension lest the Sovereign, in all the warmth and fervour of youth...should have been led by the mistakes of others to sanction hasty steps—they are now, by [Lady Flora's] letter, entirely relieved from all apprehensions of there being any ground for complaint against their Queen.”<sup>72</sup> Statements such as this suggested that it was natural for some to suspect that their young, ignorant Queen could be led astray, but the matchless character of Lady Flora could never be doubted.

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### **Queen Adelaide**

The Tory papers had undeniably been implying Adelaide's superior popularity in Tory circles; the Whig papers made the comparisons between Victoria and Adelaide overt. The Whig papers noticed the reports of Tory gatherings lauding Adelaide while merely acknowledging Victoria and concluded that “the distinction drawn between the claims of the ruling Sovereign and the Queen Dowager is sufficiently gross and indecent.”<sup>73</sup> The *Chronicle* noted with disgust that the Tories would take any opportunity to sow division, stating that “the invidious distinction which they evince in their mode of honouring the Queen and Queen Dowager is pitiful.”<sup>74</sup> The paper also inferred that the Tories “have determined to repay her Majesty's preference for their

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72 *Morning Chronicle*, August 12, 1839.

73 *Examiner*, October 13, 1839.

74 *Morning Chronicle*, November 11, 1839.

opponents [during the Bedchamber Crisis] by a personal hostility...appearing to neglect her Majesty, while they are deafening in their exhibition of loyalty to Queen Adelaide.”<sup>75</sup>

The Whig papers were positive that “the object was to impress on the country a belief that all the virtue, piety, and propriety of the Royal Family were centred in the persons of Queen Adelaide and her Chamberlains; and that the court of her Mistress and Sovereign was degraded by conduct of an entirely opposite character.”<sup>76</sup> Working on this assumption, the Whig press then attempted to portray Adelaide as the willing pawn of a Tory plot. It was said that the Dowager Queen's head had “been fairly turned by the homage paid to her” and that “she [was] anxious to make a parade of the influence she possesses with the Tories, and to endeavour to mortify her Sovereign...she is the Queen of the Tories, forsooth!”<sup>77</sup> Words were also put into Adelaide's mouth, as some papers insisted that “she [was] at no pains to conceal the uncharitable sentiments she entertains with regard to her royal mistress.” Several instances were detailed of Adelaide supposedly slandering Victoria and appearing to be bent on damaging her reputation all over England and Europe. It was observed that “she [was] evidently delighted with the opportunity which the Tories have afforded her, of acting a part which she thinks may annoy her Royal mistress.”<sup>78</sup> The *Chronicle* also tried to remind everyone that Adelaide had scarcely always been beloved; though the Tories may have praised her opposition to Reform in 1832, the average Englishman did not favour those who had stood in the way of extension of the franchise.

It was this violent reaction in the Whig press that prompted an equally vitriolic reaction in the Tory press and so made Victoria the unwitting rival of her aunt, with whom she had

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75 *Morning Chronicle*, November 18, 1839.

76 *Morning Chronicle*, December 19, 1839.

77 *Morning Chronicle*, November 20, 1839.

78 *Morning Chronicle*, November 21, 1839, with the same sentiments echoed in the *Morning Chronicle*, November 22, 1839.

always appeared to be on the best of terms. Victoria's own possible feelings about the Queen Dowager were not actually taken into consideration when the Whig papers undertook the task of speaking on her behalf. It is interesting that in this conflict, the Tories had merely tried to downplay Victoria's popular presence, while the Whig papers defending her were the ones that actually removed her perspective from her own story.

The *Examiner* pointed out that, “in spite of George the Fourth's Emancipation and William the Fourth's Reform, Tories preserved all the semblances of loyalty toward those monarchs, and recognized around them the divinity that doth hedge all kings; but around the maiden Queen they discern no such divinity...they perform no ceremonial of respect that does not imply as much of insult as of homage.”<sup>79</sup> While George IV and William IV were both associated with the political causes that had caused them to fall out of favour with the Tories, “maiden” was the only description given to Victoria in this assertion that she deserved loyalty. Her femininity was still being offered as her primary characteristic, not any political cause with which she herself may have become associated.

Victoria was also, once again, depicted as a forsaken child, with cruel men seeking to “wound” her, as demonstrated by the assertion that “one of the ways in which [the Tories] thought they could wound the Queen was, at dinners and other festivities, to drink the Queen Dowager with deafening and protracted applause, while they hardly responded to the toast of their Sovereign.”<sup>80</sup> The Tories were also said to be “prepared to cast off Queen Adelaide at a moment's notice, if the Sovereign would only put herself in their hands.”<sup>81</sup> Victoria was apparently seen as an object to be captured and held for the purposes of others. After having

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79 *Examiner*, October 13, 1839.

80 *Morning Chronicle*, November 20, 1839.

81 *Morning Chronicle*, November 21, 1839.

spent the entirety of the Bedchamber Crisis praising Victoria for acting on her own in response to Peel's supposed bullying it was still feared that she might fall into Tory hands if she allowed herself to be manipulated by their preference for Adelaide.

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From June to December of 1839, the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis continued to dominate Queen Victoria's representation in the press. Lady Flora Hastings' final illness and death almost necessarily made her a contrast to the Queen, while Victoria's rejection of a Tory ministry during the Bedchamber Crisis had seemingly made her some implacable enemies in the Tory community, which led to the adoption of Queen Adelaide as their solace. A slight shift took place in the willingness of certain parts of the press to grant the Queen agency, in that Tory writers were more than happy to give Victoria a share in the responsibility of the perceived persecution of Lady Flora Hastings. However, this only contributed to the underlying fears that had always been present: that if her independence was acknowledged, the Queen would prove herself to be less than an example of female virtue. A woman in power unchecked was a dangerous thing, and even the Queen's allies sought to emphasize her traditionally feminine qualities and her need for protection above all else.



## Conclusion

The Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis had a profound impact on the way that Queen Victoria was represented in the London newspapers in 1839. The Hastings Correspondence revealed the Tory writers' method of criticizing the Queen by blaming any suspected complicity in the torment of Lady Flora Hastings on the influence of Victoria's Whig ministers, particularly Lord Melbourne, as well as the Whig ladies of the bedchamber. The largely personal conflict resulting out of the publication of the Hastings Correspondence went on to inform the much more political issue of the Bedchamber Crisis. The Queen's decisions to deny Robert Peel's request to change her ladies of the bedchamber and to then recall Melbourne were again ascribed to the actions of the men around her. Tory writers claimed she had been coached by Melbourne, while Whig writers insisted that she had been bullied by Peel. The Hastings Correspondence was published in April and the Bedchamber Crisis took place in May, yet the effects of both events continued until the end of December. Lady Flora's final illness and death, along with certain Tory groups' turning to the Dowager Queen Adelaide after being rejected by Victoria, meant that the Queen's conduct as a woman and as a ruler was constantly being both condemned and defended by opposite sides of the press.

This constant coverage appeared to be a steady effort to reduce any evidence of the Queen actively exercising agency independent of male guidance. Such reluctance to present Victoria as a young woman acting on her own impulses and her own counsel occurred in both the Tory and Whig newspapers. The Tories wanted to express their vehement disagreement with the Queen's alignment with the Whigs, while still appearing loyal to the Crown; the Whigs wanted to support the Queen. However, despite being on opposite sides, both factions often used

the same tactic of comparing Victoria to an idealized version of young, aristocratic femininity. While Tory writers were concerned that the Queen was straying from the proper path assigned to her by societal expectations, Whig writers were determined to put her back in the box of quiet innocence and duty. Generally speaking, Tory writers expressed fear of her independence, while Whig writers sought to deny she had any. Both sides agreed that male guidance was necessary for the Queen's well-being, but disagreed upon the source from whence such guidance should come.

Similarly, and perhaps inevitably, both Tory and Whig papers agreed that the Queen's upcoming marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe Coburg, announced on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, could only benefit Victoria's personal life and political rule. Having apparently rejected the quiet, maidenly innocence supposedly embodied by Lady Flora Hastings, it was now hoped that marriage would inspire the Queen to act more like her aunt Adelaide in fulfilling the role of a wife.<sup>1</sup> In the *Tory Morning Post* Albert was referred to as an “august Prince” who would “arrive, we ardently hope, to impart new lustre and security to the British Crown and to constitute the domestic happiness and sustain the social virtues” of the Queen.<sup>2</sup> While still maintaining that it only wished for the happiness of the Queen, the paper also made it clear that it was the lack of proper male guidance that had led to the perceived loss of “lustre” to the monarchy. Some Tory writers also expressed the thankful conviction that Albert would “probably depose the dynasty of bedchamber women, and set her Majesty free to communicate with all her people.”<sup>3</sup> Albert was depicted as a figure of upright, moral masculinity, and if his bride-to-be had been too weak to see the danger she was in from her friends and ministers, then his presence at least “should have the effect of purifying the

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1 *Standard*, November 25, 1839.

2 *Morning Post*, August 22, 1839.

3 *Standard*, November 21, 1839.

court, by chasing from its precincts those voluptuaries and libertines who have been placed near the person of royalty.”<sup>4</sup>

The Whig newspapers also looked forward to the marriage, and not simply from support of the Queen. The *Examiner* agreed with the *Globe* in expressing the “hope that [Albert's] intimate relation to our beloved Sovereign [would]...confer on her the pure and refined enjoyments of domestic life, without which even the splendours of a Court, the power of a throne, and even the affectionate loyalty of an empire, leave an aching void in the heart.”<sup>5</sup> Even Victoria’s defenders thought that she needed to be married in order both to be truly happy and to provide a real example of respectability to her people. In spite of staunchly supporting her claims to her associates, her political rights, and her place in the people’s hearts, the Whig writers were still convinced that the Queen could not live a full life without a husband, losing her identity as an individual in that of the two of them as a couple.

Modern historians, too, point out the benefits of Victoria's marriage to Albert, in comparison with the problems that arose out of her time as a single ruler. John Plunkett discusses the much more public royal image that accompanied Albert and Victoria's engagement and wedding. Their new tendency to engage with the public was met with approbation and was certainly a change from the constant censure with which Victoria had so recently met. She could now be seen as putting her subjects first, which certainly seemed to justify the hopes of the *Morning Post*.<sup>6</sup> Yet there is danger in portraying the events of the early years of her reign as mere stepping stones toward union with Albert. Margaret Homans directly links the Hastings Scandal with Victoria's decision to marry, stating that the Queen had persecuted Lady Flora to

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4 *Standard*, November 25, 1839.

5 *Examiner*, November 24, 1839.

6 John Plunkett, “Civic Publicness: The Creation of Queen Victoria's Royal Role 1837-1861,” in *Encounters in the Victorian Press*, eds. Julie Codell and Laurel Brake (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004) 13.

spite the Duchess of Kent's authority, but after realizing that she could never be free of her mother's presence as a chaperone until she married, she decided to marry Albert. Homans concludes that Victoria asserted her authority in a small way, only to lose it in a much larger way when she melded her identity with Albert's.<sup>7</sup> Treating the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis as though they naturally led to Victoria's marriage with Albert ignores the significance and value that the events had in themselves with regard to the Queen's representation in the media.

Of equal disservice are discussions of the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis that only focus on whether Victoria acted correctly. There exists ample evidence to supply several arguments regarding the Queen's motives and complicity in the persecution of Lady Flora, as well as her refusal to change her ladies of the bedchamber. Answering the question of whether Victoria was right or wrong, however, is ultimately unsatisfying. There is as much, or more, value to be gleaned in analyzing how her persona and actions were represented and judged by her contemporaries than in passing our own judgements on her largely unknowable personal motivations. Evaluating whether Victoria acted harshly concerning Lady Flora or whether she acted out of personal affection to Melbourne during the Bedchamber Crisis only reinforces the behaviour of the newspapers in 1839, which held the Queen to certain expectations because she represented an unknown entity in their world—an independent feminine force in a position of power. It is far more beneficial to turn the conversation around on those who sought to downplay Victoria's agency in her own life. Realizing the extent to which the press tried to suppress reports of the Queen's agency, and asking why the Tory and Whig newspapers did so, reveals a strong undercurrent of fear of uncontrolled female power which contributed to the already uncertain climate surrounding the role of the monarchy in a time of reform.

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<sup>7</sup> Homans, 15-16.

The attempt in this work to shed some light on media representation of Queen Victoria regarding the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis could benefit from further study and expansion. This work has focused only on newspapers based in London, but it would be interesting to take into consideration newspapers located outside of the capital. Colonial newspapers could also be examined in order to evaluate concerns about the Queen's moral and political behaviour across the Empire. There might also be potential differences in viewpoint across class. Several of the newspapers examined here claim to speak for the average British citizen, but a more in-depth look at the average British worker's notice of the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis might be able to prove or disprove the accuracy of such statements. The effectiveness of the papers' coverage of the Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis on those actively involved would also be of interest. Was Victoria herself aware of the flurry of media attention surrounding her actions in these early years? These are just a few suggestions for further study.

The images of Queen Victoria most familiar to the public are those of the devoted wife, the grieving widow, and finally the enduring Empress; far less well-known is the image of the Queen during the first couple of years of her reign. This was a time when Victoria may have been exercising her new found agency, only for some writers to attempt to prevent any positive connotations being attached to such power. The Hastings Scandal and the Bedchamber Crisis are inseparable parts of a phase of Queen Victoria's life, in the growth of the influence of newsprint, and in the political climate of England, which deserve further exploration.

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