Reform, Radicalism, and Royalty: Public Image and Political Influence of Princess Charlotte and Queen Adelaide

Eileen Robin Hintz

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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REFORM, RADICALISM, AND ROYALTY:

Public Image and Political Influence
of Princess Charlotte and Queen Adelaide

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

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Eileen Hintz
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Approved by the Committee, December 2003

Eileen Hintz

James McCord

Chandos Brown

Gilbert McArthur
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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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The political influence of females, especially those associated with the court, is a topic that deserves more attention than it has previously received. During the early nineteenth century, the British monarchy was a highly visible and influential institution. While the political role of Queen Caroline has received considerable attention, the political influence of others associated with the court deserves some attention. Two women from the royal family, Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales (1796-1817) and Queen Adelaide, consort to King William IV (1792-1849), played important roles in contemporary British politics. Their significance was two-fold. First, they received attention for the influence which they actually possessed. Secondly, and often more important, they received attention from the press and political groups for influence which they were perceived to possess. Charlotte and Adelaide became useful symbols for outsiders who manipulated the women’s image in order to advance their own agendas.

Princess Charlotte, daughter of the Prince Regent (later King George IV), was heir to the throne, but she died in childbirth in November 1817 at the age of twenty-one. Public mourning, as reported in various newspapers, attempted to create a feeling of national unity which did not necessarily exist. She emerged as a symbol of family values and religious morality. The press attempted to make her an image of the stability needed in the tumultuous years after the Napoleonic Wars. However, Radical writers used her as a symbol with which to criticize the status quo. Queen Adelaide was received less favorably, especially during the Parliamentary Reform Bill crisis of 1831-1832. Suspicious of her as a foreigner, the press portrayed her as a despotic meddler, intent on using her backstairs’ influence to defeat the popular Reform Bill. Many people feared that she manipulated her husband, so that he would withdraw his crucial support for the Bill. Both women were attacked by political Radicals, who intended to advance their cause by decrying the privileges of the elite.

In general, people embraced Charlotte as a symbol of goodness and morality while rejecting Adelaide as the personification of self-interest and corruption. These characterizations were exhibited in public demonstrations, and by political commentators in the press. The Radical political movement, however, deviated from traditional upper- and middle-class opinion, and represented both women as symbols of oppression. Given their importance, it is essential to understand how royal women’s public images were created and manipulated to serve the political agenda of others. The public images of Charlotte and Adelaide were not accurate representations of their lives, but were useful constructions with significant symbolic value.
REFORM, RADICALISM, AND ROYALTY:

Public Image and Political Influence of Princess Charlotte and Queen Adelaide
INTRODUCTION

The era between the turbulent Napoleonic wars and the more placid Victorian Age was a time of transition for Britain. New social classes were emerging; literacy was spreading; and ideas about government were evolving. The end of the wars left people searching for moral and political direction. Cultural and political values were changing. These new values can be revealed by examining the political and press responses to two very different female members of the royal family, namely Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales (1796-1817) and Queen Adelaide, consort to William IV (1792-1849). In each case, the perception of the woman was more revealing about contemporary social concerns than were her private beliefs or behavior. Both women became public symbols; they served as a platform onto which others projected their fears, convictions, and agendas. Authors and activists alternatively used each woman as examples to make cases about stability and unrest, inclusion and exclusion. Neither Charlotte nor Adelaide actively shaped her own image. Each became a political and cultural pawn subject to manipulation by outsiders, such as political activists, moralizers, or authors of newspaper articles. These outsiders constructed each woman’s image in order to advance their own agendas.

Princess Charlotte and Queen Adelaide are important pre-Victorian royal women for a number of reasons. As daughter of the Prince Regent, Charlotte was heir to the crown; Adelaide was married to King William IV. Therefore, because of their
proximity to the throne, reactions to their behavior revealed a great deal about the perception of royalty. At this time, the power of the monarchy was slowly giving way to the power of Parliament, but the monarch still retained a politically viable position through his ability to dispense patronage, appoint Bishops, dismiss ministries, and, as became so important in William IV's case, create peers. Neither Charlotte nor Adelaide has received significant historical study, in contrast to their male counterparts and other contemporary females, such as Charlotte's mother, Caroline of Brunswick. Queen Caroline's colorful and often scandalous private life have made her the subject of several studies. Yet little research has been carried out on the lives of Princess Charlotte or Queen Adelaide, and the events of their lives remain in relative obscurity.

A wide variety of sources, such as newspapers, memoirs, letters, Parliamentary debates, and sermons demonstrate how royal images were manipulated by members of the press and by political activists in order to further their own agendas. After Charlotte's death in 1817, there was an intense interest in the Princess. Her image suddenly became idealized; many Britons felt as if they had lost a personal friend, a phenomenon seen in modern times with the loss of Princess Diana, another Princess of Wales. Charlotte was transformed into a model of grace, charity, and morality to which Britons, male and female, could hope to aspire. Mourning Charlotte became an activity which united diverse Britons in a single national activity. Yet, while Royalists

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promoted the unifying qualities of Charlotte, Radicals attempted to undermine the public reverence for her in order to advance their own political agenda. Because most of this contradictory treatment of the deceased Princess occurred after her tragic death, she neither had the chance to destroy her new-found saintliness nor to defend herself against her detractors. People chose to eulogize or demonize the Princess for a variety of reasons, and their actions reveal much about the British character and the political atmosphere of the era.

A little over a dozen years after Charlotte’s death, Adelaide’s treatment took on a darker tone than had that of Charlotte’s. Unlike the Princess, Adelaide was depicted in a largely negative light. While Adelaide’s troubles occurred entirely during her lifetime, she, like Charlotte, was voiceless to defend herself, because she either lacked the ability, interest, or power to do so. Because she was silent, Adelaide’s image was entirely concocted by outsiders and officials. The criticism Adelaide received during the Reform crisis of 1831-1832 demonstrated the dramatic changes in politics. Adelaide was condemned in the press as part of a staid and corrupt old order which needed to be modified to suit the changing face of British society. The sheer scope of her unpopularity indicated how intense the debate over Reform had become. The statements made about Adelaide revealed the expectations that Britons held for their government and their intense respect for Parliamentary processes.

The portrayal of Charlotte and Adelaide symbolized contemporary concerns and the attention that they received served as indicators of public opinion. The images of both women were manipulated for the benefit of others. Neither woman played a significant part in crafting her own image; however, the image that was created
revealed a great deal about her society. By understanding how and why that image developed, we can better understand the political and cultural climate of early nineteenth-century Britain.
CHAPTER I

THE DEATH OF PRINCESS CHARLOTTE, NOVEMBER 1817

Despite his amazing progeny, by 1817 George III had only one legitimate grandchild to carry on the Hanoverian dynasty. By November of that year, both his granddaughter and her child, the heir for whom all had been waiting, were dead. During her short lifetime, Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales, was the well-liked heir to the throne. Her family life had not been as happy as it appeared, in part because she received little attention from either her careless father or her distant mother. The public had seized upon this mistreatment, and defended Charlotte by attacking her father, the unpopular Prince Regent. Charlotte’s unexpected death in November 1817 precipitated an outpouring of public curiosity and grief. Sermons, poems, prints, and newspaper articles all discussed her death. She moved from being a popular and entertaining member of the royal family to being a public figure onto whom the nation projected its fears, concerns, and interests.

The materials produced in response to Charlotte’s death raised a wide range of issues, ranging from morality and family life to commercialism and political reform. While many observers saw her death as engendering a spirit of national unity, such sympathy was not completely pervasive. The Radical press forcefully denounced the government and those who mourned the Princess. Radical journalists used the episode to illustrate the hypocrisy of the government itself. Whether they shared in the spirit
of national mourning or not, writers and speakers from a variety of backgrounds used
Charlotte's death as a forum to voice their opinions on the conditions of British
society.

In previous studies, Charlotte has emerged either as a tragic or a comical
figure. Some authors, such as Joanna Richardson, Arthur Aspinall, and Stephen
Behrendt, have portrayed Charlotte to some extent as an impetuous, silly, and poorly-
educated girl. Other scholars, like Alison Plowden, have been more sympathetic in
their approach to Charlotte's life. Plowden balanced Charlotte's shortcomings with
an examination of the troubles of her childhood. Much of the historiographical
material about Charlotte discussed the way that reaction to her life reflected gender
roles and religious ideas. In his study of Charlotte's death, Stephen Behrendt argued
that the public image of the Princess as a dutiful British daughter and wife had little
basis in reality, as she was outspoken and truculent, had an unconventional childhood,
and did not have very long to create a family of her own. Behrendt examined literary
materials produced at the time of Charlotte's death and by using literary, rhetorical and
artistic conventions, discussed poems, songs, sermons, and artwork made in
remembrance of her. Berhendt and others such as Esther Schor have concluded that
her death was a unifying event for the nation. However, a closer examination reveals

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1 Joanna Richardson, "The Princess Charlotte," History Today 22 (1972): 87-93; Letters of Princess
Charlotte, ed. A. Aspinall (London: Home and Van Thal, 1949); Stephen C. Behrendt, Royal
Mourning and Regency Culture: Elegies and Memorials of Princess Charlotte (New York: St.
Martin's Press, 1997).
2 Alison Plowden, Caroline and Charlotte: The Regent's Wife and Daughter 1795-1821 (London:
Sidgwick and Jackson, 1989).
3 Esther Schor, Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning From the Enlightenment to
that the nation did not unquestionably support the monarchy.

Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales was born to Caroline of Brunswick and the future King George IV on January 7, 1796. By all accounts, her mother and father had a difficult and unhappy marriage. Both parents were strong-willed and extravagant characters whose actions often drew negative attention. Charlotte grew up under the care of nannies and servants, and interacted little with either of her parents. Although he was reportedly devastated when she died, her father’s treatment of her alternated between severity and neglect. She was often excluded from the activities of the royal court. Numerous observers commented upon the harshness of her upbringing. People identified with her because they saw her troubles reflecting their own suffering.

Charlotte’s limited social circle meant that she had difficulty in finding a suitable husband. In 1814, she was briefly engaged to Prince William of Orange -- an arrangement that was widely viewed as a plot by her father to relieve him of financial obligations to her. She broke off the engagement, saying that she did not want to leave Britain and that she wanted to be close to her troubled mother. This in turn made Charlotte popular with the people. Within two years, Charlotte was again engaged, this time to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg Saalfeld. In the year and a half following their marriage in May 1816, the couple lived a peaceful domestic life. Their devotion to Britain, to the people, and to each other made them popular. As Charlotte prepared to give birth to her first child late in 1817, the royal couple seemed like the

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2 Behrendt, Royal Mourning and Regency Culture, 38.
3 Ibid., 16-18.
ideal British family. Unfortunately, late on the night of November 6, Charlotte produced a stillborn son, dying herself from complications early the next morning.

Charlotte’s unique position meant that the implications of her death went well beyond the immediate family. The heir to the throne was dead and this clearly elicited alarm in the political sphere. The question of succession led The Times to print a complete chart of possible heirs three days after Charlotte’s death. Sermons and letters published in The Times indicated that Britons were concerned about the possibility of a foreigner from King George’s extended German family ruling the nation. Charlotte’s status as heir to the throne naturally earned her death enormous attention. While she had lived a quiet and secluded life, her generous personality had made her seem like a friend of the people. Once she died, the public projected many of their concerns and fears onto her memory.

With Charlotte’s death, the country went into a deep and immediate mourning. Shops and theaters were closed and a solemn feeling pervaded the public. Throughout the remainder of the year the popular, and politically neutral, Times carried indications of the national grief, from consolation letters to her husband Prince Leopold to the minute details of Charlotte’s embalming and funeral. Mourning the Princess was a national activity. Showing distress was a way to indicate patriotism and an allegiance to British values. As it would seem from reading contemporary newspaper articles, everyone, especially those who were traditionally considered outsiders, wanted to show his or her concern. For several weeks, The Times carried excerpts from other

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7 The Times. 10 November 1817.
8 Behrendt, Royal Mourning and Regency Culture, 79.
newspapers describing the "reception of the news" in various regions. There was
great interest in engaging in public mourning. Public displays meant that one could
verify that everyone else had seen his or her mourning and could ensure that others
were maintaining the same standards of conduct. These opinions, as reported in the
press, were based upon the public's understanding of the events of Charlotte's short
life.

Although she only lived twenty-one years, Charlotte had time and interest
enough to create her own opinions. The Princess was an active and outspoken young
woman, but she was also a political pawn during her lifetime, much as she would be
after her death. Although for most of her life the Princess was excluded from courtly
or political activities, she was headstrong and curious and thus demonstrated an
interest in the world around her. Living so close to the throne, Charlotte was
surrounded by politicians, courtiers, and other men involved in government. In a letter
to her friend Mercer Elphinstone, she wrote that "Lately I have seen a good deal of
ministerial people & Ministers, there is nothing else invited here."9 While observing
these politicians, Charlotte formed her own opinions about the government and those
who should run it. In an 1813 letter to her Whig advisor, Henry Brougham, she wrote
"Those who know well cannot hesitate in saying what side of politics I am."10

However, Charlotte's emerging Whig political views were in opposition to those of
her father, who had abandoned his previous connection with the Whigs to support the
Tories. She wrote favorably about Whig politicians such as Lord Grey, Brougham,

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9 Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales to Mercer Elphinstone, October 26, 1812, Letters of Princess
Charlotte, 32.
10 Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales to Henry Brougham, February 20, 1813, Ibid., 57.
and Samuel Whitbread, while she criticized Tories such as Lord Liverpool and Lord Wellesley. Charlotte also had a natural tenderness towards the poor. While the welfare of the masses was not on the Whig agenda at this time, it was a concern shared by Brougham. Perhaps her own unhappy childhood caused her to sympathize with the disadvantaged. Or perhaps more concretely, she was heavily influenced by her advisors, Brougham and Whitbread.

Brougham had been advising Charlotte’s mother, the beleaguered Caroline of Brunswick, since 1809. In his memoirs, Brougham described his commitment to Charlotte and her mother in selfless terms when he said:

But I really felt, as did Whitbread, that the conduct of the Prince had been such from the beginning towards his wife, and his later treatment of both mother and daughter so outrageous, as it made it a duty to take their part; whilst his conduct towards the Whig party made this proceeding on our part quite justifiable, and not at all inconsistent with our party connections.

Thus Brougham took the public stance that he was committed to helping two mistreated and unfortunate women, a cause that just happened to coincide with the beliefs of his political party. However, other observers saw Brougham’s actions as motivated by self-interest and the desire for power. As heir to the throne, Charlotte was a valuable political commodity. Her eventual position as Queen meant that she would hold great power and privilege. Thus, whoever controlled her would control that power. The contemporary Whig politician, Thomas Creevy, characterized Brougham’s attachment to the Princess and her mother as a transparent attempt to

increase the influence of both himself and the Whig Party. This manipulation can be best demonstrated by Brougham’s involvement in Charlotte’s broken engagement to the Prince of Orange in 1814.

If Charlotte had married the Prince, she would have been expected to leave England to join her husband in Holland. With her daughter out of the country, Caroline would have had no reason to stay in England, a place which she disliked and where many in the Court disliked her. Thus she would have returned to her family home in Brunswick. With two major royal figures out of the country, the Whig party risked losing valuable sources of influence. If Caroline left Britain, the Prince Regent likely would have divorced her and remarried. A new wife would have meant a new family, and possibly a son who would supplant Charlotte as heir to the throne. This development would be the final blow to Brougham’s investment in Charlotte’s future potential. Historians and contemporaries agreed that it was Brougham’s influence which persuaded Charlotte to break off the engagement on June 21, 1814. While keeping his personal motives secret, Brougham played upon the Princess’s emotions by convincing her of the predicament in which the nuptials would place her mother. In what Creevy called “one of the most brilliant movements in his [Brougham’s] campaign,” Brougham fostered Charlotte’s natural reluctance to leave the country and her unwillingness to leave her mother during a difficult time, thus securing his party’s and his own personal ties to the Crown. However, Charlotte’s death made any such

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15 Ibid., 110.
plans irrelevant. Brougham went on to achieve fame for his defense of Queen Caroline and political success in the Reform crisis fifteen years later. The Princess and her image would soon be manipulated by others.

Charlotte’s mother also suffered at the hands of those outsiders who manipulated her image to advance their own agenda. Caroline of Brunswick’s marriage to the Prince of Wales was unhappy and tumultuous. He publicly questioned her morals, her ability to raise their daughter, and her right to be crowned as his Queen. When George ascended to the throne as George IV in 1820 and attempted to divorce her, the public was outraged and Caroline received support from many disparate sectors of society. The working class saw her as a victim of aristocratic vengeance and oppression; the middle class felt she represented family values; women viewed her as a strong but wronged representative of their sex; and Radicals realized that her case provided an opportunity to challenge the status quo.¹⁶ Like her daughter, Caroline became a symbol of issues occupying the British mind at the time.

The public judged both Charlotte and Caroline on how well they adhered to standards expected for women at the time. Caroline both transgressed and upheld those standards. She was involved in several scandals which portrayed her as a lusty, loud, and unsophisticated woman. However, many working class women could relate to her “earthy hedonism,” and thus even by deviating from standards set for women at the time, she still found female supporters.¹⁷ In the divorce trial, Caroline found still more followers among those who saw her as the wronged wife. She could elicit

¹⁷ Ibid., 51, 55, 58.
support from middle-class men and women who respected the family and the
institution of marriage. Charlotte also symbolized purity and family loyalty, but
without the bawdiness of her mother. Sermonizers sanctified Charlotte as a vision of
Christian goodness and moral decency. Though in her life she was an ordinary woman
with her own faults, in death, Charlotte became the symbol of female wholesomeness
to which all women should hope to aspire.

Charlotte’s post-mortem image was in large part constructed by the press.
When Charlotte’s death was announced, the publishers of The Times stressed the way
that her passing unified the nation. Her death was used almost as a propaganda piece
to demonstrate the existence of a common national identity. A Leeds newspaper, for
example, urged its readers to come together: “The death of the Princess Charlotte has
filled the whole British empire with grief, dismay, and mourning. It has effected what
few events could produce -- unanimity of feeling.” Formulaic appeals to patriotism
appeared in numerous instances. Poets, both amateur and professional, eulogized the
Princess. A typical piece revealing the reaction of many citizens was a poem by John
MAYNE, entitled “All the People Mourning: A Lament for the Death of Her Royal
Highness the Princess Charlotte Augusta.” His dramatic account of the response to
her death indicated the widespread depth and sincerity with which many Britons
regarded Charlotte’s misfortune. He wrote:

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18 “Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820,” 49, 60.
19 Leeds, 15 November 1817. Quoted in The Times, 18 November 1817.
What dire event o’erwhelms the land,
Blithe looks to sadness turning -
The great, the noble, and the grand,
And all the people, mourning?

Oh! we have lost a peerless Gem!
We mourn, in tribulation,
The HEIRESS to the Diadem!
The Darling of the Nation!²⁰

Although “All the People Mourning” may not have been fine poetry, it was representative of many of the amateur pieces produced in the aftermath of Charlotte’s death. It expressed the feeling that the entire nation was united in mourning a single individual. Previous historians, like Behrendt and Schor, have concentrated on this apparent unanimity which expressed common values. Yet Charlotte’s legacy was manipulated, both by groups that mourned her, and by those groups who rejected her and the common public sentiment. These developments can be traced in the press.

Newspapers were a growing source of information for the British public. By 1820, two-thirds of British working men were literate. Numbers would be higher for the upper ranks.²¹ During the eighteenth century, journalism had not been a highly respected occupation. Papers openly accepted money from politicians in order to write articles supportive of specific issues or candidates.²² However, by the time of Charlotte’s death in 1817, newspapers were moving away from being paid mouthpieces for politicians to being sources of legitimate independent reporting.

Increased revenue from advertisers was an important reason for this change.\textsuperscript{23}

Important national events, such as Charlotte's death and the later divorce trial of her mother, reached a wide audience, and since many people read the same papers, many people could be persuaded to believe in a single interpretation of such events. Yet, there were also many different papers representing different political viewpoints and thus guaranteeing that there would be differences of opinion among Britons.

*The Times* chose to write about different social and religious groups who responded to the event in the same way. For example, coverage was given to the mourning practices of Dissenters, Jews, and Catholics. While there were internal divisions in the way an individual group responded to Charlotte's death, *The Times* took a handful of examples to make a case that reactions were the same, even across often bitter religious divides. *The Times* included responses from Scotland and Ireland. The editors of *The Times* went to great lengths to show that mourning for Charlotte's was not limited to any particular region or group of people; it was a national event. However, public attention went further than simply a common interest in a single individual. Nearly all of the responses to the editor seemed to react in the same way. This uniform reaction allowed the editors to use Charlotte's death to highlight national identity. Not only did Britons share geographical space or experiences, they were said to think and feel the same way about common events. In addition, the newspaper stressed the uniquely British spirit that Charlotte was said to possess. One writer went as far as to compare her to the great historical icon

\textsuperscript{23} *A History of The Times: The Thunderer in the Making 1785-1841*, V.1. 214.
Elizabeth I.\textsuperscript{24} By creating a national aura around her life, authors used the image of Charlotte to bring Britons together in a spirit of national single-mindedness, an attitude which did not necessarily exist in reality, especially in the tense post-war years.

One area where leaders attempted to create consensus was religion. Jews, Dissenters, and Catholics all held religious services to commemorate Princess Charlotte's death. Memorial services were held in several synagogues.\textsuperscript{25} Dissenters wrote letters to the times to declare their grief publicly. A “Disappointed Roman Catholic” wrote to \textit{The Times} on November 18 to express his dismay that, although he knew the clergy was loyal, they were not providing the desired commemorative masses for the Princess.\textsuperscript{26} By the next day, the letter was answered in two responses which stressed the ignorance of the author. Prayers for the Princess, they argued, were incorporated into regular masses as well as in a special mass said on her behalf.\textsuperscript{27} While there is no doubt that Britons of every faith were moved by the death of Princess Charlotte, each of these public declarations stressed their loyalty. Her death became a grounds for them to declare their adherence to the norms of British custom. Whether Jewish, Non-Conformist, or Catholic, these individuals were also British. \textit{The Times}’ decision to print these selected letters and articles demonstrated its willingness to aid in the construction of a national culture. \textit{The Times} hoped to demonstrate that religious differences could be overcome by a unifying devotion to the British state.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Bristol Observer}, 12 November 1817; quoted in \textit{The Times} 15 November 1817.  
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{The Times}, 21 November 1817.  
\textsuperscript{26} Letter from “A Disappointed Roman Catholic,” Ibid., 18 November 1817.  
\textsuperscript{27} “Response to A Disappointed Roman Catholic,” Ibid., 19 November 1817.
People from Scotland and Ireland, two perpetually divisive areas in British history, were also quick to use the opportunity to declare their loyalty to the crown. Traditionally, Scotland had not formally mourned British royalty. However, some Scots were conforming to the general mourning by closing shops and attending church services. The *Edinburgh Star* called the events “unlike the usual mourning for Princes.” In Ireland there was a division between those who grieved for the Princess and those who used her death to denounce England. *The Times* chose to focus on those who joined in the mourning. It provided an excerpt from the *Dublin Evening Post* stating:

Yet we are ashamed of our country to confess it -- the death of this Princess has been seized upon for the basest views of a low faction. Her ashes have been insulted by identifying her principles and feelings with the cursed and debasing views of that Moloch, the Orange ascendancy. We dare not stain our pages by repeating the vile imputations that have been heaped upon her memory....there are men in the city of Dublin so cruel, so hardened, so destitute of all honest feeling, as well as of the slenderest pretensions to moral taste, who have not hesitated, as far as in them lay to identify the memory of this exemplary Princess with the unholy dogmas with disgrace the Eleusynian mysteries of Orangeism.

While indicating that the always troublesome Ireland was again a source of conflict, *The Times* chose to print an author condemning the strife and defending the loyalty of the majority of the Irish people. The Irish editor described the interest in Charlotte’s death and attempted to attribute the dissenting behavior to an irksome sector.

While feelings were assumed to be spontaneous and sincere, there were certain expectations about what constituted a proper response. Citizens were to grieve; shops

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29 *Edinburgh Star*, 11 November 1817; quoted in *The Times*, 15 November 1817.
30 *Dublin Evening Post*, 13 November 1817; quoted in *The Times*, 18 November 1817.
were to close; and sermons were to be delivered. To do any less would not only show
disrespect for the dead, but would flout national values. Two particular cases reveal
the what happened to those who failed to comply to perceived mourning standards.
First, on November 18, it was announced that Oxford would not “mark the funeral day
with any solemnities,” because there was no precedent to do so. This statement
allowed the editor of The Times to comment upon the sensational nature of the
reactions to Charlotte’s death and upon the insolence of the University.31 Two days
later a member of the University responded, claiming that the editor was mistaken and
that the University was indeed grieving and was thus loyal to the Crown. He assured
the editor that “I know well their ardent loyalty and affection for our venerable
Sovereign and his family.”32 This response stressed an important point. To fail to
show some public sign of mourning was to move beyond simple callousness into
disloyalty. This was a serious charge in the tumultuous post war-years.

Events in the city of Norwich also demonstrated the dangers of disloyalty.
Norwich was the main manufacturing center for mourning cloth.33 When a general
mourning was announced, the upper ranks were expected to adhere to a strictly
regulated dress code. By the early nineteenth century, this trend had been adopted by
the emerging middle class as well.34 Therefore, during periods of mourning, demand
for Norwich cloth expanded greatly. The editor of a Norwich paper noted the stress
which the demand put upon the inhabitants of the city. They were too busy with their

31 The Times, 18 November 1817.
32 “Letter to the Editor,” Ibid., 20 November 1817.
Century Studies 15, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 309.
34 Ibid., 292.
trade to mourn properly. He condemned their commercial activities at such a time.
By November 13, he noted that “the price [of mourning cloth] has advanced in consequence very considerably....alas! the money-getting spirit of the community blunted those feelings which ought to have been excited in all at our irreparable loss.” 35 The editor of The Times praised the author for having “the grace to be ashamed of his townsmen.” 36 While the authors deplored the greed they detected, they also condemned the citizenry's lack of participation in mourning customs. The textile workers of Norwich were caught in a paradox: whether to stick to their trade during a period of enormous commercial demand, or to abandon their work to engage in mourning. The suggestion of the editors was that the people of Norwich were more interested in making money than in taking part in the national grief. While the editors saw this as unacceptable and disgraceful, one could make the case (as would the Radicals William Cobbett and Thomas Wooler) that the textile workers had no reason to abandon their regular routine for a death in a distant family with whom they had no connection. In a town whose commercial success depended on the mourning trade, it was necessary for the employee and employer to capitalize on periods of mourning, especially during the current national demand. However, reaction to Charlotte’s death was being used by the press as a measuring stick by which to gauge national loyalty. Norwich workers were expected to abandon an opportunity for profit and employment to engage in national grief.

The people of Norwich realized the danger that such accusations posed. Soon

35 Norwich Journal, 11 November 1817; quoted in The Times, 13 November 1817.
36 The Times, 13 November 1817.
The Times received several responses from residents of Norwich to the initial accusations. Each declared his grief and claimed that the sentiment was shared by the entire town. The editor of The Times was forced to make amends, claiming that he was merely agreeing with the editor of the Norwich Journal and apologized on two separate occasions. On November 26 he printed a retraction. Clearly, his criticism insulted people in Norwich. Many had taken offence at the suggestion that they were not moved by the Princess’s death. They wanted to establish that they too shared in the national feeling and to stress their loyalty. The editor of The Times had been too quick to condemn them, yet in doing so he had established a clear example of unacceptable behavior by which all other towns could be judged.

In the days following Charlotte’s death, a number of congregations listened to sermons which memorialized her. These sermons, many published shortly thereafter, emphasized her goodness and helped to create an image of her as an admirable and virtuous symbol of British and Christian values. Charlotte’s death was used as a vehicle by which clergymen preached their religious message. In these sermons, she was both elevated above, and counted among, the common people. She was depicted as a loving wife, daughter, and mother-to-be. While these sermons tended to idealize her, they also stressed her human qualities, hoping to make her death an example for all listeners. The moral of Charlotte’s life was separated from the reality of her person. Both the sermons by two prominent pastors, Thomas Chalmers and Robert Hall,

37 The Times, 26 November 1817. and 18 November 1817.
38 Ibid., 26 November 1817.
stressed that the Princess's privileged status could not save her from death. Hall used the circumstances to warn against envy of those who led lives of material success.

Charlotte, preachers argued, was a human being, just like the members of the congregation. God had taken her as an example. Hall ended his sermon by reasoning:

Should her lamented and untimely end, be the means of giving that religious impulse to the public mind, which shall turn us to righteousness, the benefits she will have conferred upon her country, in both worlds, will more than equal the glories of the most prosperous and extended reign.

The sermon writers elevated Charlotte's moral qualities while reducing the prestige of the elite. The image of death as the great leveler was invoked in order to emphasize the inescapability of God's power, but it also stressed the similarities among people of different classes and backgrounds.

The tragedy of Charlotte's death and the mourning period which accompanied it provided opportunities for commercialism, at least in some specialized sectors of the economy. In a study of royal funerals over one hundred and fifty years, Paul S. Fritz demonstrated how the period immediately following royal deaths could be financially disastrous for the theaters, which were forced to close, and for the silk and ribbon trades, as austere mourning clothes replaced more ornate styles. However, crafty entrepreneurs could benefit from the national grief. As has already been indicated, there was an immediate demand for black mourning clothes (to the exclusion of all

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39 Robert Hall, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales, Preached at Harvey Lane, Leicester, November 16, 1817* (Greenfield: Clark and Hunt, 1817), 10-13, and Thomas Chalmers, *A sermon, delivered in the Tron Church, Glasgow, on Wednesday, November 19, 1817, the day of the funeral of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales* (New York: Kirk and Mercein, 1818), 6.

40 Hall, 13.

41 Ibid., 48.

42 Fritz, "The Trade in Death," 310.
other garments). The day after Charlotte’s death was announced, nine advertisements for mourning clothes appeared on the first page of *The Times*. Other advertisers took additional advantage of the need, including those selling products designed to restore old or soiled black clothing. One advertisement read “In consequence of the lamented Death of Her Royal Highness The Princess Charlotte, a general mourning will take place. Perhaps a more valuable discovery in economy never was offered to the Public than DR. WINN’S True Anticardimor Paris Black Reviver.” Authors and artists also sought to capitalize on Charlotte’s death. There were a number of offers for portraits and writings about her. One book even promised to reveal “The Real Cause of the Princess Charlotte’s Death.” The editor of *The Times* called the desire of numerous artists wishing to make death masks of the Princess “professional avarice.” Their commercial spirit had resulted from an “ignorance of the common rules of decency and propriety.” The appearance of such opportunists indicates that sincere mourning was not adopted by everyone in the country and that some individuals were willing to take advantage of their fellow citizens’ genuine grief.

Despite the national attention on Princess Charlotte’s death, sympathy for her was not total. Opinion was heavily shaped by political affiliation. Radical leaders, such as Cobbett and Wooler, denounced the Princess and those who engaged in mourning for her. Her death was used to make a political statement about the faults of the monarchy, the hypocrisy of the mourners, and the legitimacy of the Radical cause.

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43 *The Times*, November 8, 1817.
44 Ibid., 10 November 1817.
45 Ibid., 14 November 1817.
46 Ibid., 13 November 1817.
After the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, British society returned to an uneasy peace. Shortly following a great deal of political and social unrest, displaced soldiers and economic problems created tension within the country. Radical speakers like Henry Hunt and Francis Burdett sought to educate workers about the need for Parliamentary reform. Radical publishers attracted a growing audience. Between October 1816 and February 1817, Cobett's Weekly Political Register sold 40-60,000 copies a week at two pence each, while in 1819 Wooler's Black Dwarf sold 12,000 copies a week. Radicals wanted to restore traditional British liberties, such as freedom from oppression and equality before the law, which they felt had been taken away by a corrupt and overbearing government.

The printer who most used the Princess's death as a way to spread the Radical message was Thomas Wooler, publisher of the Black Dwarf. Wooler only began his Radical publication in January 1817, but he had a long history of Radical activity. Born in Yorkshire in 1785, he was apprenticed to a printer as a young man. He then moved to London and became a prominent figure in Radical circles. He contributed to such publications as the Reasoner and the Republican and was a member of a number of speaking and debating clubs. By 1817, Wooler's activities had gotten him in trouble with the law.

The government, of course, opposed the Radicals and took steps to limit their activities. One such measure took place in 1817 after the Spa Fields Riot and the

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47 Thompson, Making of the British Working Class, 789.
48 Ibid., 87-90.
Blanketeers March. Through the passage of the Gagging Act, habeas corpus was suspended, and the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, decreed that anyone even suspected of libel was to be arrested. At this point the leading Radical publisher, William Cobbett, who had been previously convicted of sedition in 1810, fled to the United States, where he continued to produce a much reduced form of his *Political Register*. Wooler, however, continued to publish and, by the summer of 1817, was brought up on charges of libel for his anti-government articles in the *Black Dwarf*. He was even visited in jail by the notorious government agent, Oliver the Spy, who hoped to implicate him in the Pentridge Rising. The entire situation only exacerbated Wooler's antagonism towards the government. He used the *Black Dwarf* as a forum to decry the injustice of the government, and his plight was carefully followed as the *Black Dwarf* took over as the most widely read Radical newspaper in Cobbett's absence.50

Throughout his trial, Wooler's primary complaint was with the use of Special Juries. These bodies were composed of jurors carefully selected by the government, and therefore guaranteed to return the decision that the government desired. Wooler argued that this process was a farce which plainly denied the rights of British citizens.51 Although he was convicted, Wooler was not imprisoned both because of a legal technicality and because of the government's eventual concentration on other Radicals. The entire experience informed Wooler's attitude towards the institutions of government. Thus, the news of Charlotte's death in November 1817 simply provided

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51 Ibid., 58.
Wooler an opportunity to condemn the government. For Wooler, the real grieving was reserved for a month after Charlotte’s death when he was convicted on libel charges. He announced the outcome of his trial by printing a black border around the front page of the Black Dwarf and announcing the “Death of Trial by Jury in Cases of Alleged Libel.” All readers would have recognized this tactic as a mockery of the form used to announce the death of a prominent individual, a respect which Wooler had not paid to Charlotte. With Charlotte’s death and her funeral fresh in the minds of the British people, readers would also have understood that Wooler was referring to the public grief which her death caused. However, he was clearly indicating which event he thought was more deserving of serious attention.

In the weeks following Charlotte’s death, Wooler included three lengthy articles on the way that her life and death affected the British people. Unlike other Radicals, Wooler admired Charlotte’s behavior and attitude throughout her life. He noted how she had engaged in atypical activities for royalty, such as walking on foot instead of riding in the state carriage. This had proved that she was not entirely corrupted by her station. He praised her because, “Fettered in the cradle of pomp and etiquette, she had learned to dislike, and to despise it.” Wooler was less critical of Charlotte’s personality than were either Cobbett or Shelley. Wooler also recognized the people’s desire to mourn her. However, he stated that while the death of a public figure, especially a wife and mother, was a sad event, it should “...occasion the regret

53 Thomas Wooler, “From the Black Dwarf to the Yellow Bonze at Japan,” Black Dwarf, 12 November 1817, 691.
54 Ibid.
of many, but the affliction of but few."  His distaste for royalty tempered whatever sympathy he may have had for the Princess.

Wooler used the Princess’s death to criticize the government and its handling of the Pentridge Rising. On June 9, 1817, a crowd of workers marched on Nottingham. They were then fired upon by the military and a riot ensued. The day after Charlotte died, Jeremiah Brandreth, Isaac Ludlam, and William Turner, the three leaders of the rebellion, were put to death for treason. Wooler and Shelley instantly saw hypocrisy and irony in the differences between the two sets of deaths. By invoking the example of Charlotte, Wooler ridiculed the government and the press instead of lamenting the loss of the Princess. In the issue printed the week of Charlotte’s death, Wooler began his essay by claiming:

Those who do not permit an alleged state necessity to overpower the common principles of humanity, are astonished that the wretched beings condemned at Derby should have been carried into effect, at a moment which the executioners of that sentence are eager to designate as one of the greatest national calamity. That the death of the Princess Charlotte should have been immediately followed by such a scene of blood as that exhibited upon the scaffold at Derby, is as shocking to the understanding, as it is abhorrent to the feelings. Was the vulture of law so eager for the banquet of mangled carcasses [sic], that it could not fast through the solemnity of those funeral preparations, which we are told will inhume all the virtues of humanity, and all the hopes of England.

The juxtaposition of the deaths of royalty and rebels confirmed startling truths for Radicals. It verified for them the elitist nature of their society, where a princess who had done little during her life would receive more attention than individuals who worked for social change. The government’s hurry in executing the rebels also

55 Wooler, “From the Black Dwarf to the Yellow Bonze at Japan,” 692.
56 Schor, Bearing the Dead, 200.
revealed the government’s fear of Radicals, whom they would rather dispose of quickly than show any signs of weakness by deferring their sentence. The Radicals’ frustration with the case was only increased by the state’s readiness to carry out the punishment at a time which the government itself had declared to be a period of solemnity and peace.

Wooler continually referred to state manipulation of Charlotte’s death. Just as the government had used Oliver the Spy to entrap the Pentridge leaders, it now used the pretence of mourning to suppress agitation and internal divisions created by Radicalism. The government regulated private activity during the General Mourning by seeing that shops were closed and by mandating what kind of clothing was to be worn. Wooler saw enormous hypocrisy in the government’s attitude.58 While it asked that citizens mourn, the state went about its devious business by executing the Pentridge rebels. Wooler questioned, “...was it decorous, at the moment, when ALL BUSINESS was desired to be suspended, that the EXECUTIONER ALONE should pursue his SANGUINARY AVOCATION...”59 He went further to compare the government’s behavior to that of pickpockets at an execution and Pizarro’s massacre of praying natives.60 The state lulled the citizens into a state of stupor and sorrow, only to take advantage of their distraction.

Wooler, however, suggested that the people were not entirely fooled by this manipulation. He claimed that the crowd that had gathered for the execution of the

Pentridge leaders was repulsed by the activity and that “the great majority refused to witness any longer the sanguinary spectacle which the government had got up for the amusement and edification of the people.”\textsuperscript{61} He also argued for moderation in mourning the Princess, saying “The general sympathy we feel for the misfortunes, even the most severe, of those to whom we are unknown, can never be sufficient to induce a suspension of our ordinary business.”\textsuperscript{62} He urged readers to keep their normal routine and not submit to the persuasions of the state. Wooler also attacked other newspapers which he felt were attempting to frighten people with the speculation that Charlotte’s death would mean that the next monarch would be foreign. Wooler argued that there were many Britons still in line for the throne, and, in a commentary on the morals of the royal princes, said that that judging from the large brood of illegitimate children they had fathered, it was still possible for them to have an heir.\textsuperscript{63}

According to Wooler, Charlotte’s death would have one tangible effect upon the lives of the British people. Without her influence, the Tories would firmly solidify their dominance at court. He stated that:

\begin{quote}

The tory star has risen in fresh splendour upon the grave of the lamented Princess; and the genius of whiggism seemed only to want this stroke to precipitate its dissolution. There are not hopes now for ‘the opposition.’ Their sun is set for ever in the grave of their expected Patroness.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

While the Radicals did not adhere to Whig doctrine, they felt that they had greater opportunity to achieve reform under a Whig administration. Therefore, the loss of the

\textsuperscript{61} Wooler, “Executions at Derby,” 689.
\textsuperscript{62} Wooler, “From the Black Dwarf to the Yellow Bonze at Japan,” 692.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 692-694.
\textsuperscript{64} Wooler, “State of the Nation,” 706.
Princess, who was well known for her Whig values, was damaging to the Radical cause.

Wooler’s Radical message was paralleled in William Cobbett’s *Political Register*. Cobbett circumvented tax laws regarding stamped newspapers by publishing the *Register* as a cheap pamphlet. This meant that the paper could be widely read among low-income workers, Cobbett’s primary audience. His distaste for the contemporary government led him to criticize Princess Charlotte:

> It is impossible for us to feel either joy or sorrow at any event which affects any person of the Royal family, unless such event also affects ourselves, or our country. We feel no pain, we feel no pleasure, with regard to persons at so great a distance from us, except that in that which has happened to those persons that there is a something which do, or which may, affect ourselves.  

Charlotte’s death was an opportunity for him to demonstrate the ridiculousness of the monarchy. The British workers had no reason to be sympathetic towards a woman whom they had never met. In his Radical tone, Cobbett argued that the affairs of the monarchy were distant from those of the common people. Because their lives had no bearing on the everyday existence of British workers, the royal family was a burden which Cobbett was quick to denounce. In fact, he concluded that her death “...will contribute amongst other things to hasten the destruction of despotism.” Although this comment came at the end of a statement about the pettiness and hypocrisy of the monarchy, he remained elusive about his meaning. He closed his discussion of Charlotte's death by saying “And I am of the opinion that that event will tend to good.

If I am asked why I think so, I answer, that for the present, I do not choose to state

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that why. I am not bound to do it, and, therefore, I will not do it." It is implicit in the article that Cobbett hopes that infighting within the elite would cause the monarchy to collapse. Perhaps he wanted to criticize the monarchy without overtly calling for its dissolution.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was a third author to use Princess Charlotte’s death to denounce the government. He was also involved in Radical causes, advocating such issues as the ideals of the French Revolution, atheism, and Parliamentary reform. Like Wooler, he took the execution of the Pentridge rebels as his inspiration for his composition, “An Address to the People Upon the Death of the Princess Charlotte.” The essay drew explicit parallels between the death of the princess and the Pentridge rebels and concluded by demonstrating the injustice of British society. Shelley praised the admiration of extraordinarily brave, virtuous, and talented leaders. Charlotte, however, was to him completely unworthy of all the adulation she was receiving. He began by confirming the tragedy of a young woman dying in childbirth. Shelley created a disturbing depiction of the grief that so many people suffered privately as a result of such a loss. Charlotte was not the only woman to die that way, yet she was the only one to receive so much attention. He resented the attention that Charlotte was getting. He also ridiculed her in order to elevate awareness about the suffering that many other families endured. While Charlotte may have been a respectable,

virtuous, or beautiful woman, she was not deserving of such public attention. He wrote:

But there were thousands of others equally distinguished as she, for private excellencies, who have been cut off in youth and hope. The accident of her birth neither made her life more virtuous nor her death more worthy of grief. For the public she had done nothing either good or evil...She was not like Lady Jane Grey, or Queen Elizabeth, a woman of profound and various learning. She had accomplished nothing, aspired to nothing, and could understand nothing respecting those great political questions which involve the happiness of those over whom she was destined to rule. Yet this should not be said in blame, but let us speak no evil of the dead. Such is the misery, such the impotence of royalty.68

This harsh denunciation stands in firm opposition to what was being said about Charlotte in the more moderate press. Such an opinion could only be voiced within the Radical community. Shelley did not hesitate to describe her death in the most graphic terms. He opened the essay stating:

The Princess Charlotte is dead. She no longer moves, nor thinks, nor feels. She is as inanimate as the clay with which she is about to mingle. It is a dreadful thing to know that she is a putrid corpse, who but a few days since was full of life and hope.69

This passage reduced Charlotte to worldly terms, and like the sermons, stressed the universal experiences of all human beings. Neither she, nor any aristocrat, deserved preferential treatment. Again the singular example of Charlotte was used to comment upon a much larger issue. Shelley used her situation to criticize the aristocracy in general. He described the nobility as "petty piddling slaves" and "petty creeping weeds which deface the rich tracery of its [society's] sculpture."70 While Shelley may not have wished to defame Charlotte personally, he used her position as an

68 Shelley, *An Address to the People*, 233.
69 Ibid., 231.
70 Ibid., 235, 236.
opportunity to comment upon the problems he saw in society.

Charlotte was compared to the three Pentridge rebels who also died that same week. Where Charlotte’s life was seen as indulgent and idle, the rebels were portrayed as sympathetic and identifiable friends of the people. They also had families, who probably loved them more than Charlotte’s family loved her.\(^7\) They also suffered before their death. While they were not faultless, they were at least human beings like Charlotte, and deserved the same respect that she received. When Shelley said “...let us speak no evil of the dead” in talking about Charlotte, he also intended the phrase to be applied to the treatment of the rebels.\(^2\) Conversely, if it was permissible to condemn the rebels, he could denounce Charlotte and her lifestyle.

It is important to note the way in which both Shelley and Wooler appropriated the language of Charlotte’s mourning to apply to the Pentridge leaders. Wooler referred to their trials as a “tragedy” and a “catastrophe”; Shelley called it a “public calamity.”\(^3\) Each of these terms were commonplace in writings about Charlotte’s death.\(^4\) Wooler also referred to the defendants as “unhappy beings who have been prematurely forced out of life.”\(^5\) If taken out of context, this epitaph would have fit easily into any of the sermons, elegies, or other writings produced about Charlotte. She was referred to in the very same terms. By placing Charlotte’s death on the same plane as that as common rebels, the authors used the same techniques as the sermon writers. Both groups attempted to normalize royalty while suggesting that commoners

\(^7\) Shelley, *An Address to the People*..., 233.
\(^4\) Wooler, 687.
\(^5\) Ibid.
could aspire to something greater. For the clergy, the aspiration was for divine grace but for the Radicals it was empowerment and liberty. Shelley explicitly stated the way that he and other Radicals felt that these deaths should be received when he said, “But their death [the rebels], by hanging and beheading, and the circumstances of which it is the characteristic and the consequence, constitute a calamity such as the English nation ought to mourn with an unassuageable grief.” The Radicals felt that the British people had their values misplaced, and sought to remedy the situation by using Charlotte’s death to show all of the faults inherent in the current system.

As a public figure, Princess Charlotte’s memory was used by different groups in order to make public statements. The realities of her life and personality were unimportant to those who used her death to manipulate popular opinion. Newspapers, such as *The Times*, drew a lesson about national solidarity from the tragedy. Charlotte’s life was remembered and glorified in the weeks after her death. An important component of *The Times*’ coverage was its attention to reactions to the news of her death. It attempted to set a standard for mourning, and then to chastise those who did not adhere. This allowed *The Times* to present Charlotte’s passing as a nationally unifying event that cut across religious and cultural boundaries. Clergymen saw Charlotte’s misfortune as an act of God. They used her example as a method to remind their parishioners of the inevitability of death. Their message of religious universality, like *The Times*’ perception of national solidarity, attempted to create an image of British unity. This unity, however, was not fully apparent after Charlotte’s

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76 Shelley, *An Address to the People...*, 235.
death. Radicals like William Cobbett, Thomas Wooler, and Percy Bysshe Shelley also used her death to advance a political agenda, one that questioned national unanimity. They drew parallels between the life of the Princess and the life of all human beings. This allowed them to argue for the dignity of each Briton. Therefore, legal and political rights should be extended to every citizen, since all human lives were equally valuable. Criticisms of Charlotte and the mourning process were criticisms of the government. While some groups wanted to use Charlotte’s death in order to present an image of national accord, there was clearly a subversive undercurrent which refused to be assimilated to such standards. Because she was royalty, opposing groups appropriated Charlotte to make very different points. The manipulation of Charlotte’s image, both before and after her death, demonstrated the various needs and interests within early nineteenth-century British society.
CHAPTER II
QUEEN ADELAIDE AND THE REFORM BILL, 1831-1832

A few Radicals had used the death of Charlotte to criticize the status quo in the post-war years, but during the Reform Bill crisis of 1831 and 1832, a broad group of reformers helped create an image of Queen Adelaide as the enemy of Reform. When supporters for Parliamentary Reform became frustrated about the fate of the Reform Bill, popular anger was directed against anyone known to oppose the bill. Much of that anger centered on Queen Adelaide, who had made private comments expressing her distaste for Reform. Her husband, King William IV, was known to support Reform, but outsiders such as newspaper journalists and political activists feared that Adelaide would use her matrimonial influence to sway the king against the popular measure. Although tensions were apparent throughout late 1831 and into 1832, hostility towards Adelaide dramatically intensified just before the Reform Bill passed the House of Lords on June 1832. This heightened criticism can be attributed to the role which her husband played in the Reform crisis. Although he was in favor of Reform, his hesitation in creating peers who supported Reform was a crucial issue at this time. With her potential to sway the King and defeat Reform, Adelaide became a critical political symbol during the Reform Crisis.

William IV’s marriage to Adelaide was a direct result of Princess Charlotte’s death. With the heir to the throne dead and the estranged Prince of Wales and his wife
Caroline unlikely to have another child, there was a rush to have the remainder of George III’s sons married. Thus shortly after Princess Charlotte’s death, a match was arranged between William, Duke of Clarence, and Adelaide, Princess of Saxe-Cobourg Meiningen. Adelaide came from a small, poor, albeit Protestant, German state. Her background was thus very modest in light of her later role of Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. In 1834 she and some British associates returned to visit her old home, where Charles Greville derisively commented that “...she showed them her old bedroom in the palace (as they call it) at Meiningen -- a hole in the wall that an English housemaid would think it a hardship to sleep in.”

The couple, along with the Duke and Duchess of Kent, were married in a small private ceremony on July 18, 1818. The marriage was initially difficult for Adelaide, because she was alone in a foreign country whose customs and language she did not understand very well. Adelaide, born in 1792, was also half the age of her new husband. In fact, she was only two years older than William’s eldest illegitimate son with Mrs. Jordan, the actress to whom he had been secretly married. Adelaide had to contend with William’s large, rowdy brood of illegitimate children by his former lover. Adelaide, who enjoyed children, got along well with the younger members of the group, partly because she never had any of her own. Adelaide had several miscarriages and two daughters who died in infancy in 1819 and 1820. Therefore, upon William’s death, the crown would pass to his niece, Victoria.

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2 Dr. John Doran, *Memoir of Queen Adelaide, Consort of King William IV* (London, Richard Bentley, 1861), 20.
When they were crowned in 1831, the new King and Queen were initially very popular. They were a welcome change from the court of George IV, with all of its financial and domestic chaos. William planned a simple and inexpensive coronation. His ascension was jokingly called the “half-crownation.” He refused to use many of the ornate traditional robes, and it is estimated that his coronation cost only an eighth of what George IV’s had a decade earlier.\(^3\) Adelaide also insisted on using garments made from English textiles rather than expensive foreign materials.\(^4\) Observers respected this frugality, and took it as a sign that the new monarchs would represent the efficiency and sensibility which the British cherished.

In her personal life, the Queen was a quiet but competent female leader of the household. She led a simple and moral court. Gambling, low-cut dresses, drunkards, and courtiers with bad reputations were forbidden.\(^5\) In a memoir of Adelaide, her friend Dr. Doran later remarked that “The court was essentially a homely court.”\(^6\) Adelaide and her husband were active in charities for the poor and attended public fairs.\(^7\) Her biographers agreed that she was a stabilizing influence on her husband. She helped him to settle into a regular family life more suited to a monarch than were his escapades in the navy and with Mrs. Jordan.\(^8\) Courtiers however, lamented the simplicity of the court and the mediocrity of its Queen. The Times remarked that she

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\(^6\) Doran, *Memoir of Queen Adelaide*, 22.

\(^7\) Ibid., 22-23.

was too young, foolish, and vain to be a good Queen.\textsuperscript{9} Lord Holland commented that Adelaide was "...more than usually ugly," and Greville wrote that "She is very ugly, with a horrid complexion, but has good manners."\textsuperscript{10} Adelaide's "good manners" were respected and were intended to foster a court which would specifically avoid the type of scandalous attention she would receive during the Reform Bill episode.

The Reform Bill of 1832 elicited widespread public excitement and interest. Most Britons believed that reform would mean improved parliamentary representation, and would thus be an effective guarantor of their rights. Therefore, the middle and working classes quickly voiced their support for Reform measures. Reform, however, was a lengthy process that took over a year to be implemented. At times it seemed that the entire measure was in danger of collapse, and supporters often sought to blame those responsible for the bill's slow progress. One object of their scorn was Queen Adelaide, who made private comments describing her opposition to reform. Detractors in the press depicted her as a cold, authoritarian foreigner who sought to influence her husband, King William IV, against the popular measure. While such a characterization was a distortion of Adelaide's character, the pro-Reform press seized upon the image of a manipulative Queen in order to elicit support for the Reform cause while condemning corruption and influence in government.

Previous studies of King William IV and the Reform crisis have mentioned the role of Queen Adelaide in passing, but none has provided a serious focus on the Queen

\textsuperscript{9} The Times, 15 March 1831.
herself. A few brief biographies of Adelaide have been published. Two Edwardian works by Mary Frances Sandars and by Alice Drayton Greenwood were complementary pieces in praise of Adelaide’s morality and dignity. Each piece examined Adelaide’s behavior as a wife and step-mother, while lauding the poise which she exhibited in the face of criticism. More recently, Geoffrey Wakeford and John Van der Kiste have provided brief sketches of Adelaide’s life. While lacking the moral overtones of the previous writings, Wakeford and Van der Kiste both offer chronological accounts of the biographical details of Adelaide’s life. Her role in politics can best be understood in the context of the Reform Crisis of 1831-1832.

Adelaide’s troubles derived from her perceived attitude towards the Parliamentary Reform Bill, a subject of intense public and political interest between 1831 and 1832. Many citizens believed that good government should guarantee them liberty and individual rights. However, the popular perception was that government corruption and mismanagement had imperiled traditional rights. Moderate Reformers deplored corruption and influence in government and demanded expanded rights for the growing middle-class. As an example of government decay, supporters of Reform pointed to such cases as the unpopulated rotten borough of Old Sarum, which had representation in Parliament while urban industrial centers such as Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham had no representation at all. Reformers sought

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to redistribute seats and to extend the franchise.\textsuperscript{14} The government's plan for reform was never intended to mean universal manhood suffrage; rather, it was designed as a moderate measure to include the burgeoning middle class in the processes of government. Thus, Reform gained many supporters from the middle class, and also from the lower ranks of society, who felt that they would benefit from the changes as well.

However, the Reform campaign was long and complex. At points it seemed as if anti-Reformers would prevent its passage. After several months of struggle, the bill passed through the House of Commons on September 22, 1831. It then faced the daunting task of passing through the House of Lords where it was rejected in the fall of 1831 and again in the early part of 1832. Lords, who gained their seat for life as a birthright, were not responsible to any constituencies. Many of these men, who had conservative tastes, opposed Reform and would easily defeat the bill when it came into the House of Lords. In order to pass Reform, it appeared that William IV would have to create a large number of peers who would support the measure. The King considered himself a Whig, and he expressed support for Reform. He agreed with the Whig leader Earl Grey's scheme to create more pro-Reform peers. When Grey revealed that he would need fifty or sixty seats, the King hesitated, causing two governments to collapse. William soon realized his error. He asked Grey and his government to return and agreed to create as many lords as were needed. In short order, the votes were cast and the bill passed the House of Lords on June 4, 1832.

\textsuperscript{14} Brock, \textit{The Great Reform Act}, 37.
The political role of the King, which had been dwindling for generations as Parliament had been growing more powerful, became highly significant. Although George III and his sons became more visible in the press and in the public eye than previous monarchs, the actual power of the crown was declining. George IV was interested in politics, but often failed to take a strong position on issues, or was defeated on the ones that he did. William IV’s political abilities were curtailed by financial necessity during the administration of the Duke of Wellington. However, the King could still exert power through patronage and the distribution of money from the Civil List, although these resources were declining by the time of William IV. There was also the possibility that the King could dismiss a ministry without being sanctioned. William IV was in fact the last monarch to do so (in 1834). The Reform crisis presented an opportunity for the King to exercise his powers, however in doing so, he was manipulated by Whig leaders. Although William considered himself a Whig Reformer, Adelaide was thought to be opposed to Reform. This seemed confirmed when it was known that she complimented the Bishops when they defeated the first Reform bill in the House of Lords in December 1831.

Because the cooperation of the King was vital to the Reform cause, the press, and those represented in the press, resented any private influence which they believed Adelaide had over her husband’s political opinions. If the King had been dissuaded from supporting the Reform Bill, the entire measure would have failed and the people

16 Ibid., 20-23.
17 Ibid., 22.
would not have received the improvements which they had been expecting. Not only was the monarch's approval needed in order to insure passage of the bill, but his symbolic role was highly significant. If the King (and by extension, his Queen) were regarded as the embodiment of Britain, their actions and opinions should reflect the opinions of the British people themselves.

Despite the fact that William IV attached himself to Reform, some Britons questioned his commitment to the cause. He was regarded as cheerfully devoted to Britain, but blissfully unintelligent. He was referred to as "Silly-Billy." At the time of the King’s death in 1837, Greville commented that, "King William IV, if he had been born in a private station, would have passed unobserved through life like millions of other men, looked upon as possessing a good-natured and affectionate disposition, but without either elevation of mind or brightness of intellect." The press believed that his simplemindedness left him open to manipulation by individuals who put their own interests before those of the nation. The *Morning Chronicle*, a Whig newspaper, exculpated him of blame when it wrote "Some allowances must be made for the weaknesses of the KING, good-hearted as he is known to be, under all the circumstances of the case." Thus when momentum for Reform began to slow, critics needed someone to blame for turning members of the government against Reform. The attacks became especially virulent in late spring of 1832, when Earl Grey's government fell because of the King's hesitation to create pro-Reform lords. The press and the public were disheartened that Reform seemed as if it would fail after

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19 *Morning Chronicle*, 11 May 1832.
such a struggle. They needed someone to blame for persuading the King not to create the lords, and thus nearly allowing Reform to die. The primary target of such accusations was William's consort, Adelaide.

The slow and precarious progress of the Reform Bill created controversy with the public and the press. Supporters questioned why the bill encountered so much opposition, especially at court. Adelaide was an easy target for such criticisms. She was a foreigner and she was known to be antithetical to Reform, as well as being a highly visible figure. There is little evidence for the fact that Adelaide opposed Reform. In fact, by the time that public agitation was swelling, she and her defenders repeatedly tried to show her support for the issue. One of the few documents which she supposedly authored was a letter to the Lord High Chancellor. The letter was reproduced in many pamphlets. Adelaide defended herself against accusations of intrigue and maintained her loyalty to her husband and her adopted country. She claimed that "My Court was not one of favouritism or political intrigue," and that she had always conducted herself properly in private and public life.²⁰

But by then it was too late. Court rumors starting in 1831 indicated that Adelaide opposed Reform, and at first there was probably some truth to them. One of the strongest pieces of evidence that she opposed Reform was a congratulatory letter which she sent to the Bishops who returned a unanimous vote against Reform. She wrote that "I trust you will strenuously exert yourselves, as you have hitherto so honourably done, for the preservation of our Church and State. Believe me, I am

heart and soul devoted to your maintenance.”  

Earl Grey, though, believed that Adelaide’s words had been misinterpreted and that she had meant no harm. 

Biographers attributed her initial reluctance to accept Reform measures to her upbringing in Meiningen, where she had been affected by the Napoleonic Wars. 

Therefore, she was suspicious of popular agitation because she associated it with the uprisings which followed the French Revolution. Lady Frederick Fitzclarence remarked in 1832 that “The Queen’s fixed impression is that an English Revolution is rapidly approaching, and that her own fate is to be that of Marie-Antoinette, and she trusts she shall be able to act her part with more courage.”  

Adelaide was not alone in her distaste for Reform. Other royal women, such as Princess Augusta and her sisters, and Mary, Duchess of Gloucester disapproved of Reform, as did Adelaide’s Chamberlain, Lord Howe, and his wife. It is possible that their opinions were conflated with Adelaide in public opinion. All of these characters were prominent figures who were also denounced by the Radical press. Adelaide, however, remained the focus of negative attention because of her proximity to the Crown. Some critics viewed her as the “power behind the throne,” a position that represented underhanded manipulation antithetical to the practice of Parliamentary government. Writers and politicians seized upon these rumors and created a powerful

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21 Queen Adelaide, quoted in Sandars, *The Life and Times of Queen Adelaide*, 194.
22 Earl Grey, *The Reform Act, 1832: The Correspondence of the Late Earl Grey With His Majesty King William IV and With Sir Herbert Taylor, From Nov. 1830 to June 1832*, ed. Henry, Earl Grey (London: J. Murray, 1867), February 27, 1832, 240.
24 Lady Frederick Fitzclarence, quoted in Greenwood, 390.
25 Greenwood, 379.
image of a shrewish wife who dominated her husband into carrying out her will. This image of Adelaide became synonymous with opposition to Reform and in turn support for corruption and oppression.

Many members of the press argued that she used her influence over her husband to turn the King against the will of the people. William’s Whig tendencies were vital to the Reformers, but it was widely believed that any negative influence could turn the impressionable King against the cause. Therefore, supporters of the Reform Bill, both in political and press circles, were highly critical of Adelaide’s influence on her husband. Once Reform agitation began, the press exhibited three distinct opinions about the Queen. Some authors believed that her foreign opinions cause her to sway her husband against Reform. Others argued that Adelaide herself was influenced by the corrupt advisors who surrounded her. A few authors, mainly from the anti-Reform faction, defended her virtue altogether.

Newspapers frequently discussed Adelaide’s politics and her influence over the King. The *Morning Chronicle* was a pro-Reform paper that criticized the Queen, while the *Morning Post*, a Tory paper, defended her. However, the most widely read and respected paper was *The Times*. Under the auspices of editor Thomas Barnes in 1819, *The Times* became a modern paper free of eighteenth-century corruption.26 Barnes liberated the paper from dependence on political subsidies, and thus made it independent in political reporting. By 1830, *The Times* became a leading source of public opinion, and therefore it was significant when the paper announced its support

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for Reform. *The Times* advocated the middle-class Whig interpretation of Reform, which held property ownership as a condition for suffrage. However, the paper was vocal in its criticism of Adelaide’s possible back-stairs influence.

Many of the most serious arguments against the Queen were printed in the pro-Reform newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*. On May 9, 1832 the paper boldly stated that “...the QUEEN has done more injury to the causes of Reform than any person living.” The author played upon general suspicion of her German background by saying “Her MAJESTY, as a foreigner, whose life till within a few years was passed out of this country, can be supposed to know little of English affairs or English interests.” It then implied that she manipulated the court by restricting access to royal social activities. The *Morning Chronicle* also spoke of a vague “female cabal” consisting of the Queen, the King’s sisters, and other women who desired to control court activity for their own benefit. From the *Morning Chronicle’s* perspective, the court appeared rife with traitors who wanted to see Reform fail, and Adelaide was usually featured prominently among the suspects. The paper warned that “The people of England should know that the QUEEN and the FITZCLARENCES are the real causes of the loss of the bill. History affords some instructive lessons with regard to the influence of queens over their husbands; and her MAJESTY might profit from these lessons.” Such sway of a queen over her husband was deemed to be unnatural and deplorable. In these articles, Adelaide was depicted as an maniacal genius who

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27 Offices of *The Time: A History of The Times*, 246.
28 *Morning Chronicle*, 9 May 1832.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 15 May 1832.
31 Ibid., 11 May 1832.
wanted to turn her virtuous husband against his loving people. An anonymous political cartoon from the era depicted a stern-looking “Queen Adelaide, supported by Cumberland and Wellington, forcing William IV to dismiss Grey and Brougham” [Illustration 1].

Standing with her fists clenched behind her seated husband, Adelaide gives William a harsh look. She rests her foot on a plaque reading “Advice to Create Peers.” A miserable William sits on a stool labeled “Repentance” [sic]. He weeps while Grey and Brougham, two advisors who supported Reform, are sent away by Adelaide and her cronies. The sobbing William wipes his tears on the Lord Chancellor’s wig being trailed by Brougham. The cartoon depicted Adelaide as the physical and literal power behind the throne. The newspaper articles and the cartoon demonstrated a fear of the Queen’s meddling and William’s weakness in standing up to his wife. Many authors respected the integrity of King William IV, and believed that his conniving wife was taking advantage of him. Other writers believed that Adelaide herself was being manipulated.

Adelaide’s Chamberlain, Earl Howe, was often regarded as the power who influenced Adelaide. Howe was a staunch Tory who was openly opposed to Reform. As would be exhibited by Queen Victoria’s troubles during the Bedchamber Crisis in 1839, positions close to the monarch were regarded as a reflection of political alliance. Therefore, the press believed that Lord Howe either reflected Adelaide’s political beliefs or had a hand in shaping them. The Times printed anonymous opinion pieces criticizing Howe’s proximity to Adelaide. One article was addressed to “A

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"Queen Adelaide, supported by Cumberland and Wellington, forcing William IV to dismiss Grey and Brougham."

Certain Busy Earl. It warned Howe that he was being watched as a known enemy to Reform. The author scolded Howe that he “did not act like a man” because “you set yourself about certain excellent female branches of an illustrious family, not daring to approach the men of it.” That same day, The Times printed another article defending the Queen’s honesty and devotion, but warning that she was surrounded by unhealthy influences trying to sway her opinion. Agitation against Howe in the press became so virulent that Earl Grey recommended that Howe be dismissed. The King refused to fire Howe because of the Chamberlain’s close friendship with Adelaide. The attacks continued and even Howe himself suggested that he should leave the court. By October 1831, the King was forced to give in to opposition and dismissed Howe when Howe voted against the Reform Bill in the House of Lords. Adelaide was upset over the decision and refused to accept another Lord Chamberlain in Howe’s place.

Newspaper articles describing public demonstrations for Reform showed the broad scope of Adelaide’s unpopularity. They described popular resentment and occasional acts of violence directed against the Queen. Whereas political commentators and members of the court may have been divided over Adelaide’s negative influence, the public, or at least the public as it was presented in the press, strongly resented her. Angry crowds booed the King and Queen’s carriage on public outings, and on several occasions protesters threw objects at the Queen as she passed.

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34 The Times, 11 April 1831.
35 Ibid.
This attitude reflected the fact that the people who caused such agitation thought that they had the most to lose if the Reform Act failed. The middle and lower classes believed that they were going to gain political representation, and thus the ability to better defend their interests in Parliament. Therefore, Reform seemed to promise them an empowerment which they had never experienced before and one that many were determined to acquire.

There were several contemporary examples of Adelaide’s unpopularity. At an assembly in Covent Garden in May 1832, onlookers gave three cheers for “Reform,” and “Earl Grey and his Colleagues,” while they issued three groans for “Bishops,” “Other State Paupers,” and the “German Queen.” A poster created at the time of Reform depicted Adelaide and the Tory Duke of Wellington embarking for Germany, with the image of the Queen making the following remark:

My cranky old sailor is worse than a Taylor,
His bill by commission was signed t’other day;
I’m a German stormer, I hate a reformer,
Confusion to Billy, his Broom, and his Grey.

By playing on names of prominent individuals involved in Reform, the author made Adelaide an informed and active opponent of the movement. Thus Queen Adelaide had been transformed into a public symbol of the anti-Reform faction.

The *Morning Chronicle* presented a colorful illustration of popular opinion against the Queen. In two articles entitled “Signs of the Times,” the paper described a sign hanging at an inn outside of London in May of 1832. The image on the sign

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36 *Morning Chronicle*, 14 May 1832.
37 Ibid., 12 May 1832.
portrayed Adelaide as both a meddling conspirator and a woman with "unladylike" designs on political power. Originally, one side had depicted a crown while the other side displayed an image of a sailor. However, the sign was repainted to reflect the popular support of Reform and the widespread distrust of Adelaide. The words "Reform Inn" were written under the crown. The crown itself was nearly painted over with a picture of a petticoat, a common symbol for female influence. The image was accompanied by the rhyme "May the Petticoat over the Crown; Soon fly off or soon fall down." The reverse side of the sign was just as forceful in its denunciation of Adelaide's pernicious influence. The artist had drawn a ship with a sailor falling "from the pinnacle of popularity" into "a sea of troubles." As the Duke of Clarence, William had been in the navy, and he was popularly referred to as the "Sailor King." Thus, it would have been evident to whom the reference alluded. The writer for the *Morning Chronicle* further described the image by saying:

In the background was represented a Lady, with a diadem on her head, and a long pole in her hand, and by her side stood a one-eyed Monster, who, from his attitude, had evidently been aiding the lady to throw down the poor sailor. Near them stood a soldier in Wellington boots, with his sword drawn, cheering them.

This was a none too vague allusion to manipulation by Adelaide and her cohorts. The entire image was accompanied by the following poem:

If ye would shun the coming storm  
Take Shelter at the Inn-Reform.  
The People's Friends right bravely cheer,  
O'er cups of generous home-brewed beer.

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40 Ibid., 14 May 1832.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
Cumber-the-land and Petticoat
Shall hear three groans of direful note.43

The sign blamed Adelaide for problems facing the Reform Bill. She and the King’s brother, the Duke of Cumberland, were boldly depicted as the villains who conspired to turn the King against his people.

Also in May 1832, another incidence of petticoat imagery appeared, this time at the Leeds Electioneering Association meeting. The anti-Reform *Morning Post* reported with disgust that a Reform agitator carried, “...a yellow flag with the words ‘The Reform Bill: No petticoat government.’ At the top was the figure of a female, trampling upon an inverted crown; a Bavarian broom was tied to her back with a piece of red ribbon.”44 The *Morning Post* described this display as an “unmanly and brutal abuse against the Queen.”45 Images like this flag and the sign at the “Reform Inn” demonstrated a public suspicion of Adelaide’s influence over William. The public recognized the fact that Adelaide’s privileged status gave her unique and unmatched opportunities to pressure William. But the image of the petticoat also indicated that politics were assumed to be a strictly male domain. Britain had not had a ruling Queen since Anne died in 1714 and thus the idea of a female politician was represented as unnatural and unacceptable. The criticism directed at Adelaide during the Reform crisis was reminiscent of the harsh treatment given to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, an openly active political woman, in the late eighteenth century.46

43 *Morning Chronicle*, 12 May 1832
45 Ibid.
Adelaide can also be compared to Queen Caroline, another royal woman who received much press and political attention for her exploits. Adelaide's unpopularity made her the antithesis of all that Queen Caroline represented. Whereas Caroline was championed by the working-class as a victim of an unjust class system, Adelaide was viewed by working- and middle-class people as the embodiment of that oppressive hierarchy. The many articles in the *Morning Chronicle* attest to her unpopularity among the middle-class. Caroline, like the Reformers and all who supported them, represented change, while Adelaide represented stubborn opposition to new ideas.

Caroline also represented the traditional values of home and family. During her divorce trial, she fought to preserve her marriage. However, Adelaide symbolized an inversion of the marital power structure. The press depicted her as a shrew who dominated her husband and forced her opinions upon him. Those who knew her personally decried this interpretation, but it remained popular with the people. Adelaide, who was actually a modest woman who strove to live an unassuming and happy life with her husband, became the symbol of deviant and subversive female power. She was ridiculed for having political opinions and for forcing her husband to carry them out. In several ways, Adelaide was the opposite of all that Caroline represented. Because of her perceived opinions and actions, Adelaide received a great deal of criticism.

The Radical critic William Cobbett also used Adelaide as an example to condemn Royalty and thereby promote the interests of the working class. Cobbett, already seen as one of Princess Charlotte's main critics and as a leading spokesman for the Radical press, could not avoid commenting on the Reform predicament. Popular
belief maintained that Cobbett had called Adelaide a “Nasty German Frow [sic].”\textsuperscript{47}

However, Cobbett himself denied the accusation and it seems the quote was attributed him incorrectly, possibly through the Whig paper the \textit{Morning Chronicle}.\textsuperscript{48} In fact, Cobbett avoided the specific allusions to the Queen which were made by other papers. While he suggested that “...the King [as] well as the rest of his family, were decidedly hostile to any reform of Parliament at all...,” Cobbett relied upon an emotional focus on the common man, rather than attacks on the character of the Queen, to encourage support for Reform.\textsuperscript{49} His tactics recalled his attention to the lives of Jeremiah Brandreth and the other condemned Pentridge rebels in 1817 in order to trivialize the death of Princess Charlotte. Cobbett’s articles stressed that it was the British worker, rather than the British monarch, who deserved the people’s attention and sympathy. For instance, rather than express anger at Adelaide’s supposed behavior, Cobbett described how he was angered by the story of a Joseph Mason. Mason walked from northern Hampshire to Brighton in order to give a congratulatory letter to the King. He was turned away by the King’s handlers, only to soon be transported for life for his part in a riot in Hampshire.\textsuperscript{50} Cobbett specifically addressed Dr. Black, editor of the \textit{Morning Chronicle}, who was angered by the intrigue and manipulation in Adelaide’s court. Cobbett wrote:

\begin{quote}
Come, come, Doctor, don’t cry; dry up your tears; or if you must shed some, let it be for the husbandless wives and fatherless children in Hampshire and Wiltshire; let it be for the parents of poor Cook of Micheldever, who was
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{47} William Cobbett, “To the People of Manchester on the Events of Last Week,” \textit{Cobbett’s Weekly Register}, 19 May 1832.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Cobbett, “To the People of Manchester...”
\end{flushright}
hanged for striking Bingham Baring, without doing him any bodily harm.
Never break your heart about these [Royal] people, who have such a plenty of 
Palaces already, and who have another of enormous size now building, at 
expense enough to frighten one to think of.\textsuperscript{51}

Cobbett’s tactic was to deflect attention from royalty in order to focus on the common 
man. He provided many examples of how Britons had been wronged, ignored, and 
neglected by the monarchy. Just as he had depicted the Pentridge rebels as 
sympathetic individuals, Cobbett also focused on the individuals who had been hurt by 
King William IV and his entourage. Thus, his focus on the common man was really a 
backhanded attack on Royalty, designed to erode the monarch’s credibility.

The press’s attacks on Adelaide became so persistent and injurious that some 
Members of Parliament considered initiating libel suits against the offending papers 
and speakers. On May 21, 1832, Lord Stormont spoke of the Queen’s dilemma in the 
House of Commons. He read an inflammatory passage from a paper entitled the 
\textit{Satirist}:

Of the persons here alluded to, some are Germans -- low, artful, nursed in 
despotism, and devoted to it....employing the resources of England, profusely 
bestowed upon them, even by the Whigs, to crush her people, and bribing the 
venal, who are every where to be found, to support them in their base 
ingratitude and daring machinations against a people who have redeemed 
them from beggary. The Queen and the Duchess of Kent are among the most 
active of these intriguers.\textsuperscript{52}

The government was aware that the attacks on the Queen were unbecoming to the 
actual station of “Queen” and to a female. Discussions about libel cases did not lead 
to prosecutions as Reform soon passed and Parliament moved on to other issues.

\textsuperscript{51} Cobbett, “To the People of Manchester…”
\textsuperscript{52} Lord Stormont, 21 May 1832, \textit{Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates}, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 12 
(1832), col. 1145-1147.
However, not all political commentaries in the newspapers were negative.

Some expressed support for the Queen. The same day that *The Times* condemned Lord Howe, it printed a letter in support of Adelaide. In a message to the editor, “Radical” avowed his support for Adelaide by saying:

> Amiable as she is, occupied in the faithful discharge of all the duties of a wife and Queen -- devoted to the happiness of her Royal husband, -- it was not probable she could for a moment have been led to sanction any attempt to interfere in the decision of a measure in which the immediate happiness of the Royal Person, as also the welfare of the nation, is involved.

The author claimed to have obtained this knowledge through his previous acquaintance with the Queen. The *Morning Chronicle* also contained articles warning Adelaide against interference, if not exactly condemning her. It stated that “The private virtues of the small German family attached, by recent connection, to the British throne, are respected; but let the parties take heed. These are times in which small account might be made of their pretensions, should they interfere with the just claims of the people.” Thus, the press did not depict Adelaide as only a negative influence. Opinions ranged from supportive to hesitantly accepting to outright condemnation. The conflicting opinions indicated that Adelaide was not perceived as entirely bad. Therefore, it is revealing to examine which groups advocated the various interpretations of Adelaide’s character and why.

Adelaide’s greatest supporter was the Tory paper the *Morning Post*. The paper vehemently defended the Queen while launching merciless attacks upon her enemies. Many contributors exhibited strong respect for tradition and felt that any

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53 “Radical,” “To the Editor of The Times,” *The Times*, 11 April 1831.
54 *Morning Chronicle*, 11 April 1831.
tinkering with the machinery of government would lead to disaster. One commentator wrote that the Reformers were "...intoxicated with the spirit of reckless and insane innovation."\(^5\) For the writers in the *Morning Post*, Reform and Radicalism were synonymous. Another article sarcastically thanked the Radicals for their indecent behavior towards the King and Queen, as such actions turned moderate people against Reform.\(^6\) By their decision to "exhibit the cloven foot" Radicals actually strengthened the anti-Reform cause.\(^7\) It is also revealing that this same article described both *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle* as Radical newspapers.\(^8\) The *Morning Post* was highly critical of the way that the Queen had been treated. It complained that the Whigs:

...daily assail the character of her MAJESTY; they strive by every art to exasperate the people against her; they assume the privilege of threatening her safety; they form themselves into active conspiracy against her peace, her reputation, and her life; and then, in order to free themselves from all fear of that law which they daily violate in their conduct towards her, they demand that her legal protectors and advisors shall be chosen from within their own ranks.\(^9\)

The *Morning Post* recognized that the Reformers were using the Queen as a political symbol simply to support their own agenda. Tory writers attributed this to the coarseness and ambition of the opposition. The paper was personally and politically offended by the Reformers' attacks upon both the King and the Queen. Anonymous letter writers came to Adelaide's defense saying that she was a kind and gentle woman.

\(^5\) *Morning Post*, 2 January 1832.
\(^6\) Ibid., 11 May 1832.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid., 1 June 1832.
who was not involved with politics.\textsuperscript{60} One of these articles stated that Adelaide could not be blamed "...for endeavouring to do what every wife has right to do, if she can -- influence the opinions of her husband."\textsuperscript{61} Thus, at least one author had some respect for Adelaide’s right to hold her own opinions and to share them with the King.

Politicians resented the interference from the press. In a letter to the King’s Private Secretary Sir Herbert Taylor on February 27, 1832, Earl Grey described a discussion between himself and the Archbishop of Canterbury about the response of the Queen to an address by several Bishops.\textsuperscript{62} The Bishops had denounced the Reform Bill in the House of Lords, and were thus very unpopular. They subsequently addressed the Queen, and she responded by thanking them for their “preservation of our Church and State.”\textsuperscript{63} When word of her response was made public, she became even more unpopular. Earl Grey believed the Queen had been misunderstood, and wrote in her defense:

After this conversation was over, [the Archbishop of Canterbury] spoke of the answer of the Queen which has appeared in the papers. He showed me his address, in which there certainly was no political allusion; and he thought there was none in the answer, which, he stated most truly, would have been exceedingly improper. The answer in the papers, however, is very differently interpreted; and I regret, most deeply regret, the effect this and other circumstances are producing in respect to Her Majesty.\textsuperscript{64}

Taylor responded by saying:

Nothing can, in His Majesty’s opinion, have been more cautious and guarded than the Queen’s conduct for months past; and His Majesty is persuaded that

\textsuperscript{60}“Aristides,” “To the Editor of the \textit{Morning Post},” \textit{Morning Post}, 14 May 1832; “Fashionable World: Their Majestys &c.,” \textit{Morning Post}, 21 May 1832.
\textsuperscript{61}“Aristides,” “To the Editor of the \textit{Morning Post}.”
\textsuperscript{62}Earl Grey, \textit{The Reform Act, 1832}, 240.
\textsuperscript{63}Sandars, \textit{The Life and Times of Queen Adelaide}, 194.
\textsuperscript{64}Earl Grey, 240.
you are too well aware of the manner in which the newspapers distort words and misrepresent facts, as well as of their predilection for any invention that can serve their purpose and make mischief, to suffer their reports to weigh with you.\textsuperscript{65}

The exchange illustrated that the attitude of the press was a concern at all levels of the government. The King and his ministers all recognized the way in which they were being manipulated in the media. The Earl of Winchilsea noted the power that the newspapers were having when he said, “Yes, the public mind was deluded and forced into a state of unnatural excitement by a daring Press, which lorded it over the Government and Parliament.”\textsuperscript{66} Thus there was a clear indication that both politicians and the monarch understood the influence of the press.

Attitudes about Adelaide within the court exhibited the variety of opinion seen in the press. There were some who disliked the boring court she presided over and others who believed her to be more clever than she seemed. However, those who had the opportunity to observe Adelaide closely felt that whatever other shortcomings she may have had, she was incapable of influencing the politics of the King. Lord Holland heard rumors of Adelaide’s behavior and subsequently investigated the extent of her influence on the King. Lord Egremont claimed that the Queen broke down her husband through tears. In using this emotional weapon, Egremont said that Adelaide and her allies “have found [the King’s] secret and will use it.”\textsuperscript{67} Holland believed he was exaggerating, a sentiment that he confirmed when he spoke to people close to the

\textsuperscript{65} Sir Herbert Taylor in Earl Grey, \textit{The Correspondence of the Late Earl Grey With His Majesty King William IV}, 241.
\textsuperscript{67} Lord Holland, \textit{The Holland House Diaries, 1831-1840}, 15.
Queen. Both Lady Mary Fox and Lord Albermarle later convinced him that "...the Queen, though averse to reform and surrounded by persons hostile to our government, was incapable of intrigue or underhanded manoeuvres to thwart the King's government and equally unlikely and unable to sway his opinion." Thus Lord Holland was convinced that Adelaide was not interfering in her husband's political business. Lord Grey also agreed with this sentiment. He wrote to Princess Lieven "[The Queen] has no influence over the King, and that, in fact, he never even mentions politics to her -- that her influence over him as to his manners have been very great and highly beneficial, but there it stops." People who actually met Adelaide all seemed to reach the same conclusion. She may have opposed Reform, but she was not the type of person who would try to force her opinion onto others. William IV's sister, Princess Augusta, summed up this position quite nicely when she said "The Queen is like my good mother -- never interferes or even gives an opinion. We may think, we must think, we do think, but we need not speak." Royal women, therefore, were welcome to formulate their own opinions, but not to attempt to implement them. Those who knew Queen Adelaide depicted her as following this advice exactly.

Two distinct images of Adelaide emerged from the Reform crisis. The first came from people who actually knew her. They generally described her as incapable of using her influence to turn her husband against Reform. She was not a political manipulator or an intrusive wife determined to bend her husband to her will. The second image that emerged was of Adelaide as a symbol of court corruption.

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68 Lord Holland, The Holland House Diaries, 1831-1840, 6, 35.
70 Princess Augusta, quoted in Ibid., 389.
Accounts of her backstairs' influence and potential for interference were used as proof of corruption within the government. Reform was needed in order to eliminate such injustices. These accounts largely relied on stereotypes of the meddlesome foreigner or nagging wife and played upon her acknowledged dislike of Reform. Even the stories which did not hold her responsible for interfering depended upon the idea that her ignorance of British customs had led her to associate with people like Lord Howe, who actively opposed the Reform Bill. In casting Adelaide as the villain, the press was protecting William. By blaming others for the very un-British opposition to Reform, writers preserved William's status as the Patriot King who represented all British virtues. Britons protected the monarch, the symbol of their nation, and instead attributed problems to more ambiguous forces of influence. This tactic preserved the monarch as the embodiment of the British spirit of liberty and freedom.

In June of 1832 the Reform Bill passed through Parliament. While it was much more moderate than some supporters had hoped for, it expanded the franchise dramatically, redistributed some Parliamentary seats, and attempted to eliminate electoral corruption. With the Reform crisis over, Adelaide resumed her quiet life. She regained her popularity, but was periodically accused of interfering in politics. In November 1834 she was blamed by the press for the collapse of the Whig government, although The Times later printed an apology. By all accounts, Adelaide and William enjoyed a happy marriage until his death on June 20, 1837. Adelaide lived out the rest of her life traveling and living at various homes throughout Britain until her death on

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71 The Times, 13, 15, & 17 November 1834.
December 2, 1849 at the age of fifty-seven.

As a public figure in the early nineteenth century, Queen Adelaide was the target of many accusations. Critics capitalized upon her visibility in order to manipulate her image for their own purposes. Adelaide rarely had the opportunity to speak for herself. Rather, observers recorded their perceptions of her, or, as happened in the press during the Reform Bill, created a new identity for her. Adelaide represented many different images, emotions, and fears. Many worried that she would use her matrimonial influence to manipulate the opinion of her husband. She was therefore portrayed as corrupting the monarch, one of the most visible symbols of British patriotism. A devious Adelaide, as created by the press, represented the suspicions that many ordinary Britons had about corruption and privilege in government. Therefore, by attacking Adelaide, they were attacking the old and corrupt style of government which they hoped that Reform would eliminate.

Queen Adelaide was a princess from a small German state who became one of the most visible women in early-nineteenth-century Britain. She wanted to live a quiet life, but her opinions and her exploits were well-publicized during the Reform campaign of 1831-1832. Partly because of her own opinions, partly because of the imagination of the press, Adelaide was associated with back-stairs influence that Reformers wanted to do away with. Although those who actually observed Adelaide noted that she was not manipulative, the press continued to portray her as a negative influence on her husband. As a result, Adelaide became a pawn in the reform of the British Parliamentary system.
CONCLUSION

Charlotte and Adelaide may have been born only four years apart, but they lived completely different lives. One was a headstrong and energetic Princess, the other was a reserved and taciturn Queen. Their personal differences were reflected in the way that the public viewed them. In general, people embraced Charlotte as a symbol of goodness and morality while rejecting Adelaide as the personification of self-interest and corruption. These characterizations were exhibited in public demonstrations and in the press. The Radical political movement, however, deviated from mainstream opinion and represented both women as symbols of oppression. It is necessary to ask why these conflicting views emerged and to examine what purpose they served. The public images of Charlotte and Adelaide became detached from the actual reality of their lives. Thus it was not their actual behavior in their daily lives that was important to political, public, and press activists, but rather the values which their images came to represent.

There are a number of differences between the experiences of Adelaide and Charlotte. Once analyzed, these disparities help define the significance of each woman. Although both women were members of the royal family, their roles and responsibilities varied. Charlotte was heir to the throne and Adelaide was royal consort. The Princess would one day be the monarch who would hold power herself, but Adelaide was only an accessory to her husband’s rule. Charlotte’s political views could be expected to create more interest than Adelaide’s. However, Adelaide’s
political opinions garnered more attention than Charlotte’s. This was because the people recognized the women’s actual power rather than the potential for future power. When she died, Charlotte was little more than a teenager who had led a cloistered life. Although she held distinct political views, she never had the opportunity to exert her influence. Had she lived to become Queen her political opinion would understandably have gained a greater degree of interest, but as events occurred, the people paid little attention to the young and sheltered royal daughter during her lifetime. Adelaide, who rose to prominence as a direct result of Charlotte’s death, had no official power, but the press literally viewed her as the power behind the throne. Many journalists and political activists believed that she attempted to manipulate her weak-minded husband in order to bend him to her will on the issue of Reform. Therefore, many people felt that Adelaide had a more immediate effect on the running of the monarchy during the Reform crisis than Charlotte ever did during her lifetime.

The public’s reaction to the two women varied as well. Adelaide differed from Charlotte in that she was viewed with widespread hostility. Commentators on Charlotte’s life were much more complimentary. The Queen’s unpopularity meant that she was targeted by the more mainstream press. While Charlotte’s detractors were solely from the Radical political sector, Adelaide was criticized by papers as popular and well-respected as The Times. Thus the extent of Adelaide’s unpopularity can be extrapolated as a comment on the widespread public support for the 1832 Reform Bill. Adelaide became synonymous with opposition to Reform. Therefore, the intensity of the attacks on Adelaide indicated how broadly based was the support
for Reform. Adelaide was a public symbol of an unpopular political stance.

The political activities of both women presented an interesting paradox. Adelaide, who may have held private opinions about Reform or other matters, but who was never outwardly politically active or affiliated with any group, received harsh criticism for her “politics.” However, Charlotte, who was interested in politics and enjoyed the company of politically-active Whig friends, never received much attention, and certainly no negative attention, for her political views. Thus there was a marked difference between the way the women lived and the way that they were represented in the public, political, and press arenas. It is crucial to examine how and why these disparities developed.

Adelaide’s opponents criticized her political views and represented her as a symbol of corruption. Her detractors misrepresented her as having strong motives and the will to achieve them. She became a political character whom other people condemned or praised in order to advance their own political agendas. Statements, activities, and political motives which never existed were attributed to her. Adelaide was a focus of negative attention, and thus became a convenient target for her political enemies. However, the political views of Charlotte, who openly wrote about her opinions and corresponded with key political figures, were never examined with such scrutiny. Charlotte’s views were for the most part kept to herself and those with whom she spoke or corresponded. It is significant that she received less attention as a political figure than did Adelaide. Clearly there was political agitation during Charlotte’s lifetime. Yet, outside of the Radical press, she was never mentioned in connection with any of these activities. Perhaps because of her Whig associations she
may have been more palatable to the agitators. Or she could have simply been too young or obscure a target for them.

Once Charlotte died, and thus lost her own voice, she became subject to manipulation. Like Adelaide she did not have the ability to defend herself, or at least, the chance to sully her esteemed image. The women may have laid the groundwork from which these images would derive, but they did not actively contribute to the way in which their public image developed. Their lack of input in the creation of their images differs from the experience of Caroline of Brunswick. Caroline, with the help of Brougham, actively manipulated the way people interpreted her life, and thus influenced the way people came to sympathize with her. Charlotte was a young newlywed who was known to have been charitable and kind; Adelaide was a foreigner who disagreed with the Reform bill and associated with others who did so as well. From these basic facts sprang speculation and embellishment. The images of both women were distorted by others.

Images of public figure have always been subject to manipulation and discussion. However, Princess Charlotte and Queen Adelaide did not actively create their own public images. These impressions were crafted by others with specific political and cultural agendas. Therefore, Charlotte and Adelaide are revealing examples of the issues and attitudes of the era. Their images were used to foster political unrest and national feeling. Thus, their symbolic characterizations allow us crucial insight into the values and concerns of early nineteenth-century British society.
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VITA

Eileen Robin Hintz