Abandoning Private Femininity: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, the 1784 Westminster Election, and its Implications for the History of Women in Politics

by

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Author’s Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

My thesis argues that women had a powerful influence on politics long before the fight for suffrage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that the focus in political history on "high politics" has not allowed for women's less formal involvement in politics to be recognized as it should be. I discuss the socio-political culture of eighteenth-century England, including the nature of the role of women in politics and how it aligns with the social expectations of women during the eighteenth century. I analyze the impact of Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, on the 1784 Westminster election, as well as her prominent role within the Whig party. Finally, I discuss the rise of the newspaper press's influence on politics in the eighteenth century and how its harsh criticisms of Georgiana played a role in not only causing Georgiana to take a step back from politics, but also reduced the visible activity of women in politics for the next hundred years.

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I would like to thank Dr. Richard Connors, whose teachings throughout my undergraduate degrees not only reignited my passion for British history, but also gave me the tools and confidence I would need to pursue history at the graduate level. His sarcastic sense of humour combined with the necessary gravitas of a history professor whose material could sometimes be dark or dense, was the defining example of the type of professor I hoped then, and still hope now, to become in the future. I am also exceedingly grateful for the support I have received over the last two years from Dr. Dan Gorman, without whom this project never would have come to completion. From our very first meeting, I felt invigorated and hopeful about what I would be able to achieve with this project, and I was lucky enough to feel that way after every meeting that followed. I am appreciative of his feedback and questions which introduced further avenues of research for me to utilize and prompted me to reconsider the parameters of my argument in a way that only strengthened my thesis.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my friends, Cortney Burnham, who I am grateful to have experienced the highs and lows of graduate school with, and Michaela Fernandes, who listened when I needed to vent and celebrated my wins with me as if they were her own. My sisters Mikaela and Makenzi McManus, who inspire me to be a better version of myself every day. My grandfather, Norm Johnston, who taught me to be resilient in the darkest moments. My parents, Paul McManus and Kristi Johnston, who have been truly steadfast in their support of my numerous academic endeavours and made all of this possible. Finally, my partner, Justin Paro, who has been with me on this journey from the very beginning, never failing to steady me when my confidence wavered and remind me of my purpose. I am immensely grateful.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the women in my family who came before me. My mom, Kristi, my grandmothers, Sharon and Norma, my granny, Anne, and all of my maternal ancestors who paved the way for me. Without their sacrifices I would not be here, and I will never take that for granted.

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Introduction

The political influence of women is largely recognized as having exploded surrounding the fight for women's suffrage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With political history largely dominated by the discussion of "high politics," the role of women in the eighteenth-century has not been recognized as it should have been. Women were regularly involved in and engaged with the parliamentary agendas of their families, and in some cases for their own political agendas, as early as the eighteenth-century. By focusing solely on high politics, we remain ignorant of the contributions of women that could be considered informal, domestic, or issue-based.[1] Women's political involvement was not unrestricted, and they certainly had fewer opportunities than their male counterparts, but the barriers to involvement were not as set in stone as is commonly presumed.[2] Though other centuries demonstrated this same phenomenon, in the eighteenth-century the predominance of women in the domestic sphere had a substantial influence on contemporary issues and politics.

The participation of women in elections during the eighteenth-century is now widely acknowledged, but historians miss the importance and complexity of their roles. Historians frame the discussion of these women around one central issue: the extent to which British culture in the eighteenth-century allowed for women's participation.[3] Key historians on this subject such as Linda Colley, Amanda Foreman, and Nicholas Rogers share the perspective that the press was particularly concerned with defining what was considered acceptable female participation in

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[1] Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds., *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 8-9.
[2] Gleadle and Richardson, *Women in British Politics*, p. 9.
[3] Renata Lana, "Women and Foxite Strategy in the Westminster Election of 1784," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 46–69, https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-26-1-46.

elections, and they did so specifically through the judgement of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. They argue that representations of the Duchess and other female canvassers either accused them of being traitors to their gender or class or defended them against such attacks as these. Common perspectives of Georgiana and other female canvassers accept that they were generally effective, but they greatly interpret the treatment that received by the press as an indictment of their role being a liability to the candidates they served.[4]

The reality of eighteenth-century politics was that it was both familial as well as factional, so women were required to be politically aware and involved in politics to the extent that was considered respectable for those of their gender in order to fulfill the expectations of their families. Eighteenth-century British society believed that women were constitutionally unfit for politics, thus the British polity was determinedly male in construct. That being said, politically active families worked together towards a common goal both inside and outside of election times. In a culture that encouraged social interactions in the interest of maintaining political supporters and highlighting a family's position of importance, women were indispensable players in the process. The importance of personal connections for both politics and acquiring patronage meant that politicians, patrons, and clients often met at each other's homes to discuss their plans and strategies for the future. While these types of meetings were most commonly attended by men, simply by the nature of them occurring within the domestic space meant that women were often involved, even if only to the slightest degree. Both during

[4] See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, Rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998); Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

and in-between election times women played a vital role in maintaining positive relationships, socially and politically, thus their involvement must be understood and credited.

In early studies of eighteenth-century political women, the focus has most often landed on canvassing due to its public prominence,[5] but their other contributions deserve equal consideration. With political campaigns often running out of homes, there were times where women acted in more important roles than simply canvassers: they were sometimes utilized as managers and administrators of their families' campaigns. Furthermore, with the accession of King George III to the throne, a new era of politics rose with him where political aspirations frequently involved the procurement of offices and patronages for themselves, their families, and their friends. The structure of the patronage system in particular lent itself well to women's participation, as it was based on the personal contacts between individuals, families, and political connections, all of which were aspects of a social responsibility that rested on the shoulders of aristocratic society's women. Information gained during visits to the homes of others or the reception of visitors was extremely valuable, both for the maintenance of the social hierarchy, as well as the influence it could have on politics.

The skills required to obtain this type of information and influence were not often inherently possessed by elite women but learned, during both their upbringing as children and as wives. Georgiana Spencer's experiences were no different. As a child, she was a quick study of social studies and etiquette, and was a performer at heart from the beginning. She was educated as any young elite woman at that time should have been, and in the early months of her marriage to the Fifth Duke of Devonshire she endeavored to learn everything there was to know about

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[5] Karl von den Steinen, "The Discovery of Women in Eighteenth-Century Political Life," in *The Women of England From Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present: Interpretive Bibliographical Essays*, ed. Barbara Kanner (Hamden: Archon Books, 1979).

being an aristocratic wife so she could perform her wifely duties to her husband and his family's utmost satisfaction. Although she was her own woman in many ways, she still worked tirelessly to uphold the expectations of who she should be and what she should do as the Duke's wife. The Public Days she and the Duke hosted early in their marriage not only taught her vital skills for her social life, but also her future political life, like how to structure a room full of visitors in a way that would allow her to pay special attention to those who would benefit her and how to keep others at a distance while still making them feel important. When Georgiana married the Duke in 1774, a general election was to take place in October of that very same year making these early Public Days of even greater importance. Due to the fact that peers were unable to campaign in parliamentary elections, it was the responsibility of wives and relatives to campaign on their behalf and this election would be the first time Georgiana would do so on behalf of her husband and the Cavendish family.[6]

The eighteenth-century also witnessed rising concerns about what impact politically-ambitious men seeking universal suffrage could have on the population of British women. In order to suppress the possible legitimization of women's claims to citizenship that would allow them to vote, the differences between men and women, whether they be physical, emotional, or functional, were widely discussed and emphasized. One philosopher who became widely influential not just to Georgiana, but also amongst British moralists like Hannah More and Jane Austen, as well as feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, was Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose rhetoric and sexual politics defined the era. Many of his arguments revolved around the idea that a woman who left the confines of her home in order to seek public recognition would be rightly

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[6] See Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998) pp. 28-9.

criticized and ridiculed because she abandoned her station as a supporting character to her husband and family in favour of another role that she was not suited for. For a woman who could easily be accused of doing these things, perhaps it is odd that Georgiana would have aligned herself with the beliefs of Rousseau.

However, to Georgiana, her actions were not representative of a woman abandoning her family or duties of a wife of her station. In her eyes, much of her work on behalf of the Whig party, the party that her husband was an influential figure in, did in fact line up with eighteenth-century society's expectations of a woman of her status. It was agreed by the Duke and other grandees that Georgiana should become more involved in the Whig party by leading a women's delegation after a crowd at Covent Garden had a positive reaction to her presence on the hustings at Covent Garden in 1780.[7] That being said, during the 1784 Westminster election Georgiana moved away from the widely accepted familial mode of political support which destabilized the gendered foundations of the polity. Initially her work with the Whig party was within the bounds of acceptability, but during this particular election her actions were an affront to the divide that separated private female-influence-on-male-influence, which was acceptable at the time, from autonomous and public political action, which was decidedly not.

Upon meeting Charles James Fox, a prominent Whig politician, the two became fast friends as she was captivated by his quick wit and intellect, and it ended up being him more than any other person who showed her that she could be more than just a wife, that she could have influence in politics. But more than that, he treated her as an equal and as someone of importance, not simply the wife of the Duke of Devonshire. With his encouragement, Georgiana began to take on a greater role, creating for herself a position in the Whig party that was

[7] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 92-3.

ambassadorial in nature, and it flourished during the 1778 French invasion scare. The Whigs were not well-regarded in government nor by the public at this time due to their support of an independent America so to prove they were truly on Britain's side, they did what they could to aid the country's defenses. For some of the party members, like the Duke of Devonshire, this meant temporarily moving to the military base at Cox-Heath. While Georgiana could have stayed at a house nearby, she chose to stay with the Duke and immerse herself in the everyday life on the base.

Following her time at Cox-Heath, Georgiana became much more dedicated to following parliamentary debates, to the extent that she quickly became well-informed enough to have her own opinions about political debates, and to share them in her role as a political hostess. More than that however, Georgiana was cunning, learning when to appear informed versus ignorant in order to extract useful information for the Whig party. She became an expert in propaganda, and possessed an aptitude for the political that was shared with and encouraged by Charles Fox. She was dedicated to the party, but what made her so influential both inside and out of the party was the strength of her convictions; her convictions were what made her so convincing in the political world and why she came to be known as one of the party's best known representatives. Come 1780, the Whigs were confident that they would be able to drive the current Prime Minister, Lord North out of office, but their attempts were unsuccessful following a series of unfortunate events which prevented the Commons from meeting while the Whigs were in their most advantageous position. It was during this time, however, that the young Prince of Wales and future George IV, allied himself with the Whigs and cleared them of any lingering accusations of disloyalty to the Crown. However, the Gordon Riots made the situation for the Whigs more difficult, as they were accused of fueling discontent outside of Parliament, giving

Lord North an opportunity to call an election in only a few months' time. With the Whigs at a great disadvantage and an election forthcoming, Georgiana's support was heavily requested by her own family, the Duke's family, and by acquaintances who knew her influence could offer them great advantages in gaining their own political seats. All of those whom she supported were successful in their campaigns, including Charles Fox, who won his seat and earned the moniker "Man of the People."

In that election, Georgiana set a basic precedent for her political involvement in politics, but the campaign leading up to the election in 1784 changed everything. She was no longer just a wife campaigning on behalf of her husband and her own family when required; she had become Charles Fox's ally and confidante. Not only that, but Georgiana also gained the ear of the Prince of Wales. The new government with Lord North as Prime Minister was not nearly as successful as the public perceived it to be, and with the King looking for any opportunity to remove the Whigs from power, they could not afford to give the King a reason to do so. Unfortunately for the Whigs, Charles Fox had promised the Prince of Wales that he would help him receive a proper allowance from the King, even though Fox knew it was a poor promise to make as forcing the measure through to Parliament would give the King the ammunition he needed to do so. Fox hoped the Duke of Devonshire would be able help the Prince see reason about how poor of a situation this demand had left the party in, but he could not be persuaded. It was not until Georgiana took matters into her own hands and explained to the Prince that the cost of his gaining his desired allowance would be more than monetary, that it would force the Whigs to resign because the costs of paying out such a sum were far too high for the government to carry that he understood. She was successful in convincing the Prince to rescind his demands, allowing for the shaky coalition to remain steady for a while longer.

The introduction of Fox's East India Bill only complicated matters for the coalition. The goal of his bill was to nationalize the English East India Company and transfer control of its territories, revenues, and commerce over to seven commissioners who would be nominated by the British government and removed from their positions only by vote of either house of Parliament.[8] Some saw the Bill as a major political interference in the East India Company and claimed that the Whigs were attempting to take it over, but these claims did not stop the Bill from passing through the House with a strong majority. Despite it succeeding in the House of Commons, all was not well in the British government. King George III managed to convince the House of Lords not to pass the Bill by penning a letter that stated any person who voted in favour of the Bill would be considered an enemy of the King moving forward. The Bill failed to pass and the very next day William Pitt the Younger became the new Prime Minister. While this may have appeared to be a great loss for Fox and the Whigs, it offered them another sort of victory. By interfering in the government processes so blatantly, the King finally gave the Whigs proof of his despotic tendencies. The Whigs preached their righteous indignation to anyone who would listen, but they were unsuccessful in convincing the public of the King's despotic tendencies and the coalition lost its majority in the House.

While public opinion was an important part of the 1784 Westminster election, it played a greater role in society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with Whig historians crediting its influence on the press as part of the inevitable rise of accountable government and

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[8] Charles Fox, *Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox, on Monday, December 1, 1783, upon a Motion for the Commitment of the Bill "for Vesting the Affairs of the East-India Company in the Hands of Certain Commissioners, for the Benefit of the Proprietors, and of the Public."* (London: printed for J. Debrett, successor to Mr. Almon opposite Burlington House, Piccadilly, 1783).

democratic society.[9] The ruling elite may have exerted some influence over the press, but they were also increasingly required to recognize the power of popular politics and the press and adjust themselves accordingly. From the late seventeenth-century onwards, members of British society maintained that the press was a main form of protection for the constitution, not a threat, and that it had the ability to defend the public against government corruption by making its actions public knowledge. An increasingly politicized society emerged during the eighteenth-century and with it, a public that was willing to share its opinions widely and unencumbered. Before the eighteenth-century, the concept of public opinion was known by another name: public interest. Contemporaries of the time believed that valid and important ideas were emerging in extra-parliamentary society that deserved to be heard, and the press acted as a place where opinions and debates could be exchanged widely and with ease.

This widespread exchange of knowledge was not appreciated by all. The government itself did not always have a healthy respect for the power of the press, arguing that the press was sometimes too willing to sacrifice the good of the nation in order to make a profit. While alternatively, the opposition supported the idea that the press reflected public opinion and helped ensure a responsible government. Perhaps if Britain's society had truly been bi-partisan, then the press would have held limited sway, but even by the 1784 election it was not yet divided by truly bi-partisan ideology. The ministerial press acted as one would expect, supporting the government and criticizing the discourse created by the press, while the opposition press was

[9] See, for example Frederick Knight Hunt, *The Fourth Estate: Contributions towards a History of Newspapers, and of the Liberty of the Press.* (London: D. Bogue, 1850); Alexander Andrews, *The History of British Journalism from the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England,to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855, with Sketches of Press Celebrities.* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968).

seen as encouraging conflict and spreading misinformation about the government and its policies. The press's focus was not limited to simply party politics however, they also sold papers by printing stories about members of society that drew interest, such as Georgiana.

From the 1770s onwards. Britain witnessed an increase in newspaper reporting and alongside it a greater confidence in ridiculing public figures, including King George III. John Wilkes, member of Parliament and radical, published articles in the *North Briton* criticizing King George III for his appointment of his former tutor and his mother's rumoured lover, Lord Bute, to the office of Prime Minister, which was acceptable per the constitution, but led to accusations that the king was trying to claim too much power.[10] Wilkes also exploited the prominent anti-Scottish bigotry in English society to denounce Lord Bute and scorn the Scottish members of government and society, referring to them as "stinking people" and asserting their stupidity, claiming that "the ground might be fruitful, had they the wit to manure it."[11] Particularly leading up to the 1784 campaign, the government spent a lot of money on anti-Fox and anti-Georgiana propaganda in order to maintain their own popularity and discredit their opponents with the hopes of securing a better election outcome. The criticisms wrought upon Georgiana brought shame to her family, as she was ruthlessly mocked for her lack of feminine propriety, with some of her female contemporaries blaming her for her own misfortunes. Although the Duchess took issue with the criticisms she received, she continued to believe in the necessity of her work with the Whig party. She left Westminster and took a short break in St. Albans in an attempt to escape

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[10] *North Briton (1769: Reprint)*, July 3, 1762, no.5, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2001698289/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=7738d0f7.

[11] "A Perfect Description of the People and Country of Scotland," *North Briton (1769: Reprint)*, August 28, 1762, no. 13, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2001698304/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=2bf280f4.

the press, but her departure coincided with a downward shift in Fox's polls, so she returned quickly to resume her role. The women of her family and the wider community heavily criticized her actions, with Mary Hamilton noting in her diary that she had "met the Dss of Devonshire in her Coach with a mob around her, canvassing in the strand for Mr. Fox" and expressed it was "a pity that any of our sex should ever forget what is due to female delicacy."[12] Alternatively, her husband's family recognized Georgiana's importance and depended on her to return, regardless of the consequences. Whether they believed she acted without propriety is hard to say, but what is abundantly clear through the letters they wrote to her is that they understood her value to the campaign and knew they could not afford to lose her influence at that point during the election.

Georgiana's return was as impactful as the Whigs needed it to be, with the shopkeepers she visited hanging fox-skin muffs over their doors as a symbol of their support. Accusations from the press followed shortly, which stated that Georgiana and her followers were overpaying for purchases as a way of bribing them for their support and threatening to blacklist them should they not vote per Georgiana's request. Although the criticisms of Georgiana ran hot through the press, that is not to say that they did not go unchallenged. The opposition press supported by Fox and the Whigs made sure to issue rebuttals, mostly focusing on the actual issues of the election as opposed to slandering their candidates and supporters like the government press was wont to do. The Foxite press did their very best to keep Georgiana above the scandalous rhetoric perpetuated by the government press, instead portraying her as a virtuous and truthful woman who existed above the scandal the press tried to paint her with. This was unfortunately not

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[12] Florence and Elizabeth Anson, *Mary Hamilton, Afterwards Mrs. John Dickenson, at Court and at Home: From Letters and Diaries, 1756 to 1816* (London: J. Murray, 1925).

enough to keep Georgiana from the most unfavourable election scandal of them all: the butcher-kissing scandal. After her short break from the election, it was only a matter of time before a new rumour came to be that accused Georgiana of exchanging kisses for votes. Despite her numerous denials of the accusations, as well as the common nature of the electioneering kiss, this was one scandal Georgiana would never be able to escape. The kissing scandal was about more than just the nature of a kiss, it was about perpetuating the ideals of propriety versus impropriety and the nature of eighteenth-century gender roles. If one could truly be bought by a kiss from the Duchess, then a man was weak and relinquished too much political power to a simple woman. The prints depicting images of Georgiana kissing butchers charged Georgiana with undermining the public sphere and stepping outside the boundaries of elite womanhood.

While some assume that the criticisms endured by Georgiana were a detriment to Fox's campaign, this was not the belief of her Whig contemporaries. They recognized and valued her contributions to the election campaign and viewed her continued support of their campaign as indispensable despite the scandals that followed her. While this was likely more about potential political gains than viewing a woman as their equal, it demonstrates the ability of eighteenth-century men to recognize the political power and influence of a woman and understand that it was crucial for their goals that she continue to engage in her work. Not only that, but Foxite rhetoric throughout the campaign maintained that women were an important part of the voting process even without the ability to vote, as they could take a broader view of the nation's interests and had the natural sensibilities necessary to understand the needs of their fellow citizens. A similar line of thinking expanded even to the press, which despite their attacks on Georgiana, began to suggest that relationships candidates held with women were a measure of their suitability as candidates.

The underlying problem society had with Georgiana during this election was that her involvement disrupted the existence of an entirely male political order and threatened the eighteenth-century status quo. Though attempts to keep women and femininity from invading the political arena and public life began in the 1750s, it intensified in the final decades of the eighteenth-century when Georgiana and other women were at their most influential. The disgrace and ridicule that surrounded Georgiana during the 1784 campaign as a result of Pittite attacks gave added weight to the idea that politics was no place for a lady and assisted in the emergence of a powerful gender system of separate spheres for men and women. In an effort to fill the gap that is women's political history in periods like the eighteenth-century where at first glance, women's political involvement may not seem as integral as it would become after they received suffrage, some of the nuance of the century's socio-political culture has been lost.

Historians such as Linda Colley, Elaine Chalus, and even Nicholas Rogers have noted the involvement of women as influential and important during the 1784 Westminster election.[13] However, their perspectives on the contemporary reaction to women such as Georgiana's political engagement is short-sighted. They have put forward that the culture of the era led women like Georgiana to be judged and ridiculed for her "masculine" attempts at electioneering, even going as far as to say that her involvement was a detriment to Charles Fox's campaign. But

[13] See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*; Elaine Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness'" Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (New York: Longman, 1997); Elaine Chalus, "Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000); Elaine Chalus and Fiona Montgomery, "Women and Politics," in *Women's History, Britain 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 2005), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203341995.

this leaves out the fact that Georgiana's own contemporaries recognized her importance and influence on the campaign, and that the ridicule coming out of the press were more often than not targeted attacks from government-funded news outlets. But the lasting legacy of the 1784 Westminster election retains much more significance than the reputation of one woman, or even evidence of women's political participation before their enfranchisement in the twentieth century. The palpable influence of Georgiana during the 1784 Westminster election demonstrated to society that a disruption of the separate spheres was beginning to take place, and this disruption would continue no matter how hard they may try to fight it.

Something I discovered as I researched and combed through my sources around Georgiana and this time period, was how little literature there is surrounding women in politics in eighteenth century England. Georgiana was not only the ideal example to prove my thesis, she was also the only example. As I began outlining this project, I started building my source base from the works I found in the footnotes of Elaine Chalus's article "Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England," published in 2000, and Amanda Foreman's biography of Georgiana titled, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire,* published in 1998. These works assisted me in building my initial secondary source base, and from there I repeated the process with any new and notable works I came across in my research. Where I encountered the most challenges in building my bibliography was in identifying the types of primary sources that would be the most useful to me, while still being accessible as a remote researcher without access to physical sources beyond those that were online or could be mailed to me. I primarily utilized newspapers to demonstrate public opinion about Georgiana, and to some degree this was the simplest avenue for finding primary sources once I narrowed down the parameters of what I was looking for. I took note of the newspapers most often

mentioned in my secondary sources, such as the *London Chronicle*, the *Morning Herald,* the *Morning Chronicle*, and the *Morning Post*, and focused my research on the time periods where Georgiana would have been mentioned the most often. Due to Georgiana being the major focus of my project, I also hoped to get inside the minds of her, her family members, and her peers to understand exactly what they were thinking and saying to each other, so I utilized correspondences between them to further demonstrate what they thought about Georgiana's actions, specifically throughout the election campaign. A work titled *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* published in 1955 by the Earl of Bessborough was a collection of her correspondences beginning with her marriage to the fifth Duke of Devonshire, all the way until her final days of life in the early nineteenth century. I initially believed this work would be of great use to me, but what I found was a very limited selection of her correspondences. I discovered later when reading through the epilogue of Amanda Foreman's work on Georgiana, that upon her death, she bequeathed all of her papers to her close confidante and friend, Lady Elizabeth Foster, who selectively chose what to keep and what to destroy, choosing to leave those which would damage Georgiana's reputation and preserve her own.[14] This leaves me to wonder if some of those papers remained preserved, what more we could have come to understand and know about the Duchess of Devonshire's own thoughts and feelings.

The first chapter of this paper will explore the intersections of gender and class in eighteenth-century England's socio-political culture in order to create a better understanding of how Georgiana came to be politically involved, and to establish why some aspects of her involvement were more acceptable than others because of familial and societal expectations. It describes the nature of eighteenth-century British politics and the role of women within it,

[14] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 393.

including why women were such an integral part of the informal political system. The role of canvassing during election campaigns is discussed, as well as an explanation for why it is wrongfully centered as the primary contribution of women in eighteenth-century politics. We also look at how and why Georgiana married the Fifth Duke of Devonshire, what expectations were placed upon her when she entered the marriage, and how her and the Duke's such different values and personalities made them a less-than-perfect match. There is a brief discussion of Georgiana's fashion choices and how they initially led her to her celebrity status in the press, which would set the precedent for her future features during the 1784 Westminster election. Finally, it includes an analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile, or Treastise on Education* primarily as a way of examining its influence on eighteenth century English society and how his sexual politics were embedded in the socio-political culture of the time.

Chapter two will detail Georgiana's politics, explaining how she went from a typical peer's wife to a devoted follower of Charles Fox and integral part of the Whig party's 1784 election campaign. It begins with a brief background on Charles Fox, detailing his own upbringing as a spoiled son of Lord Holland, and his entrance into politics as a young man. It continues with an introduction to the relationship between Georgiana and Fox, including how and when they met, and why Georgiana saw him not only as a friend, but also as a politician worth following. Georgiana's time at Cox-Heath is discussed as one of her earliest pseudo-political initiatives, where she used both her fashion and influence to further the goals of the Whig party. Her and the Duke's return to London after Cox-Heath marked the beginning of Georgiana's interest in parliamentary debates and of their discussion at dinners where she played the role of political hostess. The latter half of the chapter details Georgiana's active role in politics, beginning around 1781 and all the way through the 1784 Westminster election, when

Lord Cecil Wray, Charles Fox, and Lord Hood were elected into the three available Westminster seats.

The final chapter demonstrates the growing importance of public opinion in the eighteenth-century and the growing power and freedom of the press to print what they desired with little consequence. It begins with a detailed discussion of both what the newspaper presses printed, but also how the ruling elite, including the government, used them to promote their own political interests and to strengthen their hold on society. It also shows the treatment of Georgiana during the 1784 election by the public and the press, including satirical prints created to mock her that were treated as real news, which by the end of the election caused her to retreat from public political involvement. Finally, it explains how the treatment of the Duchess by society was interpreted by those close to her through an examination of her correspondences, with her mother both criticizing her involvement and requesting she take a step back from politics, while members of the Whig party including the Duke and Duchess of Portland told her she must come back to help no matter the consequences for her own person. But ultimately it shows that despite these weighty criticisms levied against her, Charles Fox, although not the Whig party as a whole, was successful in his election because of Georgiana's efforts in campaigning.

Chapter 1: Intersections of Gender and Class in Eighteenth-Century England's Socio-Political Culture

The Nature of Politics and Women's Involvement in the Eighteenth-Century

Whenever election season came about in eighteenth-century Britain, the election dominated conversations, personal and business correspondences, as well as the press. This was particularly true for heated campaigns and contested seats, as they drew interest from various positions on the social scale. For women who were members of the political elite, whether by birth, marriage, or both, involvement in electoral politics was an unavoidable part of life. The nature of politics in the eighteenth-century was both familial and factional, requiring women to be both politically aware and interested in the current events, as well as actively taking part in whatever ways were both useful to those involved and respectable for the expectations of their gender. For some, this involvement included social politics – managing people and social activities for political gain – through canvassing, managing and directing electoral campaigns, or controlling family interests on behalf of the male family members. In the eighteenth-century, the personal characteristics of the candidates and the familial or factional connections to those candidates generally mattered more than ideological stances. An ideal election during this time would be uncontested, cheap, and undemanding; any demands were to be handled by men, the candidates, their patrons, or their agents. It was when elections were either contested, or threatened to be so, that political families, including the women, became more involved in the process.[15]

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[15] Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness' Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," p. 151.

During this time however, the British polity was determinedly male and general understanding was that women were constitutionally unfit for political responsibility. Despite this common rhetoric, women at all levels of society took part in the political process, whether it was due to the circumstances of their birth, inheritance, necessity, or personal interest and commitment to the party or candidate. Their involvement was also generally accepted under certain circumstances: if it could be related back to familial connections, if it developed from traditional female roles, if it was in support of men who were family members, and/or if it was motivated by duty to family or family interests.[16] That is not to say however, that their roles in electioneering forced women to act in a way that was always subservient to men. A select group of highly influential and political women – those who were involved the most extensively and effectively in electoral politics – undertook roles that could consist of anything from agents, advisors, or partners in their families or political factions.[17] Some women worked in managerial roles while others controlled political interests, and because of this they were often in positions of authority over men; their positions, as well as their open political involvement, was accepted out of respect for both their political capabilities and their positions within their families or factions.[18]

Eighteenth-century socio-political culture was rooted in this idea that politically active families worked together towards a common goal, ensuring that the women's contributions aligned with and complemented those of the men. Socializing, charity work, pardons for those who were unjustly accused, and patronage for the deserving all contributed to a family's political

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[16] Chalus and Montgomery, "Women and Politics," pp. 219-220.
[17] Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness'" Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," p.155.
[18] Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness'" Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," p.155.

credit. Much of this work was assigned to the women of the family as they were the key players in a culture that encouraged attending and organizing activities in the interest of both maintaining good relations with their families' major political supporters, as well as emphasizing their families' positions within their communities. The activities women took part in during elections were clearly political in nature, but those that took place between elections could also carry either blatant or subliminal political messages. The events they organized and attended, such as assemblies, balls, dinners, breakfasts, and race meets were public events where these families wanted to be seen by society; alternatively, families might host Public Days at a local great house, special dinners for the local Corporations, or entertainments for freeholders and their wives which all took place in the private setting of the home. Both public and private activities were important for the political family, and they were vitally important for the reputations and futures of these families. For example, prior to the 1754 Oxfordshire election, the Old Interest country gentlemen in Oxfordshire elected Miss Stapleton, the sister of a politically inclined squire, to serve as the patroness for the annual feast of the High Borlace. These types of appointments held significant meaning, and in this case it demonstrated that there was indeed support for the political aspirations of Miss Stapleton's brother, Sir Thomas Stapleton.[19] Even routine or more intimate socializing such as teas, cards, and visits often had political implications, whether it was during an election season or not.[20]

The commercialization of leisure that took place during the eighteenth-century meant there were more locations and opportunities where men and women could socialize together, but

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[19]Ralph John Robson, *The Oxfordshire Election of 1754.*, Oxford Historical Series. British Series (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 11.
[20]Chalus, "Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England," pp. 674-6.

the home continued to be one of the main settings for mixing. The importance of personal connections for both politics and patronage meant that politicians, patrons, and clients often met and strategized in each other's homes. The politicization of social activities in the home very much depended not only on the political importance of the host family and the guest list, but also on the timing and location of the events themselves. The second half of the eighteenth-century saw visiting become a ritualized activity, ranging anywhere from ceremonial visits to those of a personal nature. For some households, the guest lists were based on the hostess's or the family's political affiliation, but most politically active families drew a wide assortment of visitors to their homes. With social events largely considered to be the prerogative of women, and the immense impact and role played by social events in politics, it is difficult to understand how women could ever have been thought to be excluded from the eighteenth-century British political arena.

Public Days were of vital importance to the political family, and they were both costly and demanding for the host family to put on. The entertainment and refreshments had to be of both high quality and quantity, not just to demonstrate the family's hospitality and civility, but also as a display of their wealth, social standing, and the value they placed on the locality. Host families would look to increase the size of their group for the occasion with members of their extended family, important social and political connections, and notable artists, musicians, and writers in order to emphasize its importance and position not just in the locality, but in the wider community as well. The key role that women played in maintaining positive relationships during elections and in between them must not be underestimated. On rare occasions, women might be placed into the role of the family agent where they could be entertained by men for political purposes. More importantly than that however, was the role of the "Lady patronesses" that local clubs or groups employed to host events like their annual feasts or banquets, with the selection of

the women being considered a thinly veiled declaration of political intent. The woman who was chosen was honoured as a representative of her political family and the services she performed acted to form a connection between her family and the respective group. Contemporaries of the time viewed these nominations as an indication of political inclination, if not blatant political allegiance.[21]

Unlike during campaigns, there was little reason to socialize across class boundaries and fraternize to the same extent with freeholders between elections, however the lack of cooperation from some electorates, particularly the Corporations, required a certain amount of regular socio-political interaction. Formal calls and visits with important women like the Mayoress and the Aldermanesses were transactional and assisted in strengthening political connections. Although the political elite recognized just how freeholders' wives could influence their husbands' votes, they were not the only ones to consider the advantages of these types of arrangements. The freeholders also recognized that the women of the political elite offered key opportunities to gain influence and patronage. Elite women also had to take part in what Elaine Chalus referred to as "judicious burgessing," which she explained might mean offering the local Aldermen hospitality by socializing comfortably, but not over familiarly, with them over food and beverages, most commonly at dinners.[22] Gatherings like this helped to provide convenient social cover for women's political machinations where they might seek to address current issues at hand, observe whether any opposition or potentially problematic alliances were forming, or even attempt to appease those who were becoming dissatisfied with current affairs. This type of "judicious

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[21] Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness' Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," p. 159.
[22] Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness' Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," p. 160.

burgessing" was a skill that took time to develop and hone, making it a very stressful task for young women. Mature, more politically experienced women were the most effective at taking on these tasks as they both had a long-developed understanding of social expectations, as well as an awareness of personalities and rivalries of the Aldermen and the politics of the Corporation. These skills were vital for women to know because a woman who had the capabilities to succeed in these high stakes environments was a valuable member of a political family, thus gaining the necessary experience was a key aspect of an elite young woman's informal education.

Studies considering the involvement of women in eighteenth-century election campaigns and contests have tended to focus on their most visible presence, that being their participation in canvassing. While this was a key way that women got involved so they could directly influence the outcomes of elections, their other contributions must be considered equally. Women also took parts in parades and processions, they canvassed both formally and informally, and on occasion, they took part in the "war of words" either in person or in print. Homes were the domain of women throughout this time period, and during election times they also became the control centres and points of contact for political men; women who remained at home thus acted often as the managers and administrators of their families' campaigns. Though some did little more than receive and forward information, others actively took part in coordinating both people and events, and managing networks of correspondence and making key campaign decisions.[23]

During campaigns, communities and social activities were so heavily politicized that the excitement of elections was almost completely unavoidable for even the least political woman. If the odds were high that an election was to be contested, then the likelihood of women's

[23] Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness' Women and Electoral Politics in the Eighteenth Century," p. 166.

involvement in the election was likely to be high as well. Even the women whose families were not politically-involved or whose elections took place outside of London and the other major boroughs found themselves taking part in election activities in their localities. Although it was certainly those women from political families who were most drawn into electioneering because of community and familial expectations, some women's involvement had less to do with family connections, tradition, or duty; there were those women who chose to participate in support of a friend or a lover, or even in support of factions borne out of loyalty or political convictions. That being said, individual family expectations and traditions had more impact in determining the extent of women's electoral involvement more than personal preferences or ideological divisions; though women that chose to get involved in electioneering due to those personal convictions should not be underestimated.

Before Georgiana became deeply involved in politics, there was another elite woman who made her impact on people and politics in the mid-eighteenth century: Lady Rockingham, wife of Lord Rockingham, the leader of the Rockingham Whigs. Lady Rockingham was a combination of the two typical types of eighteenth-century political women: she was encouraged to participate in politics as Lord Rockingham's wife, but she also very closely identified with her husband's political concerns and found politics to be an intellectually stimulating and fulfilling pastime. What makes her such an interesting figure is that in 1765, when Lord Rockingham experienced difficulties with William Pitt, whose support they needed in order to survive, Lady Rockingham became the point of contact between the two of them. Her subtle flattery and light touch in opening negotiations allowed her to manoeuvre around Pitt's ego and establish a comfortable rapport with him. She approached Pitt under the guise of wanting to purchase a pair of horses from him, which she did, but she also managed to facilitate the transmission of political

papers between Rockingham and Pitt without compromising anyone involved. [24] Lord Rockingham very much relied on his wife's judgement, but he was not the only man who noted her great impact. Edmund Burke, a notable member of the Whig Party, advised Lady Rockingham to preserve her own correspondence as she did her husband's as he recognized its import and truly believed others should recognize it as well:

> Pray therefore let them be returned to keep company with the rest and to remain with the family as documents of the constant support and assistance you have uniformly given to your excellent Lord in the Course of that Conduct which will make this age a pattern of Virtue to the next, and to many more succeding (*sic*), notwithstanding its having its full share of evil examples. Your Names indeed ought to go down together; for it is no mean part you have had in the great services which that great and good man has done to his Country.[25]

Burke's quote demonstrates that even before Georgiana's widely recognized contributions to politics, there were other women such as Lady Rockingham involved in politics who were seen as integral members of the system by their contemporaries, regardless of their gender's inability to vote or engage in politics on a formal level.

Women and Patronage

With George III's accession to the throne, a new era of politics was ushered in where at an elite level, there was a fusion of Tory and Whig politicians into a united ruling class whose political aspirations involved obtaining offices and patronage for themselves, their family, and their friends. The patronage system provided the means through which both the state and the

[24] Elaine Chalus, "'My Minerva at My Elbow': The Political Roles of Women in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson*, ed. Richard Connors et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 226-7.
[25] Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. 5, 10 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), p. 457: Burke to Lady Rockingham, Beaconsfield, 20 Nov. 1782.

church obtained the people it needed in order to operate. The patronage system also provided opportunities for the elite to gain access to land and power, as well as the prospect of social advancement. The organization of the patronage system lent itself to women's participation in it, as it was based on the personal contacts between individuals, familial, and political connections, all of which were aspects of a social responsibility held in the hands of eighteenth-century women. The homes of politicians were often flooded with information pertaining to politics or social events, and it was the responsibility of members of those families to keep their friends and correspondents updated. This was the case in particularly for men and women in London, who were expected to be sources of any news they might encounter, no matter their own personal preferences; this could be a burden for those who disliked being involved in politics.[26]

However, for those who were interested in politics, this task was not as tedious. Information gained from home visitors or visits to other homes was extremely valuable for maintaining hierarchy of status through social exchange, but it also had a direct political purpose. For example, in November 1783, a morning visitor of Louisa Macdonald managed to confirm rumours about the Fox/North Coalition's plans concerning the India Bill at the beginning of the upcoming parliamentary session. She passed on the news to her stepmother, Lady Gower, who could then use this information to persuade her husband, then in opposition, to attend the session. While this information specifically was obtained through an entirely social call, some visits were more so, or even entirely motivated by political concerns. The goal of political visits was to persuade or pressure, seek or distribute advice, or declare or determine allegiances; all of which could lead to women visiting and being visited with political intent. In the country in particular,

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[26] Chalus, "Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England," pp. 680-1.

requests for pardon and patronage were often made by women who were either the representatives of important families, or who had useful connections of their own. For women born of or married into politically active families, like Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, these types of visits were an expectation of their role as women in elite families.[27]

Face-to-face contact across dining room tables or on ballroom floors was just as likely to have an impact as audiences held in the halls of Westminster or in hearings at political meetings or at court; because of this, women had the opportunity to be active, thriving, and successful political players in their own right. Furthermore, obtaining patronage successfully had more to do with the rank and family status of the petitioner, as the gender of the requester rarely impacted the outcome. In the patronage system, women most commonly acted as clients seeking the favour of a patron, but they could also act as intermediaries for family members or friends. While few women acted as patrons themselves due to their lack of access to political, administrative, and church offices, where the opportunity to bestow private patronage existed, women could be found. Of the patronage requests received by the Duke of Newcastle, more than ten percent of those came from women who sought pensions for themselves, places for themselves or their children, and/or seats in parliament for their male family members or friends. While more than half of the requests he received came from titled aristocracy, he also received requests from women from various positions within the social order, right down to women of the artisan class. Of these requests, fifty-seven percent of them were granted, while another twenty-four percent were promised fulfillment in the future when opportunities arose.[28]

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[27] Chalus, "Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England," pp. 680-2.
[28] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 115, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203006672.

Georgiana Spencer, Future Duchess of Devonshire

Georgiana's parents arranged for her education to reflect what they considered to be a good upbringing; one that would see her as polished, but not overly educated. She learned both feminine skills, such as deportment and harp-playing, as well as practical skills like geography, French, Latin, and Italian. She was a quick study, but what excited Georgiana's mother the most was her excellent grasp on etiquette.[29] The emphasis Lady Spencer put on acquiring proper social skills and etiquette encouraged the part of Georgiana that was a performer at heart. Georgiana's ability to hold lively and perceptive conversations almost never failed to charm the adults around her, but she hardly cared for their praise unless her mother and father recognized it as well. Lady Spencer despised extravagance, ostentation, and pretentiousness, so in the act of raising her daughters she attempted to teach them to value decorum and piety as she did.[30] When she was six years old, she went abroad with her parents, to Spa at first, but when this did not help settle Lord Spencer's unhappy disposition, Lord and Lady Spencer left Georgiana behind for Italy, with the latter hoping this would help to improve the Lord's temperament. With Georgiana's siblings having already been left behind in Britain, Georgiana was now left alone with her grandmother, feeling quite shocked and abandoned by this turn of events. Maybe believing her abandonment had something to do with some unnamed misbehavior, Georgiana became much more self-conscious and anxious to please; she imitated her grandmother's likes and dislikes and trained herself to anticipate what adults would expect of her. When the Spencers returned, there was a noticeable difference in Georgiana's behaviour, of which Lady

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[29] Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 9.
[30] Iris Leveson Gower, *The Face Without a Frown: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire*, 5th ed. (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1947), p. 18.

Spencer noted and praised in a letter to a friend. Amanda Foreman argues that Lady Spencer did not realize this "improvement" in Georgiana's behaviour was at the cost of her self-confidence and created a dependence on other people that as a child, made her obedient, but as an adult, made her much more easily manipulated.[31]

Georgiana's marriage to the Fifth Duke of Devonshire was a typical marriage for the time, meeting all the conventional components of suitability. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it was politically suitable. In the eighteenth century, politics were a hereditary business where children were expected to uphold the traditional doctrines of their families, particularly in the case of old families, and to do otherwise could mean being labelled a renegade or traitor. The marriage of Georgiana and the duke was certainly political in nature, but their position, breeding, and age also made them an ideal match. In spirit however, they were a very poor match indeed. At twenty-four years old, William, the Fifth Duke of Devonshire, was a "dull, worthy conscientious young man without humanity, humour, or spontaneity."[32] Iris Leveson Gower wrote that the Duke was not a bad man, but he was "shadowy and unambitious," and that if he had been born into a lesser position, that he may have been a "good and worthy man."[33] Georgiana, on the other hand, was a young girl of only seventeen, but within her she was entirely full of spontaneity, kindness, impetuousness, and charm. She possessed a loving and demonstrative nature, was anxious to please, which meant she could have been molded into any shape the Cavendish family wished, "provided that the shape were lovely and honest."[34]

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[31] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 12.
[32] Leveson Gower, *The Face Without a Frown*, p. 20.
[33] Leveson Gower, *The Face Without a Frown*, p. 20.
[34] Leveson Gower, *The Face Without a Frown*, p. 20.

Once married, Georgiana would become the first hostess, not only of the ton, but of this era's most vital political party in England.

It was not uncommon for marriages of the time to be political in nature or to prioritize upholding social status over a true romantic relationship, in fact it was the norm for those of Georgiana's social standing. So why do the stark differences in nature of Georgiana and the Duke matter? They matter because those differences in nature at the time of their marriage would have an impact on the remainder of their lives, both as a couple and individually. Where Georgiana was raised by Lady Spencer to appreciate knowledge and learning, as she was a lifelong learner herself, the loss of both his parents by the age of sixteen meant that the Duke lacked the same parental guidance and criticism which was so important for personal growth. Once married, Georgiana maintained her love for education, engaging in voracious reading of history books as well as practicing minuets composed for her by the great violinist Giardini. Not only that, but Georgiana also built herself a laboratory where she could study geology and experiment with chemistry, emulating her husband's kinsmen, Henry Cavendish, in a way she thought would please her husband as it did her mother. However, he was not pleased in the slightest, stating that he did not find this occupation suitable for his wife. Despite her arguments that it was a pastime her mother encouraged, and Henry Cavendish had agreed to assist her with her experiments, the Duke replied that he would prefer for her "not to visit him again" now that she had done her duty in "waiting upon" him, because he was "not a gentleman."[35] This moment saw Georgiana's idea of the world shift on its axis entirely. Raised to consider all aspects of work to be admirable and necessary, where idleness, not work, was the sin, she hardly knew the proper response. But she was also taught by her mother that obedience to one's husband was of

[35] Leveson Gower, *The Face Without a Frown,* pp. 26-7.

the utmost importance, so she accepted his instruction, and literally and figuratively, shut the door of her laboratory behind her.

The early weeks of her marriage to the Duke of Devonshire saw her engage in a high-stress race to learn everything there was to know about being an aristocratic wife that could only be learned through experience. She was not just the new Duchess of Devonshire, she was also the chatelaine of Chatsworth and thus had numerous expectations and responsibilities upon her that she needed to quickly learn how to excel at, lest she be a failure. Upon her arrival at Chatsworth, the Cavendishes sent the Duke's agent, Heaton, to meet with her and prepare her for what they expected her to achieve in her new role. He provided her with a list of expenses that detailed the names of parishioners and tenants who received charity from the estate and whose welfare was now her responsibility. Her first task as the new Duchess was to fulfill her social obligations, maintaining the strength and importance of the Cavendish name, as well as to establish good favour between herself and the Duke's dependents. The Duke's friends also wished to make the acquaintance of his new bride, often arriving for a visit with very short notice, all of whom she was expected to entertain. Georgiana needed to remain composed and friendly towards these strangers, and she was greatly successful in doing so, in part because of Lady Spencer's presence at her side, as well as her upbringing that focused heavily on the social skills and etiquette she was now being expected to use with great skill and expertise.[36]

Despite the common understanding that Georgiana was very much her own woman in many ways, she still worked very hard to uphold societal expectations. For her, this included hosting the very important Public Days at Chatsworth House. Chatsworth House hosted these events once a week, where all of the Duke's tenants as well as any respectable stranger who

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[36] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp 25, 28.

wished to see the house and have dinner with is owners, could do so. At these events, Georgiana and the Duke waited in the hall, dressed in their finery as if they were meant to be attending a state occasion, and greeted each visitor to the house personally. Understandably, her first appearance was of great excitement, but after a few weeks the Public Days at Chatsworth House became considerably less crowded. These early Public Days were a vital part Georgiana's political and social education, as she quickly learned how to orchestrate a full room of strangers, how to pick out those who she should pay particular attention to, and perhaps most importantly, how to detach herself from those who would otherwise cling to her presence all day. Only the grandest families could afford to host such events as they were vastly expensive, but as mentioned previously, they were an important means of encouraging good relations with the tenants and maintaining their local political influence.[37]

Public Days were of particular importance in 1774, the year Georgiana married into the Cavendish family, as a general election was scheduled for October of that year and the Cavendishes needed to defend their electoral interests in Derbyshire. As peers were not allowed to campaign in parliamentary elections, their wives and relatives had to campaign on their behalf, and this would be the first time Georgiana would do so on behalf of her husband. On October 8, Georgiana went to her first election ball in Derby, dressed in fashionable London clothes to impress the locality. At this point, Georgiana was not yet using fashion as a political tool, but as was typical of the time, she used her sense of style to display her social status and her place in the societal hierarchy.[38] Events like this often held an open-door policy, thus when Georgiana

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[37] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p.29.
[38] Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, OUP Catalogue (Oxford: University Press, 2007), p. 249. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199215287.001.0001; Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Régime,"* Past and Present Publications. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 6.

arrived it was packed and hot, creating an incredibly suffocating atmosphere. But Georgiana, as she was both raised an expected to do, kept her poise and danced to the music with grace. Although the Whigs as a party did not achieve great success in this election, the Duke's candidates were voted in without any issue. Though most people saw Georgiana in a favourable light at this time, she was very wary of forgetting herself and committing a grave error that would upset the Cavendish family. As a family, they expected Georgiana to conform to their ways, which included near-extreme levels of self-control over their emotions as well as the peculiar drawl that characterized their speech. Her desire to be accepted by the family led to her adopt all of their mannerisms, including their speech patterns, resulting in her name's pronunciation changing from "George-i-ahna," as it was prior to her marriage, to "George-aina;" it would remain this way for the rest of her life.[39]

Despite her difficulties fitting into the Cavendish family, for her entire adult life she stood out as an icon of fashion and a celebrity; Kimberley Chrisman-Campbell states that "Georgiana was one of England's primary tastemakers. She not only invented fashions; she also inspired them."[40] But her status as a fashion icon was not a positive characteristic in the eyes of eighteenth-century society, and her fashion choices were the beginning of her numerous negative appearances on the pages of the newspaper press. The fact that she was a trendsetter was seen as inappropriate for someone of her rank and gender, and newspapers implied that as the wife of a peer, convention would require her to dress in a manner that was a passive reflection of her husband's wealth and social status, rather than choosing to wear clothing that express her own

[39] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire,* p. 29.
[40] Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, "French Connections: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and the Anglo-French Fashion Exchange," *Dress* 31, no. 1 (2004): 3–14, https://doi.org/10.1179/036121104805253153.

taste and personality.[41] In April 1777, disapproval of her fashion choices escalated into violence when her eccentric fashions drew a literal mob: "Last week the D---ss of D--- went to Ranelagh, dressed in a style so whimsically singular, as quickly collected the company round her; they behaved with great rudeness, insomuch that she was necessitated to take shelter in one of the boxes... until the motley crew had retired."[42] The fast-paced cycle of fashion trends where the lower-classes attempted to imitate the rich by recreating their fashions prompted the wealthy to distance themselves by adopting new fashion trends was a development that grew during the eighteenth century, causing a large amount of stress and anxiety.[43]

There was no shortage of criticisms surrounding Georgiana's fashion choices, but none were as great as those that pertained to her choice to decorate her hair with enormous ostrich feathers. This fashion reportedly created unnecessary hostility between aristocratic women as they attempted to possess the larges feather, and when Georgiana obtained enormous ostrich feathers for herself it was seen as an arrogant attempt to portray her superiority. An article in *The Morning Post* reported that "The Duchess of Devonshire is the most envied woman this day in the *Ton*... for a delicious *Ostrich* feather lately presented her by Lord Stormont on his arrival from Paris, measuring exactly one yard and three inches: -- the *topple-crowned* pellets of inferior

[41] *Morning Herald*, October 21, 1782, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000911025/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=5b2cd852.

[42] *London Chronicle*, April 29, 1777, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000565483/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=181da19f.

[43] Neil McKendrick, "The Commercialization of Fashion," in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (London: Europa, 1982), 34–98.

plumage now look contemptible in her Grace's presence."[44] There was so much debate surrounding the potential impropriety of Georgiana's decision to wear such large ostrich feathers was so prevalent that William Combe, a satirist and literary imitator, capitalized on the interest in Georgiana and produced publications both critiquing and defending her feathers. In *An Interesting Letter to the Duchess of Devonshire* he criticized Georgiana: "Your Grace, by the singular manner in which you adorned your person, not only placed an exorbitant plume upon the heads of all who frequent the polite places of public resort, but gave the same decoration to every unhappy Female who patroles (*sic*) the purlieus of Prostitution."[45] His criticism not only reiterates the complaint that Georgiana's fashion is too eccentric, it also insinuates that the feathers are immoral and associates the trend with prostitutes. Later, he published another letter taking the opposite stance, where he pretends to answer one of Georgiana's critics, writing: "Sir, pray give your leave to the Duchess to wear a few Feathers in her head. Pray do, sir; what can they signify... And I must tell you, that your asperity towards the Ladies on the subject of Feathers, *will never*, sir, *be a Feather in* YOUR *Cap*."[46] While it is difficult to ascertain exactly where Combe stood on the issue of Georgiana's feathers, what is clear is that those who held a critical view of the feathers felt very strongly about the matter, and this would foreshadow her treatment by the public and the press in the years to come.

[44] *The Morning Post*, April 7, 1775, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000927535/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=33f48b29.
[45] William Combe, *An Interesting Letter to the Duchess of Devonshire* (London, 1778), p. 54. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0105440262/ECCO?sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=21ecb0dc&pg=2.
[46] William Combe, *A Letter to Her Grace the Duchess of D. Answered Cursorily, by Democritus*, p. 7.

The Influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Sexual Politics

During the eighteenth-century, concerns began to arise about the impacts of politically ambitious men seeking universal suffrage on the population of British women. One method of preventing women from legitimizing their claims to citizenship in the same way as British men was to emphasize the differences between men and women, whether they be physical, intellectual, emotional, or functional. For this reason, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's sexual politics became greatly influential in Britain, amongst both conservative moralists such as James Fordyce, Hannah More, and Jane Austen, as well as feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft who found it together "impossible and undesirable" to ignore the importance of the separate male and female spheres.[47] Rousseau believed that the only thing that men and women shared in common, was their species.[48]

This is particularly important because Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire, was devoted to Rousseau's ideas, and read his works in their original French. For someone like Georgiana, an active politician and woman who flouted social norms, Rousseau's commonly understood ideas about the roles of men and women may not appear to line up with her way of thinking, but in some respects, his understandings of men and women were fairly progressive. He explains that "with respect to what [men and women] have in common they are equal" and in the ways that they are different "they are not capable of being compared." [49] He argued very much in favour

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[47] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, Rev. ed. (New Haven [Conn.]; Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 239-40.
[48] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or Treatise on Education.*, International Education Series (D. Appleton and Company) ;v. 20 (New York: Appleton, 1899), p. 259.
[49] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or Treatise on Education.*, p. 260.

of the separate spheres ideology, understanding that men and women had common goals, but those actions which would allow them to reach these goals would be different.

His interpretation of the roles of men and women appear to present the two genders as two halves that make a whole. He argued that "woman is worth more as a woman, but less as a man" and that "wherever she attempts to usurp ours she remains inferior to us."[50] He adhered to the contemporary belief that women were a class below men, and that they should remain loyal to the duties of women. He believed that for women to adopt the qualities of men at the expense of their own would be a detriment to their sex, and that by attempting to "usurp our advantages," women would not be able to manage their gender-specific roles and thus would lose half of their value. Rousseau recognized the value of women, and of their education, but argued that "the whole education of women ought to be relative to men."[51] This was clear in his description of what exactly that education should entail them to do:

> To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them.[52]

Rousseau also argued that from a young age, girls should be taught restraint. Not insofar that they could not know joy or laughter, or even playfulness as children, but that they should not live their entire childhood without knowing the restraint expected of women.[53] He explained that this "habitual restraint" would result in a type of docility that women required simply for their own existence, as they would "never cease to be subject either to a man or to the judgements of men" and as women, they could not be allowed to place themselves above these judgements.[54]

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[50] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, p. 262.
[51] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, p. 263.
[52] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, p. 263.
[53] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, pp. 269-70.
[54] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, p. 270.

Despite his rather progressive beliefs about the ways that girls should be raised and educated, his perspective on the proper place and behaviour of grown women was less so. He explained that an educated man was usually expected to marry an educated woman, and a wife that was uneducated or came from a class where education was not possible flouted standards of the time. That being said, he also argued that he himself would prefer a "simple girl, rudely brought up" to "a girl of learning," explaining that a woman of keen intelligence, who did not know her place, was a "scourge" not only to her husband, children, and household, but to society as a whole.[55]

Worst of all, for Rousseau, was a woman who left the confines of her own home to seek any sort of public recognition, like Georgiana was wont to do. He argued that a woman away from her place in the home would be ridiculed and criticized, and rightly so because she left her station and entered another for which she was not prepared or suited. Furthermore, Rousseau argued that even if a woman possessed genuine talents, "her pretension would abase them" and that for an honourable woman, her dignity depended on her remaining unknown, her glory was rooted in her husband's esteem, and her greatest pleasure existed in the happiness of her family. Knowing that his work held influence, Rousseau even appealed to his readers directly, asking them which option of two would lead his audience to respect a woman more: a woman "occupied with the duties of her sex, with her household cares, the garments of her children lying around her" or, a woman found "writing verses on her dressing-table, surrounded with all sorts of pamphlets and sheets of notepaper in every variety of colour?" He concluded this section by saying that if all the men in the world were sensible, that "every girl of letters would remain unmarried all her life.[56]

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[55] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, pp. 302-3.
[56] Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, p. 303.

But to Georgiana, she was not abandoning her duties as a woman of her station or necessarily working outside of the expectations of elite women in the eighteenth century. It could be argued that because the Duke of Devonshire's wealth, background, and holding of six seats made him one of the leaders of the Whig party, that her actions on behalf of the Whig party were directly related to her family as was expected at the time. The Duke of Devonshire was generally uninvolved in the public politics of the party, choosing to remain in a role that could be considered more behind-the-scenes in that he would happily fund that party and discuss his personal opinions in private, but this was not what Georgiana wanted for him. As she grew to understand her role as the Duchess of Devonshire, she became much more invested in the Whig party and had ambitious plans for the Duke's political career. Unfortunately for her, he very much wished to avoid the responsibilities attached to party leadership, choosing instead to invest his time into his club, Brook's.[57] Because her husband lacked the same ambitions she held, Georgiana looked for a way to create a political role for herself "within the perimeters of her ordinary duties."[58]

While *Emile, or Treatise on Education* was an influential work in the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* was the work that brought him his popularity in England and amongst women.[59] This work also left a lasting impression on Georgiana, and her personal copy located at Chatsworth is covered in annotations.[60] It is a tale told through two novels, with the first encompassing a story of wifely virtue and the second a counter story of

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[57] Amanda Foreman, "A Politician's Politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig Party," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 181-2.
[58] Foreman, "A Politician's Politician," p. 182.
[59] James H. Warner, "The Reaction in Eighteenth-Century England to Rousseau's Two Discours," *PMLA* 48, no. 2 (1933): 471–87, https://doi.org/10.2307/457786
[60] Brian Masters, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), p. 68.

women's friendship, but what it really does is demonstrate an eighteenth-century perspective of a woman's conflict between desire and duty.[61] Georgiana's love for this novel tells us a lot about her perspective on her life and her marriage to the Duke. After four years of marriage there was still no sign of an heir, something that was most unimaginable to members of society. But even four years into what was an entirely loveless marriage, Georgiana still wished for Rousseau's descriptions of love in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and Brian Masters noted that the lines Georgiana marked in her copy of the novel were always the most passionate.[62]

[61] Donald R. Wehrs, "Desire and Duty in 'La Nouvelle Héloïse,'" *Modern Language Studies* 18, no. 2 (1988): 79–88, https://doi.org/10.2307/3194768.
[62] Masters, *Georgiana*, p. 68.

Chapter 2: Georgiana's Politics

When women moved away from the familial model of political support, like Georgiana did in the 1784 Westminster election, they rocked gendered foundations of the polity and "drew upon themselves the ire of satirists, moralists, and critics of all political hues."[63] Georgiana's political career initially lined up with what was considered acceptable, working on behalf of her husband with designs of furthering his political career but due to his disinterest, she found herself lacking purpose. She became dedicated to the Whig party and acted as a political hostess in London, passing along letters and, in some cases, rumours, between powerful men, serving as a confidante for both Charles James Fox and the Prince of Wales. In this way, Georgiana was doing little more than what was accepted and expected of elite women who at this time, were permitted to enact a certain level of political influence behind the scenes. However, during the Westminster election, Georgiana's actions affronted the divide that separated private female influence on male influence, which was acceptable by social standards, and from autonomous and political public action, which was decidedly unacceptable.[64]

The Influence of Charles James Fox

Fox was brilliant but flawed as a politician and as a man. His career up until the late 1770s alternated between political success and failure, and great wealth and bankruptcy. Much of his behavior can be attributed to his contemporarily unconventional upbringing that lacked restrictions on his existence, both materially and emotionally; his father, Lord Holland, believed that an intelligent child should be indulged in everything, never reprimanded or thwarted, and

[63] Chalus and Montgomery, "Women and Politics," p. 220.
[64] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, p. 244.

should not receive any instruction that would threaten his happiness. At age fifteen, Fox had outgrown his schooling at Eton and went on to study at Hertford College, Oxford. By seventeen he left college for the continent, spending excesses of money on gambling and new fashions, which he then brought back to London. In 1768, Lord Holland bought the borough of Midhurst for Charles, and he took his seat in the House of Commons while still eighteen months below the minimum age regulations. He was well-known enough for the House to make an exception for him, and they were proven to have made the right decision when he executed his speeches effortlessly in front of the House. That being said, from his early years in the House he demonstrated a complete unwillingness to feign respect for experienced parliamentarians whose shortcomings were apparent to him. In 1774, Fox's mother, father, and brother all died, leaving him alone and entirely in charge of his family's fortune and properties. When he was dismissed from parliament two years later by Lord North, he lost his outlet from which to express his energies and passion, leaving him all the more susceptible to gambling in excess.[65]

Georgiana became friends with Fox after he came to stay at Chatsworth in 1777. Before he arrived at Chatsworth house, Georgiana was in low spirits and her liveliness was a performance kept up only for appearances. However, when Fox arrived, his presence produced an almost immediate change in Georgiana as she found herself both intrigued by him and stimulated by his intellect and conversation. He made a huge impression on her intellectually, and he, more than anyone else, assisted in leading her to her life's vocation: politics.[66] Georgiana valued his commitment to politics, but more than that she appreciated that he spoke to her as if she were his equal, discussing his thoughts and ideas with her, as well as encouraging

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[65] Masters, *Georgiana*, pp. 56-62.
[66] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 55-56.

her active participation. His belief in her convinced her that she could make more of herself, that she need not only be a wife. He helped to awaken within her a sense of loyalty and commitment to the Whig party that she did not possess before, but what most endeared Fox to Georgiana were the qualities she felt they shared: a capacity for deep and loyal friendship rather than the fragile bond of social acquaintance, as well as an aptitude for pranks and recklessness.[67] By the time he left Chatsworth she was his devoted follower; even decades later she was still one of his most loyal supporters.

Georgiana's Early Political Involvement

Georgiana created a role for herself in the Whig party that was ambassadorial in nature, taking advantage of any opportunity that came her way to promote not only the interests of her husband, but the party as well. One of the earliest initiatives Georgiana undertook was in 1778, during the French invasion scare. At this time, the Whigs were unpopular in British society for supporting the Americans' declaration of independence. The Whigs contended that the government was at fault for attempting to force an unjust system of taxation on the colonists, which was an argument the public rejected, as did the press who accused the party of scheming with Britain's enemies in order to break up the empire. Although this was an unfair accusation to make against the Whigs, it raised a particular dilemma for them that they could not ignore: The Whigs saw this conflict through the lens of Westminster politics and thus viewed it as part of the struggle between the people and the Crown. This perspective caused them to privately hope that the Americans would be victorious. The Whigs did however, want to prove their

[67] Masters, *Georgiana*, p. 62.

loyalty to Britain, so the members did what they could to support their country and assist in aiding its defences.[68]

The Duke and Duchess of Devonshire went so far as to move to the military camp that as set up at Cox-Heath in order for the Duke to join the other Lord Lieutenants in training regiments of volunteers. The Duke rented a large house for the Duchess that was nearby, but she convinced hum to allow her to live in the camp with him. She followed the Duke as he inspected his regiment, and even though generally speaking women were not accepted out on the field, the officers indulged her desire to participate in the preparations. This did not last long however, with the Duke quickly growing tired of her presence and the soldiers no longer viewing her as something new and unique so she reluctantly returned to socializing with the ladies of the camp. In conversations over tea with Lady Melbourne and Mrs. Crewe, Georgiana discovered that she was not the only woman tired of sitting around and doing nothing more than just observing the soldiers. heir solidarity gave her the boost she needed to try and figure out a way that women could contribute even though they were not able to take part in military action.[69]

Her idea was positively ingenious. She adapted her riding habit so that it would resemble a military uniform and reflect the look of camp's regimental uniforms, ultimately creating the popular "military look." Georgiana's popularity and influence in both society and the fashion world may have made this particular action enough to increase the popularity of the Whig party, but at this time she was committed to doing everything she could to benefit the party. So she organized the officers' wives into an auxiliary corps to demonstrate, not just to British society, but to the world, that the Whigs and their wives were committed and prepared to fight the

[68] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 58, 62.
[69] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 58, 63.

French.[70] Although Georgiana and the women's auxiliary corps only dressed up in uniforms to support the men and try to raise their spirits, what was so impactful about this choice was that it broke with tradition; aristocratic women organized themselves to help their men during a time of war for the first time ever. The sight of these women marching through the camp in their military look left an impression, so much so that it was reported on by the *London Chronicle*, which stated that:

> The Duchess of Devonshire appears everyday at the head of the beauteous Amazons at Cox-Heath. Who are all dressed en militaire, in the regimentals that distinguish the several corps in which their Lords, etc., serve, and charm every beholder with their beauty and affability.[71]

The publicity surrounding this "imaginative display of patriotism," such as what was written in the *London Chronicle* was a "propaganda coup" for the Whigs, as well as for Georgiana herself. In this circumstance, both Georgiana and the Whigs benefited from their connection with each other, and once that connection stuck, she was no longer only representing her husband in the party.[72]

Upon her return from Cox-Heath, Georgiana followed parliamentary debates and never missed an opportunity to discuss their implications at dinners as she was determined to impress Fox and the other Whig leaders with her political understanding. Soon enough, Georgiana became well-informed enough to have her own opinions about political debates that she was happy to share with her peers and she had refined her skills as a political hostess with her dinners at Devonshire House serving their purpose as a place to reward supporters and recapture those

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[70] Foreman, "A Politician's Politician," p. 182.

[71] "News," *London Chronicle*, July 16, 1778, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, https://link-gale-com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/apps/doc/Z2000568337/BBCN?u=uniwater&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=1fea6e59.

[72] Foreman, "A Politician's Politician," p. 182.; Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 63.

whose loyalties may have wavered. Equally importantly for a woman in her role, Georgiana had both developed the ability to obtain information without betraying any confidences, as well as the knowledge of when it was important to appear informed and when to appear oblivious. Georgiana also acted with conviction and expected her friends to do the same, particularly when she wore the Whig colours of blue and buff to support her party. Her conviction was what made her so convincing and why she had so easily become one of the party's best-known representatives. She was an expert in propaganda, possessing an aptitude for the public aspect of politics that was shared by Charles Fox, who both understood the power symbols possessed in raising or lower morale, or in inviting or repelling support.[73]

Her skills and knowledge base led Charles Fox to encourage Georgiana to play a larger role in increasing the party's public presence which resulted in her missing the annual celebration of the Queen's birthday in January 1780. Both society and the press commented on her absence because it was the first time the Duchess had ever spurned the court and it was seen as a sign of the Whig party's confidence in their ability to drive Lord North out of office. The Whigs were fuelling discontent throughout Britain, with people around the country demanding democratic reform of the parliamentary system take place. On April 6, 1780, the Whigs ambushed Lord North with a surprise resolution, pointing out that over a hundred-thousand people had petitioned Parliament to make changes, with the government choosing to respond by crushing it. The House voted 233 to 215 in favour of the resolution and Lord North's immediate response was to tender his resignation, however George III insisted that he stay in office. Unfortunately for the Whigs, the Speaker fell ill and prevented the Commons from meeting for a week. By the time the vote was taken up again, the independent MPs fell on the side of the

[73] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp, 74-5.

government, voting against the resolution and causing the Whigs to lose that advantage. They did however, have a stroke of good luck when the young Prince of Wales and future George IV allied himself with the Whigs, absolving them of their accused disloyalty to the Crown, ultimately making it easier for them to attack the King.[74]

Despite their loss, the Whigs continued their attack on the government, with the Duke of Richmond introducing a resolution on June 3, 1780 that stated that the constitution should be rewritten to permit universal suffrage and annual parliaments. Once again, the Whigs fell victim to an unfortunate situation where Lord George Gordon, a Protestant fanatic, chose to march on Parliament at the head of a large mob, carrying a petition from the Protestant Association which opposed giving legal rights to Catholics. The danger the mob posed quickly grew, attacking the members of Parliament as they tried to leave the House, devolving into a full-blown riot by nightfall. By the next day, the mob was close to taking over the city. With the magistrates nowhere to be found and confusion over who had the power to allow the use of firearms against civilians meant that there were no troops in place to help. By June eighth, the army arrived, and a group of volunteers were able to organize a strong defense against the mob, with only pockets of resistance remaining by the ninth. Whole blocks of the city were in ruins with the number of casualties totalling up to 458. The immediate aftermath saw the discrediting of the reformers and all the Association movements, as well as the blame falling on the Whigs for fuelling discontent outside of Parliament. Seizing the political advantage this offered him, Lord North called for an election to take place on the first of September that same year.[75]

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[74] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 75-6.
[75] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 79-81.

With an election upcoming, Georgiana's support was high in demand. Not only was she needed for canvassing on behalf of the Cavendishes in Derby, the Duke's family wanted her to convince Lord Spencer, her father, to align his interests with theirs. Her brother's former tutor, Sir William Jones hoped she would write letters on his behalf as he was contesting the seat at Oxford University. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a playwright and poet, also hoped to become a politician, but his lack of wealth and family connections made it extremely difficult, nearly impossible, for him to do so own his own merit. He too, sought assistance from Georgiana, who arranged for him to stand in the election at the Spencer-dominated borough of Stafford despite her misgivings about him giving up his literary career duly where he ultimately won his seat. A week later Georgiana was invited by Charles Fox to join him on the hustings as he contested the borough of Westminster. Her nerve shocked the press, despite her only standing on the platform for a few minutes in support. Fox was brilliant on the hustings, entrancing his supporters with rousing speeches about parliamentary reform, the consequences of royal tyranny, and the rights of the British people. Fox won a comfortable majority during this election and it was on this campaign where he earned his moniker "Man of the People."[76]

As previously mentioned, it was not uncommon for elite women to take part in electioneering on behalf of their male relations, whether they be fathers, brothers, or husbands. But Georgiana's involvement in the 1784 Westminster election did not follow the standard guidelines of women's involvement in elections in two crucial areas. First, Westminster was neither a family borough nor was it rural or secluded enough to keep her actions from being scrutinized by society. Instead, it was the constituency in which the Houses of Parliament were located and the largest democratic borough in Great Britain in terms of its electorate, thus it was

[76] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 79-82.

the borough that was most likely to garner attention from the press.[77] While this in itself could have potentially been explained away as good for the party her husband was involved in, her actions were less so in support of the party as a whole and more in support of a man who was not a blood relation: Charles James Fox.

After General Cornwallis surrendered to the combined forces of the French and the Americans at Yorktown in October 1781, Lord North offered his resignation the King almost immediately, although George III did not accept it until March 20th, 1782. The Whigs were certain they would come to power quickly after Lord North's resignation, but this was not the case. George III was not yet prepared to accept the Whig party as a whole, so he insisted they share power with the minister he preferred: the Marquess of Shelburne. The Whigs were not particularly pleased with this turn of events, however they accepted the King's terms with the hopes that they could soon push Shelburne out and take the majority power for themselves. During the celebrations at St. James Palace, Fox came to Georgiana with a proposal. Because Fox was now Foreign Secretary, under parliamentary rules he as a member of Parliament was required to re-offer himself to his constituents. He was impressed by how the crowd reacted to Georgiana when she appeared on the hustings at Covent Garden in 1780, so he requested that she make similar appearances on his behalf, which she quickly agreed to do. The Duke himself, along with the other party members agreed to Fox's proposal and allowed her to assist in planning the event. They came to the conclusion that Georgiana should lead a women's delegation of around five or six women, figuring that if the crowds reacted so enthusiastically to one woman, their enthusiasm for more women would be even greater.[78]

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[77] Colley, *Britons*, p. 244.

[78] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 89-90.

Georgiana's role was not to bring women into politics, but to bring them out of what Brian Masters refers to as the "discreet half-light" and into a leading role.[79] At the time, elite Whig ladies often found themselves in the lobbies of the House of Commons for hours, listening to reports on what was happening within its walls, hoping for news, and waiting for the results of a division. Not unlike today's parliament, eighteenth-century England's House of Commons was much like a theatre, with dramatic addresses and moving speeches that would be discussed for days afterwards. Therefore, it was quite common to see elite women enjoying the fun of politics, if not actively participating in it, and supporting their men on the hustings. In this way, it was not an outrageous departure of tradition for Georgiana and other women to be at the hustings, the difference now was that they joined the candidates, like Fox, instead of supporting from the sidelines.

Georgiana performed her first official duties for the Whig party on April 3, 1782 by helping Fox with his re-election campaign. The Duchess of Devonshire and another lady stood on the hustings where they waved their hats with the rest of the large crowd in compliment to Fox. Fox stood upon a platform underneath three hanging banners that read: "The Man of the People," "Freedom and Independence," and "Independence."[80] The crowd reacted loudly to Fox, where he thanked them for their confidence and trust in him, and promised he would work to unite the country in defence of liberty. The *London Chronicle* reported that Fox's "friends wore arrange and blue ribbons, with the word Fox on them,"[81] while Georgiana and several other

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[79] Masters, *Georgiana*, p. 117.
[80] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 90-1.
[81] "News," *London Chronicle*, April 2, 1782, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000576410/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=4a19c8c9.

women with her all wore the Whig colours, blue and buff, and they raised their hats in celebration every time the crowd cheered.

The Political Happenings of 1782-1783

As Georgiana was away from London for most of 1782, the political goings-on for the Whigs during that time occurred with Georgiana being little more than a spectator. Due to her pregnancy, when she came back to London it was expected that she would remain out of both public and political life, but she defied those expectations by returning to her position as Charles Fox's ally and political confidante. From the start, the Rockingham-Shelburne Coalition was on shaky ground, with George III only ever speaking to Lord Shelburne and deliberately ignoring Lord Rockingham and the Whigs' requests for patronage. Although the Rockingham-Shelburne Coalition only came into power in March of 1782, by June of that same year some members of the Whig party were already condemning the coalition as unworkable. The circumstances worsened when Lord Rockingham came down with the flu and succumbed to it within two weeks. Not long after Rockingham's death, Fox grew disillusioned with the coalition government and surrendered his seal of office; other Whigs followed suit shortly after. This created an excellent opportunity for William Pitt the Younger to capitalize on those opening seats and manoeuvre his way deeper into the parliamentary process.

Pitt's first speech in Parliament in 1781 demonstrated that his political leanings on economical and parliamentary reform aligned with the Whigs. Despite Fox and William Pitt the Elder being long-time rivals all of their working lives, Fox supported Pitt and within a month of Pitt taking his seat, he had recommended him to Brooks's. By 1782 however, Pitt removed himself from his close attachment with Fox and made it clear to all that as the son of the former

Prime Minister, he expected to be respected and taken seriously. The seats left open following Fox's departure offered an opportunity to Pitt, and Lord Shelburne thought for himself as well. He offered Pitt the place of Chancellor of the Exchequer, thinking that he would be easy to manage. Fox was furious about this turn of events, seeing his former protégé take office over the heads of the departing Whigs: from this moment onwards, Pitt the Younger and Fox were rivals, continuing the legacy of his late father.

Shelburne was unpopular and found himself very quickly losing supports as the members of Parliament found were more easily drawn to Lord North or Fox. He realized he needed to form a collation with either of the two men or he would quickly find himself outvoted in the House of Commons. Considering William Pitt hated Lord North even more than he hated Fox, Shelburne's only real option was to join up with Fox which was unlikely given their mutual dislike for each other. Shelburne bid Fox and Pitt to meet with each other in order to reconcile their differences, but the meeting was unsuccessful. Pitt made a number of contemptuous remarks about the Whig party which Fox took personally, and he never forgave him for it. Shelburne's inability to successfully reconcile Fox with Pitt led the Whigs into an unlikely pairing with Lord North, and as soon as the Whigs and North's supporters began voting together Shelburne was lost. Shelburne resigned in February upon realizing his influence was limited, and once again George III was reluctant to allow the Whigs back into office. He desired that Pitt form his own government, but Pitt realized he would have no support and declined. Lord North would not go back on his deal with Fox despite George III's prodding for him to do so, and when George III's mission to recruit any senior parliamentary figure to challenge Fox and none would do so, he almost abdicated the throne. Finally, on April 1, Lord North, Charles, Fox, and the Duke of Portland received their Great Seals of State, with North as the new Prime Minister, Fox

once again taking up the role as Foreign Secretary, and Lord John Cavendish becoming the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

This new government was not running as smoothly as the general public believed, with the King still seeking to remove the Whigs from power and the Prince of Wales providing him with reason to do so. As the Prince was now twenty-one, he wished to receive a proper allowance and run his own household, but he had already run up so many debts that he needed an exorbitant one-hundred-thousand pounds to clear them. With the King refusing to hand over that hefty sum, Fox, to the dismay of numerous members of cabinet, promised that he would obtain the money for the Prince. Fox himself was dismayed by this promise that he had made to the Prince, but he could not go back on his word. He asked the Duke of Devonshire to speak privately with the Prince, with the hope that he would be able to convince the Prince to relinquish this demand, but the Duke was unsuccessful. By June 17, Fox believed that the Fox-North coalition government would "not outlive tomorrow" or would be "at an end in a very few days."[82] While Fox sat at Brooks's, bemoaning his promise to the Prince and the consequences it would surely bring him, Georgiana took it upon herself to try and devise a solution, so she wrote him a letter. In this letter she explained that causing the Whigs to resign would be a terrible mistake and that Charles Fox was an honourable man, honourable enough to attempt to carry this promise through no matter the consequences rather than break his word. She explained to the Prince further that if he was to release Fox from his promise to help him, that "great delicacy must be used" and that he would have to do "as if it was of [his] own accord."[83] Her letter succeeded in making the Prince realize his situation was hopeless, choosing to accept

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[82] L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 62.
[83] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 116.

the lower sum he was offered. Her intervention meant that the coalition was safe for the moment, demonstrating that in the five years was active, she matured from a woman parading through a military encampment in military dress, to shrewd politician.

The 1784 Westminster Election

The Fox-North coalition was still on shaky ground when Parliament resumed after the summer recess, although the cabinet was cautiously optimistic. The ministry announced its plan for reforms, with the most controversial being that of Fox's Bill to revamp the East India Company's charters and rights, but there was agreement across the parties that something needed to be done. Governments had been wary before of interfering with private business, and many MPs, particularly those who were enemies of the coalition, saw this Bill as an outrageous political interference and claimed that the Whigs were attempting to take control of the East India Company. Despite these criticisms, the East India Bill passed through the house with a strong majority in November. This success did not mean that all was well in Parliament however, as behind the scenes William Pitt was meeting with the King on a plan to try and oust Fox from government. When Fox's East India Bill reached the House of Lords, Lord Temple passed out an open letter from the King which stated that anyone who voted for the Bill would be considered an enemy of the King from that moment onward. Fox did not realize he had been outwitted until he watched his Bill get voted down around him. When the King received the results late at night that the Bill failed to pass, he sent his officers to Piccadilly to collect the Seals of State from Fox and North. The very next morning, December 19th, William Pitt the Younger became the youngest Prime Minister in history at twenty-four years old.

Although the Whigs' Bill failed to pass, their mood was one of celebration; they now had proof that the King had despotic intentions as he had basically declared open war on his ex-ministers. For two decades the Whigs claimed the Crown's influence was increasing through "secret" patronage, built via the awarding of pension and places. The Whigs argued that by issuing what almost constituted an order to the Lords that they must overrule the wishes of the House of Commons, the King finally provided proof of his anti-constitutional activities. Fox considered this political crisis to be personal, as if it were a duel between himself, King George III, and William Pitt.[84] A duel Georgiana had little doubt could be won by anyone other than Charles James Fox. In a letter to her mother, Georgiana made her position on the state of politics with William Pitt in charge very clear, she stated that "if Mr. Pitt succeeds he will have brought about an event that he himself as well as ev'ry Englishman will repent after, for if the K. and H. of Lords conquer the H. of C. he will destroy the consequence of that house and make the government quite absolute, for a majority in the H. of Lords is always in the King's power by creating new peers."[85] While the House of Commons supported the coalition, there was little the King or Pitt could even do. The Whigs marched around town with what they felt was righteous indignation against the King, supported by their friends, but public opinion was not on their side. Much of the public hated the Whigs for bulldozing their way into power despite the King's objections, with Fox painted as the major villain for his India Bill because they assumed he wanted to use it to fund the Whig party. William Pitt ceaselessly wore down the coalition's

[84] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 135.
[85] Georgiana Spencer Cavendish, *Georgiana: Extracts From the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Edited by the Earl of Bessborough.*, 1st ed. (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1955), p. 74: the Duchess of Devonshire to her mother, February 8 1784.

majority; his cool determination and support from the King winning over the support of more and more MPs as time went on, until the coalition's majority was defeated.

Leading up to the election in 1784, the political arena only grew more intense, especially considering it followed a year with three major political upheavals in Great Britain: Britain's defeat during the American War of Independence, the disastrous Fox-North coalition, and the dissolution of the government and subsequent appointment as Prime Minister of William Pitt the Younger by King George III. A public debate at Westminster Hall turned into a riot where Fox was the target of projectiles which his supporters attempted to protect him from. Events like these and the threat of insults did not dissuade Georgiana from continuing to aid Fox. She initially spent a few days canvassing for her brother's constituency before returning to Westminster for the election. Three candidates were set to stand for this election: Fox for the Whigs, and Sir Cecil Wray and Lord Admiral Hood for Pitt. Westminster was one of the few constituencies where public opinion counted not only because of its proximity to Parliament, but also because of its unusually wide electorate. Its franchise was involved in a wide range of occupations including artisans and shopkeepers, so its members could be wooed and flattered, but their votes could not be controlled like in smaller, aristocrat-controlled constituencies. Furthermore, as Londoners, many of them championed a tradition of fierce independence. While some voters assembled in clubs that supported the Whigs, others preferred to maintain their independence, instead joining the radical Westminster Association which advocated for manhood suffrage.[86]

Traditionally, the aristocracy and the Crown controlled election outcomes through their influence, and many contemporaries believed that this influence was legitimate, and deference to

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[86] Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution*, p. 70.

the great families of society was a natural course of events. Even the Whigs, who criticized the Crown, believed that the elite should lead politics, but eighteenth-century voters wanted to vote for the candidate they thought would uphold the people's interest. In some instances, the great families within a constituency would settle amongst themselves who would stand in an election to prevent there being a drawn-out, contested election. In constituencies where elections were contested, great families had to use their influence to achieve their desired results. According to tradition, voters would defer to the dynasties that had controlled their constituencies for generations, but that deference was earned through favour and charity, such as setting up schools for poor children and establishing workshops to employ labourers. Aristocratic families also exerted their influence by more direct, material means, granting benefits and threatening to retract them if voters did not comply with their requests.[87]

Similar to other elections, there were speaker platforms built in Covent Garden next to the polling booths in which voters entered one at a time to cast their vote in front of the clerk. On the first day the polls opened, the Whigs gathered to initiate a group canvassing effort. While Fox and some of his supporters stayed on the platform at Covent Garden to address the crowd, the men and women divided themselves into three teams led by Georgiana, Mrs. Crewe, and Mrs. Damer to try and elicit more votes from the public. Accompanied by a few male escorts, Georgiana and Harriet marched through the streets and handed out specially struck medals to Foxites. The Whigs, including the women, enjoyed themselves immensely despite the pushing and shoving of the crowds, but many observers were shocked by the fact that women were so exposed to the dangers of a metropolitan election. By the end of that first day, the *London*

[87] Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution*, pp. 53-55.

Chronicle reported that Fox had polled 302, Lord Hood had 264, and Wray had 238.[88] Fox's lead was only temporary however, with Hood and Wray pulling ahead on the second and third days. This was of major concern to the Whigs, so they urged everyone to join the canvass. By April 5, Georgiana was no longer the lone woman canvasser for the Foxites, with the Duchess of Portland, Lady Jersey, Lady Carlisle, Mrs. Bouverie, and the three Ladies Waldegrave joining the march through Westminster, all dressed in blue and buff with foxtails adorning their hats where they worked to solicit votes from perplexed shopkeepers.[89]

Some voters were impressed by Georgiana, enjoying the presence of a woman of such high caliber and rank. But others were not so impressed, shouting insults at her and on occasion, even threatening her with physical violence. One account claimed that Georgiana entered a house alone, with no thought for her safety, in order to confront seven drunken Hood supporters. According to this same report, they would not allow her to leave the premises until she had kissed them all, by that time where was a mob waiting outside the doors attempting to fight its way in.[90] While this story may not have been true, it was not the only one of its kind.[91] The first week of the polls left Georgiana exhausted and demoralized, with bruised and blistered feet from canvassing down Henrietta Street on Fox's behalf. Even with their best efforts, Fox was still trailing behind in the polls and the government was celebrating.

The tides turned for Fox right after Georgiana left Westminster for St. Albans, and they continued to rise after she returned. She despised being a figure of ridicule, but she loved the

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[88] "News," *London Chronicle*, March 30, 1784, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000581001/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=27bdb4d2.
[89] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 142.
[90] Hugh Stokes, *The Devonshire House Circle* (New York: McBride, Nast, 1916), p. 203.
[91] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 139.

pageantry and excitement of mass canvassing. Despite the criticisms she received, she continued with her methods upon her return to the city, ignoring orders to stay in her carriage as they went out canvassing. She preferred to speak and sometimes even argue with voters, but more than that she took an interest in their businesses and families and enjoyed getting to know them. She met the wives and children of voters, became godmother to a number of infants, and managed to impress the women with her knowledge around raising children, as it was something she was heavily involved in within her own home, contrary to expectations of aristocratic women. She also went with her friends from store to store, making large purchases and purposefully paying more than she needed to while hinting at the prospect of more if the proprietors voted for Fox. Despite the government's best efforts to discredit Fox and Georgiana, their efforts much more focused on the latter, her canvassing managed to gain the votes Fox needed. By April 22, Fox was almost even with Wray, but he remained pessimistic about his chances.[92]

His pessimism began to lift when his lead over Wray reached three digits, and by the very end of April Fox and the Whigs' mood had lifted enough for them to host a dinner at the Freemason's Tavern for over eight-hundred electors.[93] Fox positioned himself in front of his constituents in a way that demonstrated this difficult election had not impacted his confidence in their ability to win, despite the reality being that he had been insecure for a long time. The party-goers celebrated gaily, singing and dancing, and toasting "the Duchess of Devonshire and Portland, and other fair supporters of the Whig cause."[94] When the polls closed, Lord Hood came

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[92] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 150-2.
[93] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 147.
[94] *Morning Herald*, April 28, 1784, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000916842/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=12b37ca2.

in with the most votes at 6,694, Charles Fox with 6,234, and Cecil Wray with 5,998.[95] It was perhaps not the victory the Whigs wanted in Westminster, but it was a victory nonetheless with Fox taking one of the two seats in the borough. With the election complete, Lady Spencer wished for Georgiana to exit the limelight and recover some of her dignity, but this was not what the Whigs needed. The Whigs had done poorly in the rest of the country, with eighty-nine losing their seats in the election, so they needed to capitalize on this victory.[96]

When the polls closed, the Whigs marched from St. Paul's, down the Strand, past Carlton House which they circled three times, and down Piccadilly until they reached Devonshire House. They were followed by hundreds of supporters, some of which held banners with statements such as "Fox and Liberty" and "Sacred to Female Patriotism;"[97] an acknowledgment and celebration of the women's contribution to the victory, although Georgiana was not present to see it. But the Whigs were close to defeat inside of Parliament with their ranks greatly depleted from what they once were. The end of the election also did not put a stop to the criticisms levied against the Duchess nor did they stop her from her work within the party. She attempted to use extravagant entertainment and her own popularity to win those who were no longer staunch supporters of the Whigs back to the cause, but none of her attempts could change the fact that the Whigs would never truly be in power while King George III reigned. Not only that, but the crucifixion Georgiana experienced at the hands of the press and the public because of her modern campaigning methods made the 1784 election the last time Georgiana would openly

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[95] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 153.
[96] L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party, 1782-1794*, Oxford Historical Monographs (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 95. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000770999.
[97] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p.155.

canvass in London. It would also be another hundred years before women brazenly campaigned and protested in the streets again.

Chapter 3: A Matter of Public Opinion

British historians have credited the press with the way the operations of the political world changed during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The press, specifically newspapers, have been credited by Whig historians as part of the inevitable rise of accountable government and democratic society.[98] At this time however, newspapers did not necessarily support the causes of freedom and equality, and were in fact often opposed to these progressive reform movements. Certain sections of the newspaper press could be politically conservative and even express a reactionary outlook to these progressive ideas. What made England's newspaper press different from its continental counterparts, was that it was political and outspoken, but more than that they did not limit their coverage to national or international affairs, choosing to also provide consistent and often critical commentary on local events. While the newspaper press reported on news concerning the court, parliament, lections, local government, and foreign relations, they also contained advertisements and information on crime, trade, fashion, theatre, racing and shipping. Content that is quite reminiscent of what twenty-first century readers would find within their own newspapers.[99]

Newspapers were also utilized by the ruling elite, both to promote their own political interests as well as to reinforce their hold on society. Despite the ruling elite's influence on the press, they were increasingly forced to recognize the power of popular politics and the press, and adjust accordingly; during the period between 1695 and 1855, the level of anxiety that the press

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[98] See Andrews, *The History of British Journalism from the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England, to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855, with Sketches of Press Celebrities. ;* Hunt, *The Fourth Estate*.

[99] Hannah Barker, "England, 1760-1815," in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America: 1760-1820*, ed. Simon Burrows and Hannah Barker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 93.

could foster amongst the ruling classes appears to have risen. This power held by the press was connected to the growth in newspaper production and readership, but was also very much dependent on the state of national politics because in periods of political unrest, the press could be at its most influential and its most threatening.[100] Despite the ruling elite's influence over the press, this period also saw a rise in a powerful rhetoric: the "liberty of the press." Politicians may have attempted to suppress stories in newspapers or even the newspapers themselves, but they came up against strong ideological opposition stemming from a belief of the sanctity of this rhetoric. From the late seventeenth-century onwards, a common argument existed amongst commentators that the press was a main form of protection for the constitution, as opposed to a threat. The press had the means to defend the country against corruption in government by making the actions of its rulers' public knowledge and throughout the eighteenth-century this idea gained political currency, making politicians determined to protect themselves and their parties by treating that power with respect, even if their actions did not reflect that goal. Furthermore, an increasingly politicized society began to emerge in the eighteenth-century which possessed opinions of its own that it was unafraid to voice, which made a significant impact on the nation's political life; these emerging perspectives came to be known as public opinion.[101]

The Rising Influence of Public Opinion

The concept of public opinion had a political application prior to the mid-eighteenth century, though at that time it was better known as "public interest" and evolved through a "natural growth of the English language" to what we now refer to as public opinion. The

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[100] Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855* (New York: Longman, 2000), pp. 9-10.
[101] Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855*, pp. 12, 22.

increasing use of the term most likely reflected how extra-parliamentary activity had developed in the latter half of the eighteenth-century alongside a mediation of the traditional hostility towards the recognition of the popular voice outside of Parliament.[102] Many contemporaries believed that powerful and legitimate opinions were being formed and articulated beyond the world of the political elite, and that they needed to be recognized.[103] Despite agreeing upon the concept of "public opinion," neither contemporaries nor the current historiography seem to have a fixed definition of exactly what that means, but contextually-speaking it majorly refers to any sort of political discussion that took place outside of the ruling classes. Public opinion at this time was rarely, if ever revolutionary, and instead was more reflective of societal conversation that existed outside of the political structures of state where state power could be judged and criticized. Only 17.9 percent of men could vote in the late eighteenth century and voting for their representatives was their only official way of having their voices heard.[104] Apart from voting, the public did not have the right to associate or even discuss political ideas, and if Parliament believed it was necessary, they could even arrest those who criticized it. The rise of the press allowed for a corresponding rise in exchanges of information, ideas, and perhaps most importantly, in debate. Therefore, newspapers became a key forum for the both the formation and expression of public opinion.[105]

In the eighteenth-century, the press formed the central component of an "alternative structure of politics." Nearly all eighteenth-century Englishmen believed that the country's citizens enjoyed a greater depth of political knowledge and access to political information than

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[102] John Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), pp. 262-3.
[103] Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855*, p. 22.
[104] Clark, *Scandal*, p. 8.
[105] Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855*, pp. 22-3.

any other country was capable of because of its free constitution, free press, liberty, leisure, and wealth. However, the power and sway of the press was not always appreciated by all, especially by the government itself. The opposition during this time maintained that the press helped to secure responsible government and reflected public opinion, while the acting government felt that newspapers were often too willing to sacrifice the good of the nation to sell their product. Furthermore, there were an increasing number of arguments made by the government that the opposition used the press to encourage discontent throughout society that would come to have dire consequences. Despite these differing perspectives on the press, one thing both the government and the opposition could agree on was that the press played a key role in educating those who existed in the extra-parliamentary world.[106]

The Role of the Press in the Eighteenth Century

If eighteenth-century Britain was a truly bi-partisan society divided by comprehensive party ideologies, then the press would have only played a limited role as an agent of persuasion.[107] But it was not yet this way, even by the 1784 election. The first half of the century saw the development of a contrarian attitude towards the press between the opposing parties. The ministerial press consistently supported the government and criticized the extent of press discourse, which they argued was seditious both in intent and in effect. The opposition press was consistently accused of spreading lies about the government and encouraging conflict, like, for example, how the opposition press was accused of Jacobitism and harming British

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[106] Brewer, John. *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 139-40.
[107] Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1987), p. 115.

foreign policy in the first half the of century.[108] The press was not only interested in writing about politics however, they also engaged in debates about members of society, like the Duchess of Devonshire, that were sure to sell stories. The *Morning Herald* demonstrated great interest in Georgiana prior to the 1784 election that showed no signs of letting up and revealed much more than a weakness for society hostesses. In December, it stated that "her heart notwithstanding her exalted situation, appears to be directed by the most liberal principles; and from the benevolence and gentleness which marks her conduct, the voice of compliment becomes the offering of gratitude."[109] Georgiana was a popular aristocrat, and a trendsetter at that, so when the Whig party's fortunes began to look up, the press became much more eager to be associated with the future regime, and they understood that one of the best ways to do that was through Georgiana.

The 1770s saw an increase in newspaper reporting, and with it came a greater confidence in ridiculing public figures. Some of this was due to the fact that both the government and the opposition would pay newspaper editors large sums of money to attack their opponents, with men like Lord Shelburne reportedly spending almost two-thousand pounds on bribes to pamphleteers and editors in less than a year.[110] In an attempt to keep themselves popular and discredit their opponents, the government spent a lot of money on anti-Fox and anti-Georgiana propaganda during the 1784 campaign period. The *Morning Herald* was a particularly bad culprit, printing numerous vulgar stories about her, with print sellers who were close to the government also selling thousands of cartoons that attacked her campaign work. Some even

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[108] Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 121-2.
[109] "Advertisements and Notices," *Morning Herald*, December 3, 1781, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000907919/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=7dc58e53.
[110] Arthur Aspinall, *Politics and the Press: C. 1750-1850* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1949), p. 67.

went so far as to cross the line between satire and pornography, and were simply using Georgiana for titillation.[111] A print titled *Political Affection* showed Georgiana clutching a fox to her breasts while a child, presumably her own, was depicted hungrily demanding milk.[112] Another cartoon titled *The Devonshire Amusement*, this one in two parts, depicted Georgiana canvassing on the street with her hair and dress haphazardly blowing in the wind, a staff of liberty holding Fox's head, and two phallic-presenting fox tails grasped in her hand in the first half.[113] The second half shows her husband, the Duke of Devonshire, abandoned at home where he attempts to change his baby's diaper with a portrait of him with the horns of a cuckold on display behind him.

The eighteenth-century was a time that valued female modesty, and the treatment Georgiana received from the press during the election brought shame to her family. It was not because she canvassed, as it has been mentioned previously that Georgiana's mother actually encouraged it, but the reality of her methods, as they were considered to be too masculine. Lady Spencer had no issue with her daughters campaigning for George in Northampton as, in her eyes, they had conducted themselves in a seemly manner there. But the brutality of the press in the aftermath of their campaign for Fox led Lady Spencer to tell Harriet that "there is a dignity and delicacy which a woman should never depart from," implying that her and Georgiana had done just that, thus the criticisms they reaped were perhaps earned. She went even further, saying "I know it has been from the best intention you have both been led to take the part you have done, but let this be a lesson to you... never to go in any matter beyond the strictest rules of

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[111] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 143.
[112] Thomas Rowlandson, *Political Affection*, 1784. The British Museum. J,2. 128. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_J-2-128
[113] John Wallis, *The Devonshire Amusement*, 1784. The British Museum. 1868,0808.5351. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-5351

propriety."[114] Georgiana's family members were not the only women who were critical of her actions and spoke outwardly of them. Mrs. Montagu, a staunch advocate for women's education and a member of the Blue Stocking Circle, said that "the Duchess of Devonshire has been canvassing in a most masculine manner, and has met with much abuse." Even Mary Hamilton, a courtier for Queen Charlotte, had something to say about the Duchess of Devonshire's canvassing, saying: "What a pity that any of our sex should ever forget what is due to female delicacy. The scenes the Dss has been in lately, were they noted down, would not gain credit by those not in London at the time of the Election."[115]

Although the Duchess of Devonshire was personally unbothered by the fact that her actions were not in line with societal expectations, she took issue with her treatment by the press and the greater public which were outspoken in their distaste of her activities. She left Westminster for St. Albans to take a break from her election activities and the negative press, but shortly after her arrival the Whig party summoned her back. At the time of her leaving Westminster, the polls were starting to shift away from Wray and in favour of Fox. Lady Spencer, likely pleased with Georgiana's choice to leave Westminster and seek peace, was dismayed when the Duchess received a letter from the Duchess of Portland, in which she wrote:

> I do verily believe Mr. Fox will succeed, every body seems to be of that opinion, if people will continue to exert themselves. I am worn out almost and must beg of you to come tomorrow. There are a great many votes that you can command and No One else, and now if you only stop at people's doors it will be quite sufficient, and really your presence is quite expected, so tomorrow morning pray be here early.[116]

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[114] Lady Spencer to Lady Duncannon, April 13, 1784. Found in Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 143.

[115] Florence and Elizabeth Anson, *Mary Hamilton, Afterwards Mrs. John Dickenson, at Court and at Home* (London, 1925) April 27, 1784.

[116] Georgiana Spencer Cavendish, *Georgiana: Extracts From the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Edited by the Earl of Bessborough.*, 1st ed. (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1955), p. 80: Duchess of Portland to Duchess of Devonshire, April 1784.

Lady Spencer was shocked at the Cavendishes, unable to believe their willingness to sacrifice Georgiana's health and reputation for political gain. Lady Spencer wrote a harsh reply, her anger heightened by her belief that if her husband was still alive that they would not treat the Spencer family in such a cavalier fashion.

Unconvinced her actions had caused Fox's fortune reversal, Georgiana expressed that she did not wish to return, sufficiently horrifying the Whigs. As far as they were concerned, the success of the election depended entirely upon her presence, regardless of the attacks on her character. So much so, that the Duke of Portland himself made a plea to her personally:

> The state of the Polls for these last two days is a better argument that any other I can give you for refusing to concur in your opinion of yourself. Every one is convinced that your Exertions have produced the very material alteration which has happened in Fox's favour, and will continue to preserve and improve it into a decisive victory, but be assured that if... a suspicion should arise of your having withdrawn yourself from the Election, a general languor would prevail, Despondency would succeed, and the Triumph pf the Court would be the inevitable consequence. However it may seem, depend upon it, that this Representation is not exaggerated.[117]

This letter from the Duke of Portland demonstrates that there was another perspective to consider in how the actions of women like Georgiana during this election were perceived. To those like the Duke of Portland, her involvement was necessary for their political gain, regardless of the costs to Georgiana. He hardly seemed to care that her actions were seen as lacking decorum as they were hugely beneficial to his and the Whigs' political goals. Lord Cavendish had a similar point of view, and although he wrote a letter directly to Lady Spencer to apologize on behalf of the Cavendishes for the way Georgiana was being treated, he also believed that attempting to avoid further abuse from the public and the press was pointless as so much of it had already

[117] Duke of Portland to Georgiana Devonshire, April 14, 1784. In Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 144.

occurred, further implying that if she withdrew her support from them now, then they were sure to blame her for any lost votes.[118]

Despite not wanting to return to Westminster, as mentioned in chapter two, she did eventually come back per the wishes of the party and continued to make a positive impression on their campaign. After her visit to the milliners' stores on Tavistock Street with Harriet and the Ladies Waldegrave, the shopkeepers hung fox skin muffs over their doors as a symbol of their support. Her efforts were so impactful that the *Morning Post* accused Harriet and Georgiana of not just paying more than what their purchases were worth, but also that they were threatening anti-Fox tradesmen and shopkeepers with a blacklist if they did not cast their vote in favour of Fox.[119] When the Duchess of Portland wrote to Georgiana insisting that she return to Westminster and her role as a canvasser, it was with the assurance that she would only have to stop at people's homes to chat with them. The reality was that her return to Westminster would almost inevitably signal a return to ridicule no matter what she did. Once she returned to Westminster, a rumour surfaced that the Duchess's electioneering had devolved in a scandalous way: that she was kissing the butchers of Westminster. These claims perpetuated the rumour that Georgiana was bribing voters to vote for Fox with kisses. An "eyewitness" to one such event testified in the pro-Pitt *Morning Post*:

> Lord, Sir, it was a fine sight to see a grand lady come right smack to us hard-working mortals, with a hand held out, and a 'Master, how-dye-do,' and say, 'Give us your vote, worthy sir, and a plumper for the people's friend, our friend, everybody's friend,' and then, sir, we hummed and hawed, they would ask after our wives and families, and if that didn't do, they'd think nothing of a kiss, aye, a dozen of them. Lord, Sir, kissing was nothing to them, and it all came natural.[120]

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[118] Lord John Cavendish to Lady Spencer, April 14, 1784. In Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 145.
[119] Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, pp. 145-6.
[120] Hugh Stokes, *The Devonshire House Circle* (London: H. Jenkins Ltd., 1917), p.198.

Despite Georgiana appearing to deny the truth of these rumours in a letter to her mother,[121] the rumour and its consequences ended up following Georgiana for the remainder of the campaign. On March 31, the *Morning Post* was the first to run the story about her kissing voters, saying that "We hear the D——s of D—— grants *favours* to those who promise their vote and interest to Mr. Fox.[122] After this, the *Morning Post* ran cruel stories about the Duchess nearly every day, rotating between three themes: that she was selling her body for votes, that she was Fox's mistress, and that she was betraying both her rank as well as her gender with her improper behaviour. The anxiety surrounding the electioneering kiss originated in the convergence of the idea of a kiss as a customary, non-sexual gesture signifying the sealing of a deal, with the private kiss as a form of a sexual interchange between two individuals.[123] But the kiss was not the most important part of the butcher-kissing scandal that followed Georgiana; the press could have selected any type of Westminster voter to portray as the object of Georgiana's affections, but they specifically chose the butcher as he was the new codified symbol of Britain as a nation. In effect, these prints were orchestrating a contest between the new eighteenth-century sense of the masculine, middle-class nation against the older, aristocratic ruling class whose values this new public was attempting to discredit.[124]

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[121] Georgiana Spencer Cavendish, *Georgiana: Extracts From the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Edited by the Earl of Bessborough.*, 1st ed. (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1955), p. 79: The Duchess to her mother, April 1784.
[122] *The Morning Post*, March 31, 1784, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000949090/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=82cc33b0.
[123] Teofilo F. Ruiz, "Unsacred Monarchy: The Kings of Castile in the Late Middle Ages," in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 125-6.
[124] Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire," p. 31.

The butcher was not just a symbol created for the sake of discrediting Georgiana, but instead was a symbol with an iconographic history as a masculine, English character in relation to other characters. In a print titled *The Frenchman in London*, a butcher, depicted with his apron and awl, threatens a Frenchman on the streets of London.[125] The butcher appears strong, masculine, and aggressive juxtaposed next to the more feminine and delicate Frenchman, signifying the type of man, the "blackguard," that the British admired and sought to emulate as opposed to that which they disparaged. According to Amelia Rauser, this contrast was part of a greater social trend which reached its height in the 1770s.[126] Furthermore, Philip Carter argued that in this period, men of the middling sort "embraced the manly patriotism and sexual potency" of the blackguard as a positive civic identity.[127] But it was not until James Gillray popularized the print in the late 1770s and early 1780s that John Bull evolved from a literary character to a popular figure in political prints and preeminent figure of British national identity, most notably with his print titled *Politeness.*[128]

While the prints mentioned previously were clearly allegorical in nature, the danger the butcher-kissing prints posed to Georgiana and the Whigs was that they were presented as real news stories to the greater public. When the first two prints of this nature appeared on April 3, 1784, they were quite similar in what they were trying to achieve. The butchers in Samuel Collings's *Female Influence* appear eager for what the Duchess is about to bestow on them, with

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[125] Charles White, *The Frenchman in London*, 1770. The British Museum. 1877, 1013. 1109. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1877-1013-1109
[126] Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire," p. 31.
[127] Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain, 1660-1800*, Women and Men in History (Harlow, England ; Pearson Education, 2001) pp. 135-7.
[128] Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire," p. 31. ; James Gillray, *Politeness*, 1779. The British Museum. 1851, 0901.23.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1851-0901-23

one wiping his face in anticipation of a kiss while her skirts are hitched up slightly, revealing her ankles in a rather scandalous manner.[129] Thomas Rowlandson's print, *The Two Patriotic Duchess's on Their Canvass*, depicts Georgiana with her hand in the pocket of a handsome butcher, implying the transfer of a monetary bribe, while her sister holds onto a butcher attempting to escape her grasp.[130] In both prints, the Duchess is illustrated wearing hats with Fox's name printed on them as well as phallic décor such as the brush of a fox. In these prints, the phallic symbolism is evident and clear to their audiences, but a print published the following week was much more explicit in nature. In this print, the Duchess towers over the butcher she embraces, while a dog urinates on her gown. The caption attached to the print reads: "A certain Dutchess [sic] kissing Old Swelter-in-Grease the Butcher for his Vote. O! Times! O! Manners! The Women Wear Breeches & the Men Petticoats."[131]

These butcher-kissing prints represented more than just a typical transgression of electioneering behaviour: they were indicative of a disturbing inversion of eighteenth-century gender roles. These prints represent the allegation that the men's weakness to the Duchess's advances made them weak and effeminate, and therefore gave this corrupt, elite woman too much political power. As previously indicated, Fox hoped to encourage within the public a fear of monarchical influence in order to help him triumph over Pitt in the election, but to his dismay, and that of Georgiana's, the fear of female influence on the political order proved to be more widespread and enduring in the election prints than anything else. These butcher-kissing prints

[129] Samuel Collings, *Female Influence*, 3 April 1784. The British Museum. 1851,0901.189. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1851-0901-189
[130] Thomas Rowlandson, *The Two Patriotic Duchess's on Their Canvass*, 1784. The British Museum. 1851,0901.229. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1851-0901-229
[131] *A certain duchess kissing old swelter-in-grease the butcher for his vote*, 1784. The British Museum. 1868,0808.5215. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-5215

accuse the Duchess of undermining the new public sphere, which was primarily inhabited by the masculine middle-class British man, with her powerful femininity and shameless nobility.[132] These accounts have largely demonstrated the negative press received by Georgiana, but these publications did not go unanswered. The more outrageous the abuses and sexual innuendos aimed at Georgiana and Fox were, the greater the rebuttals by Foxite papers were to reflect that. One of the more interesting and effective arguments the Whigs made against the pro-government press's attacks on Georgiana and sometimes other Foxite women, was that their articles were misogynistic and filled with cowardice. But Whig papers also focused on what they considered to be the important issues of the election: liberty, patriotism, and duty; this was much unlike the pro-government papers which were intent on depicting Georgiana kissing or bribing voters with favours to win the votes that the Whigs needed. The Whigs tried to keep her above the scandal the press foisted upon her, such as with the cartoon "the Apotheosis of the Duchess" in which Georgiana is held up above the clouds by "Truth" and "Virtue," while "Scandal" is lying prone beneath Georgiana's foot holding a copy of the *Morning Post.*[133]

On April 21, the *Morning Herald* published a note, that was "supposed to have dropped from the pocket of a ministerial editor" and had the potential to be particularly damning for the pro-government press, and a boon to the Whigs in their arguments of misogyny, it read:

> My Dear Friend,
> You go on swimmingly. The women are the best subjects in the world – work them for God's sake – HER in Piccadilly particularly. Suppose you were to say in your next... we hear that a certain Duchess (in great letters) has eloped with Sam House... having first had half a dozen amours;... she does a deal of mischief to the cause – can't you throw in a hint against Lady D ——, or Mrs. F ... it would have an effect... Say a word or two about the

[132] Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire p. 36.
[133] William Humphrey, *The Apotheosis of the Dutchess*, 1784. The British Museum. 1868,0808.5318. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-5318

> Miss Keppels, and just throw out that they were seen in a certain place, with a certain fishmonger, and so on, you know how to manage it.[134]

The Whigs were fairly successful in painting these types of publications as misogynistic, but it meant that they could not utilize the same tactics against Mrs. Hobart and Lady Salisbury. Despite their best attempts however, their defense of Georgiana paled in comparison to the insults made by the government press. The images the Whigs distributed of Georgiana making sacrifices to the Temple of Liberty were not enough to offset the impact of those that depicted her making love to Westminster voters. They were so outrageous and in such large quantity that the Duchess ordered for the prints to all be purchased to keep them out of circulation and away from the public's eyes as much as possible.[135]

What is so fascinating about the influence of the press during the 1784 election, is it is widely assumed by historians such as Amanda Foreman, Nicholas Rogers, and Linda Colley that the negative treatment of women like Georgiana by the press must have had an adverse impact on the candidates they campaigned for, but this perspective was not shared by Georgiana's Whig contemporaries.[136] Specifically, Nicholas Rogers argued that the press's treatment of these women revealed the "transgressive nature of female interventions in public political space."[137] There were of course those who judged her because she challenged ideas of propriety and femininity in a society that valued those things greatly, but members of the Whig party like

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134 "Advertisements and Notices," *Morning Herald*, April 21, 1784, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000916766/BBCN?sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=38d75456.
135 William Hastings, *History of the Westminster Election,* (London: Printed for the editors, and sold by J. Debrett, opposite Burlington-House, Piccadilly; T. Becket, Pall-Mall; R. Faulder, New Bond-Street; Mr. Thornton, Southampton-Street, Covent Garden, and all other booksellers, 1785), p. 254. http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0106341471/ECCO?sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=2edfa036&pg=328.
136 See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*; Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*.
137 Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*, p. 247.

Charles Fox, the Duke of Portland, and even Lord Cavendish respected the contributions Georgiana made to their 1784 campaigns and found her to be a most valuable asset, woman or not. The critical assumption shared by these historians that Georgiana's actions did more harm than good on the campaign is rooted in the view that the press's focus on women was driven by criticisms of their activities, specifically that their activities had gone beyond the bounds of what was acceptable. These criticisms in the press were entrenched in prevailing social conventions and often did suggest that their behaviour was rather unfortunately masculine in nature, that cannot be ignored. But it is important not to underestimate the variety and sophistication of the press and its influence, nor the valuable role women like Georgiana played as both street-level canvassers and as symbols of the campaign.[138]

For Opposition artists and writers, pieces featuring the Foxite women were used to help define Charles Fox's leadership capacity and values. Opposition propagandists took a similar approach, emphasizing the female advocates in their work in order to highlight Fox's independence, his reputation as the "Man of the People," and his credibility on political issues. Supporters of Lord Cecil Wray eventually found it necessary to respond to Fox's popularity among female constituents by undermining Foxite women while publicizing the activities of their own supporters and arguing that Wray was just as interested in women's issues as Fox was simultaneously.[139] Fox's campaign rhetoric was not simply a defensive strategy to protect the women connected to his campaign, although that was a key aspect of it. Foxite rhetoric was defined by two key arguments: first, that women were particularly sensitive to the needs and concerns of their fellow citizens because of their natural sensibility, and second, that because

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[138] Lana, "Women and Foxite Strategy in the Westminster Election of 1784," p. 47.
[139] Lana, "Women and Foxite Strategy in the Westminster Election of 1784," p. 47.

women were excluded from the official process of voting, they were the best judges of the system as they could take a broad view of the nation's interests. The press itself in 1784 not only engaged in discourse surrounding the propriety of women assisting in electoral campaigns, but they also began to suggest that the relationships candidates had with women, both individually – like Fox with Georgiana – and collectively, were a suitable measure of their candidacy.

The butcher-kissing scandal is also a key example of the different expectations and levels of acceptability that women were expected to adhere to, as opposed to the expectations of men, who often engaged in those sorts of behaviours during elections. Candidates commonly had to do a large amount of kissing and handshaking, with Lord Palmerston noting that he heard a butcher had made Fox kiss his wife and all his daughters before kicking him out of his shop. Events such as this likely would not have made it into the news, or at the very least been cause for scandal, but Georgiana was an easy target for the Pittite press because she was already a celebrity and her level of political influence defied societal norms. The electioneering kiss was a customary, though somewhat disliked practice during the eighteenth-century employed by both men and women alike. However, it was only considered problematic electioneering behaviour when it was used by elite women, where men simply preferred to avoid the tactic whenever possible. What is truly important about the electioneering kiss is that it was not seen as a danger to the political order until it was so successfully used by Georgiana for Fox's 1784 campaign.[140]

This scandal, while pertinent to the campaign, had a much more long-lasting and significant impact on the legacy of women in politics than one might initially expect, and thus is

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[140] For a more in-depth explanation of the role of the kiss in eighteenth-century England, see Elaine Chalus, "The Kiss in Eighteenth-Century English Elections," in *The Kiss in History*, ed. Karen Harvey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 122-143, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006944366.

much more important than some historians have noted. The butcher-kissing scandal confirmed this lingering idea that a woman's admittance to the public political arena put her chastity at risk, and made her into a "public woman,"[141] instead of preserving her decorous and private femininity.[142] What is so fascinating about this scandal however, is how the press was able to take a customary electioneering behaviour, such as kissing, and turn it into a scandalous event. Extensive political involvement by women at this time could be rationalized as non-threatening if it could be interpreted as supportive to a family member, because it could then be situated amongst the contemporary beliefs about the importance of family and duty to women. When a woman stepped outside of this familial framework and entered the political arena in her own right, as the Duchess of Devonshire did, she then posed a threat to the fundamental power balance between men and women. [143]

More than that however, she posed a threat to the continued existence of a solely male political order. The existing state of affairs needed to be preserved, thus the Duchess's political activities had to be valued and dismissed, and the best way to do this was to find a way to present them as unnatural or corrupt. With a woman's reputation being of the utmost importance at this time, the best way to do this was to label her actions as immodest, lacking in decorum, and sexually questionable. Because the Duchess of Devonshire's canvassing was so successful during the 1784 Westminster election, she was regarded as having secured the election for him, and it was at this moment that the kiss began to be depicted as a danger to Britain's political order.[144] The Pittite press took this kisses-for-votes campaign scandal and ran with it, using it to

[141] At the time, "public woman" was a phrase indicative of prostitution.
[142] Rauser, "The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire," p.29.
[143] Elaine Chalus, "The Kiss in Eighteenth-Century English Elections," p. 126,
[144] Chalus," The Kiss in Eighteenth-Century English Elections," p. 127.

perpetuate various negative stereotypes about women, their sexuality, and the role of women in politics. After 1784, the majority of elite women avoided the common canvassing practice of kissing men as they knew it risked attracting press commentary and having their respectability called into question.

Conclusion

The lasting legacy of the 1784 Westminster election has much more significance than simply one woman's reputation and the evidence of women's political participation long before the suffrage movement. When Georgiana attempted to manipulate her role as a woman in a politically active family to suit her own political aspirations, she was not entirely successful in convincing all of her contemporaries that her activities were appropriate for not only a woman, but a woman of her status. It was not that she campaigned for Charles Fox which had her criticized so viciously, as she may have been able to get away with that as the other women who joined her did, but it was that her popularity and influence during the election had some of her contemporaries considering her to be more of the candidate than Charles Fox himself. She was seen about the town canvassing more than he was, and she also made appearances in the press more than he did. Not only that, but she also had a closer relationship and influence on the Prince of Wales than Fox could ever have hoped of possessing. Her actions ultimately demonstrated to the men of the late eighteenth-century that a disruption in their separate spheres was beginning to take place, and over the next five decades they attempted to put a stop to it.

As the eighteenth-century progressed, debates surrounding what constituted a woman's proper place in society became increasingly intense, thus making the attitudes towards Georgiana both during and after the 1784 Westminster not entirely surprising. Women were formally excluded from exercising political rights, although this was more so by custom than by legal statute. All wives, other than a queen regnant, were under the legal authority of their husbands, as was their movable property. The author of *The Laws Respecting Women* put it succinctly in their 1777 work, stating that "by marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is

suspended; or at least it is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband."[145] With no separate identity or autonomous property, a women could not be considered a citizen purely by definition, and thus could never try to possess political rights. Only in the harshest way possible was a woman's freedom of political action acknowledged: if she committed high treason she could then be put on trial and burnt, though not eviscerated like male traitors.[146] Under the law, a British woman had the right to be punished for conspiracies against the state, but not to take an active part in its political processes.

The law, however, is rarely a sufficient reflection of social realities. During the 1784 election, it was not yet codified into law that women could not vote, it was more so by custom that they did not. Women were also not restricted from working, many adult women, particularly poor women, worked for monetary wages in agriculture, in cottage industries, in shops, and in domestic service. By right, single or widowed women kept their wages and any property they may have possessed, and under some circumstances, even some married women could have property that was their own that their husbands could not touch, as long as it was afforded to them prior to the marriage. To this extent, British women existed in a very similar social position to that of British countrymen, which makes it all the more understandable that anxieties surrounding the subversive female personality in British society only grew sharper as the second half of the eighteenth-century progressed. Not only that, but anxieties about keeping British women content within the private sphere also became more present as a growing number of women became increasingly active within the public sphere.

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[145] *The Laws Respecting Women, as They Regard Their Natural Rights, or Their Connections and Conduct;* (London: printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1777), p. 65. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0125106900/ECCO?sid=SERVICE_ID&xid=84139792&pg=6.

[146] Colley, *Britons*, p. 238.

What all of this has to do with the 1784 Westminster election is that Georgiana's role in Fox's election campaign demonstrated that women held much more power in the public sphere than society thought they should have. This was evident in the fearmongering demonstrated through the butcher-kissing prints that there was an inversion of gender roles taking place. Furthermore, that corrupt[147], aristocratic women held too much power in society. Perhaps one of the greater impacts Georgiana had, was unveiling how much power women had in society that they normally exercised with more subtlety, which unfortunately had negative consequences for women of the next century. The Great Reform Act of 1832 made a decisive statement about what the role of women in the public sphere was allowed to be from that moment onwards. Historians consider this act as having replaced the political system during the era of King George III with a modern electoral system[148] and as having brought representative democracy to Britain.[149] So while it is significant for those reasons, it was also the act that codified into law that franchise was limited to suitably qualified "adult males."[150] Before this moment, the only thing preventing women from voting was custom, not law. This is exactly what Linda Colley meant when she argued that statute does not necessarily dictate custom nor should it entirely inform our understandings of society.[151]

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[147] Corrupt, due to the insinuation in Thomas Rowlandson's print *The Two Patriotic Duchess's on Their Canvass* that Georgiana was bribing the butchers to vote as she requested, both with kisses and monetarily.
[148] Eric Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1879*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996), p. 229.
[149] John A. Phillips and Charles Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (1995): 411–36, https://doi.org/10.2307/2169005.
[150] H.J. Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution, 1815-1914; Documents and Commentary. Edited and Introduced by H.J. Hanham* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), pp. 264-5.
[151] Colley, *Britons*, p. 239.

Six years before the 1784 Westminster election and Georgiana's subsequent humiliation at the hands of the press, the House of Commons prohibited women from listening to its debates from the gallery or the floor. But those who argue that the period between the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century saw the role of women in the public sphere decrease while simultaneously women experienced an "unprecedented confinement" to the private sphere confuse what were perhaps symbolic gestures with what was happening in reality.[152] After 1778 women were not able to listen to debates in the House of Commons, but prior to that only a select few women even did so, and those who wished to know what happened in the House of Commons were able find out through various means of communication. While the Duchess of Devonshire was treated very poorly by some members of society for her actions during the election, she was not the only woman involved in campaigning and those other women were treated with much less ire than she experienced. The harsh treatment Georgiana received was more similar to that experienced by Charles Fox, demonstrating that in Britain the boundaries separating men and women, or private and public spheres, were not as solid as one may presume.

Although the first half of the nineteenth-century did witness political changes such as the 1832 Reform Act that forced women to adapt the ways they exercised political influence, the adaptations they made demonstrate how women during this era perhaps had more options for influence than their predecessors. For women desiring to make a difference who may have focused more on parliamentary politics, there came the option to get involved in issues-based campaigns that grew out of philanthropy, religion, moral causes, education, and even empire. This includes the female-led, sugar abstention campaigns of 1791-92 and 1825-29 which helped

[152] Colley, *Britons*, p. 250.; Linda Colley notes that historians of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France in particular are making these arguments, referencing Michelle Perrot's (ed.) *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of the Revolution to the Great War* (1990).

build popular support for abolition and anti-slavery policy. Women of all classes played a crucial role in increasing British sugar consumption, whether as domestic servants satisfying their employers' eating habits, or as social hostesses.[153] Evidence suggests that by the mid-eighteenth century, British society's dependence on colonial production, much of it by African slave labour, was something they took for granted as opposed to being an obscure fact of British life.[154] The abstention campaign was initially seen as a way of moralizing consumption, but more importantly it demonstrated to British society their own personal involvement in slavery; every family, particularly wives who were responsible for household purchases and in some cases, meal preparation, were shown their implication in the slave system.

A public appeal was made to the Duchess of York in 1792 to set a trend for abstention from sugar, with the hope that it would be emulated by the nobility and gentry, and followed by the middling class. By the 1820s, anti-slavery ladies of the middling sort were hosting tea parties using special abolitionist china; this china was an integral part of abolitionist propaganda as it helped recirculate images and lines of verse from pamphlets and other abolitionist literature. Another key aspect of women's anti-slavery campaigning was the focus on the particular suffering of enslaved women caused by the destruction of family life. The happy domestic lives of white women in Britain were shown to exist at the expense of Black women's domestic lives because of their enslavement. This taken-for-granted reliance on Black slave labour was highlighted and critiqued, and suggested that a virtuous lifestyle not based on the suffering of innocent people was not only possible, but necessary. From 1825 onwards, images and poems

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[153] Clare Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," *Slavery & Abolition* 17, no. 3 (1996): 137–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399608575190.
[154] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1993), pp. 84-97.

that stressed the violence involved in cultivating sugar cane were distributed by a networks of women's antislavery associations which made the abstention campaign one of their primary concerns.[155] The Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society distributed cards that stated: "by six families using East India sugar instead of West India sugar one slave less is required."[156] The boycott campaigns in both the 1790s and 1820s gained widespread public support, with a pamphlet published only six months after the 1791 campaign began estimating that 100,000 people had ceased the use of sugar cultivated through slave labour.[157] Abstention from sugar was advocated for more greatly, rather than substitution such as that suggested by the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, because there was uncertainty about how much sugar could be produced cheaply without resorting to slave labour.[158]

Although the abstention campaigns made little impact on sugar production in the West India, its true impact lies in the national antislavery culture it created in Britain. It helped form a distinction in people's minds between the national interest and the West Indies interest, and by widening the antislavery public to include women, children, and the poor, it helped to politicize the domestic sphere in a new way.[159] Conversations surrounding the legal limitations put upon women in the political sphere as definitive proof of their newfound lack of influence do not take into account the ways women continued their involvement in unofficial politics, such as their

[155] Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," pp. 143-5.
[156] Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," p. 146.
[157] Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," p. 146.
[158] Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," pp, 147-8.
[159] Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," p. 155.

social activities which often operated as political networks. Salons provided a space where women could hold discussions on liberal, conservative, and socialist ideology which could have indirect, but major influence on politics throughout Europe. Though women were not the only ones to visit salons for conversation, women were the central participants, and it was in those salons that they could exercise their varying degrees of influence on both the men and women who frequented those spaces.

Similarly, the "blue" gatherings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were attended by both men and women who met on equal terms to discuss topics such as art, philosophy, current affairs, literature, and religion. With both men and women attending these types of gatherings it is difficult to say just how influential women truly were, but the guests who were women rather than the men were often what made certain gatherings more attractive to attend than others as the opinions and advice of women were eagerly sought and discussed.[160] The 1780s also witnessed the birth of the Association movement, which gave women a new way to participate in politics based on independent thought instead of the influence of aristocratic women. A few mixed societies existed which allowed women to speak, but some still found it difficult to debate in public because they were still experiencing the "natural timidity of those who have but lately assumed their rights and privileges."[161] Between 1780-1788, these societies debated whether women should vote or hold office five times[162] For Anna Clark, the women who canvassed did not create a new role for women in the public sphere, unless the public was

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[160] Sarah Richardson, "'Well-Neighboured Houses': The Political Networks of Elite Women, 1780-1860," in *Women's History, Britain 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 56 -73. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203341995.
[161] Donna T. Andrew, *London Debating Societies, 1776-1799*. (London: Record Society, 1994), p. 89.
[162] Clark, *Scandal*, p. 69.

solely considered to be the aristocratic elite; instead Georgiana simply expanded the role of aristocratic women as confidantes, agents, and advisers, beyond the family and into a wider, party cause.[163] Instead, she argues, it was the women of these debating societies who established a much more important precedent for women in the public sphere, first by organizing themselves and learning to speak in public, and second, by considering the question of female franchise.[164] While Clark makes a valid argument, what these women did was set a more important precedent for their, and Georgiana's, contemporaries. But Georgiana's work in the public sphere defends the notion that women had an active and influential role in politics long before they had the right to vote.

Ultimately what this demonstrates is that women have been definitively involved in British politics at least since the eighteenth-century, despite not being afforded the right to vote. When laws changed, so did the ways in which women exercised their political influence. Relegating the political influence of women to whether or not they were involved in high politics is a mistake historians have been making for a long time. They may have begun to recognize over the last few decades that women were involved in politics through canvassing and sometimes in greater roles like campaign managers, but the fact remains that the contributions of women have always been indispensable in the political arena regardless of their categorizations as "soft" or "informal" politics.

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[163] Clark, *Scandal,* p. 81.
[164] Clark, *Scandal,* p. 81.

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