THE POWER OF PERCEPTION: WOMEN AND POLITICS AT THE EARLY GEORGIAN COURT

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The early Georgian period illustrates how the familial dynamic at court affected women’s opportunity to exert political influence. The court represented an important venue that allowed women to declare a political affiliation and to participate in political issues that suited their interests. Appearances often at variance with reality allowed women to manipulate and test their political abilities in order to have the capability to exercise any possible power. Moreover, some women developed political alliances and relationships that supported their own interests. The family structure of the royal household affected how much influence women had. The perception of holding power permitted certain women to behave politically. This thesis will demonstrate that the distinction between appearances and reality becomes vital in assessing women at the early Georgian court by examining some women’s experiences at court during the reigns of the first two Georges. In some cases, the perceived power of a courtier had a real basis, and in other instances, it gave them an opportunity to assess the extent of their political power. Women’s political participation has been underestimated during the early Georgian period, while well-documented post-1760.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The early Georgian period illustrates how the familial dynamic at court affected women’s opportunity to exert political influence. The court represented an important venue that allowed women to declare a political affiliation and to participate in political issues that suited their interests. Appearances often at variance with reality allowed women to manipulate and test their political abilities in order to have the capability to exercise any possible power. Moreover, some women developed political alliances and relationships that supported their own interests. The family structure of the royal household affected how much influence women had. The perception of holding power permitted certain women to behave politically. This thesis will demonstrate that the distinction between appearances and reality becomes vital in assessing women at the early Georgian court by examining some women’s experiences at court during the reigns of the first two Georges. In some cases, the perceived power of a courtier had a real basis, and in other instances, it gave them an opportunity to assess the extent of their political power. Women’s political participation has been underestimated during the early Georgian period, while well-documented post-1760.

This thesis will show how the court remained an important location for women to become politically involved in specific situations, including the presence of a strong princess and queen influenced women’s power as evidenced between the ascension of George I to the death of George II’s consort, Queen Caroline. At the court of George I, the women who accompanied him from Hanover, most notably Melusine von der Schulenburg and Sophia Charlotte von Kielmansegg, had direct access to the king and maintained his confidences and used this trust to participate politically. Moreover, George I’s court lacked a queen consort, which limited the
positions in the royal household available for elite women. The king’s English and German ministers, along with his favorites, dominated the attentions of George I. English women found the court of the king’s son George August and his wife Caroline, Prince and Princess of Wales, an acceptable alternative and the women appointed to positions in the princess’s service developed personal and political relationships with the royal couple. Henrietta Howard and Charlotte Clayton served George August and Caroline as prince and princess and later as king and queen, in the royal household. The close relationship that Clayton and Howard developed with royalty gave them a perception of authority and provided them with opportunities to participate in the political operations at court. Caroline facilitated the advancement of other women during the reigns of George I and George II. She became her husband’s confidante and used the contentious relationship between George I and the prince to her advantage, and in doing so became politically relevant throughout her time in England. As queen, her interests in politics intensified and the politically active role she created for herself increased the perception of power for the women close to her.

Women’s participation in politics involved a disparity between how print dictated the appropriate roles for women and how women actually behaved. Sir Richard Steele and his published works provide the best example of the discrepancy between print and reality. His written beliefs indicated that women should maintain their domestic roles, yet his desire to rise in society motivated his requests for favor from women. Steele embodies how men in general gained political favors—by requesting royal favor and patronage from elite women, men ignored proper gender roles. Steele contributed significantly to the work on proper behavior for men and women during his long career as a writer. The inconsistencies between his work and his actions
provide an understanding of the political influence of women during the reigns of George I and George II.

The role of conduct literature reveals how authors informed the public of the proper behavior for women. Kathryn Shevelow discusses conduct literature and emphasizes women as an audience. She acknowledges that while a limited idea of femininity developed that accentuated women in the private sphere of the home, the recognition of women as potential readers and writers of literature also emerged.\(^1\) She suggests that although a mixture of classes read the popular periodicals, including the elite, the intended audience focused on women who were on the boundaries of leading society. Shevelow claims that these women “did not view themselves as participating in its forms of social and political power, its educational institutions, and its classically-based literary traditions.”\(^2\) The literature diffused ideas about the “genteel codes of conduct,” so readers could associate themselves with refined society through behavior.\(^3\)

Ingrid Tague addresses feminine conduct during the early eighteenth century and highlights the importance of morality, modesty, chastity, and virtue. She posits that a shift from a religious focus in conduct literature to an emphasis on biology for explaining the differences between the sexes occurred between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She also suggests that while seventeenth-century literature promoted self-examination, the early eighteenth century

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\(^3\)Ibid.
made behavior innate and denied women power over their actions. Tague contends that virtue, modesty, and chastity became the traits that constituted femininity, and writers of conduct literature stressed that these traits were biological, but that it existed within a framework that supported learned behavior. Exposing the illogic in the biological claim, she argues that if feminine behavior were natural, women would not need instructions for their gender roles. Conduct writers encouraged female modesty and believed that it was a woman’s most agreeable characteristic. Tague reveals the masculine agenda evident through the promotion of female modesty and the connection between chastity and property. Authors of conduct literature concluded that chastity was a woman’s natural property and emphasized the constant threat of it being stolen by men. By connecting chastity to property, writers of conduct literature promoted its protection from men.

Shevelow and Tague show how writers constructed ideas of femininity in early eighteenth-century England. The variables of class, wealth, and personal ideas make it difficult to assess a collective attitude about femininity. Shevelow, Tague, and other scholars have created a general paradigm for identifying how society created the acceptable woman in print. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks suggests that one historiographical trend concerning the history of women emphasizes the political context in defining male and female. She argues that the relationship that existed between the sexes provided a model for the relationship between ruler and subject. Furthermore, Wiesner-Hanks contends that “women or men who stepped outside their prescribed roles in other than extraordinary circumstances, and particularly those who made a point of emphasizing that they were doing this, were seen as threatening not only relations between the

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6 Ibid., 34-35.
sexes but also the operation of the entire social order.” Keeping to designated gender roles maintained the social order, and therefore, conduct literature’s emphasis on women’s proper role attempted to deter women from stepping outside their appropriate positions.

An underlying theme in the construction of the feminine role concerns the idea of separate spheres, where women belonged to the private, and men to the public domains. Vivien Jones identifies the leading consensus in print during the eighteenth century as a “dominant ideology of femininity: the natural association between women and the private sphere, domesticity, and leisure.” The division of the sexes into separate spheres was most apparent in print, which suggests that this was society’s attempt to create an ideal state for a woman and not necessarily how it worked in practice. Amanda Vickery has challenged the strict construction of the separate spheres ideology when looking at women in history and asserts, “the metaphor of separate spheres fails to capture the texture of female subordination and the complex interplay of emotion and power in family life.” Subsequently, Lawrence Klein refers to this as the “domestic thesis,” and asserts that the strict gender roles assigned to men and women during the eighteenth century that delegated one to the public and the other to the private sphere was not an absolute. He claims that women “had public dimensions to their lives,” that allowed them to operate in the public domain, specifically in state matters. Vickery and Klein persuasively argue that the correlation between men and women and public and private was delicate and not total.

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Existing scholarship after 1760 contends that women began taking active roles on the political stage, most notably outside George III’s court, because he was happily married and emphasized domesticity. Elaine Chalus argues that elite women took an interest in political life. She describes how women used their roles as confidants, advisors, agents, and partners to become political and through these ways could become involved in the social politics that shaped the decision-making process in the ministry. Chalus contends that women began adding political roles to their repertoire—political hostesses, political advisors to their male children, and political petitioners that requested positions from leading ministers for male relatives. Judith Lewis’s study connects political power to property through her analysis of the manuscripts of six families who had a minimum of three thousand acres in six different counties. She argues that elite women had the ability to participate in the political process because their property enabled them or required them to participate. Scholars have shown that women acquired more outlets that permitted them to operate in the political domain. Women exercised greater variation in the ways they participated in politics in late Georgian England, whereas in the early Georgian period women had to keep their political maneuvers more hidden. Prior to the expansion of political involvement, women had opportunities to participate but had to adjust the ways they engaged in political life and not overstep the societal boundaries set for them.


13 Judith S. Lewis, Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain (New York: Routledge, 2003), 4.
When George Ludwig became king in 1714, there were 171 peers in England and during the reigns of the first two Georges, the peer count averaged around 180 in England and Wales. W. A. Speck contends that the English aristocracy was more privileged than its European counterpart, since the eldest son was the only one that could inherit titles. Speck argues, “the English aristocracy, was more of a closed circle in the eighteenth century than any other time in history.”15 The elite maintained control in early eighteenth-century politics through property giving them political dominance, and as Roy Porter claims, no one threatened the aristocracy’s superiority.16 With the Hanoverian succession, the Whigs became the favored party and after 1721, the Whig faction dominated government, so much so, that those who supported the ministry in power obtained the majority of government positions. With the consolidation of a Whig oligarchical state Porter describes the administration of the first two Georges as “personal, venal and often nepotistic; yet this was in many ways appropriate to a relatively face-to-face society, marked by immense local diversity, where familiarity and ‘pull’ really did count for more than abstract expertise.” 17 Anna Clark further accentuates the importance of status and contends that family connections remained a crucial element in politics. She suggests, “the king retained much patronage power and could choose his own ministers. An aristocratic oligarchy controlled Parliament through family connections and personal influence. The monarchy and aristocracy claimed that when they bestowed patronage, they rewarded merit and knit society together.”18 Within this framework of political power through family connections, property, and

17 Ibid., 119.
personal influence women also shared a role in politics through their family relationships similar to their male counterparts.

For aristocratic women in the early eighteenth century, political participation through patronage was an acceptable system, regardless of those who rejected this claim. Clark claims “radicals who rejected the system of patronage could raise the cry “petticoat influence” against them. Portraying influential ladies as corrupt and power hungry, they linked traditional ideas of women as insatiably sexual with the fear of female political influence in order to undercut their real targets: the king’s power, a political party, or even the aristocracy in general.”

Enlightenment writers held women responsible for influencing politics and corrupting the court. Moreover, elite women’s personal relationships with men in power determined policy and patronage. During the reigns of the first two Georges the claims of “petticoat influence” hold some basis. Some women who frequently attended the courts of George I and George II involved themselves in the politics of the court by developing the important familial, social, and royal connections necessary to influence preferment, royal favor, and to support their political interests, sometimes in corrupt ways.

The idea that politics had shifted from court to parliament, especially after the Hanoverian succession, has encouraged research to focus on political life outside the court. Hannah Smith suggests that early Georgian England offered multiple places to conduct politics and various outlets to express political thought. These venues included coffee houses, theaters, clubs, and the streets. Paula McDowell describes the period from 1678-1730 as a time when the lower ranks of women became involved in the printing of political works and participated in the

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19 Ibid., 10.
formation of the ideologies included in these types of tracts. Smith’s research has brought attention back to the court and has demonstrated that the political sphere singularly excluded parliament or the court as a hub for political activity, but included other areas where differing classes of people had opportunity to exercise a political voice. Smith argues, “because much recent work has focused upon popular political engagement, and thus invariably upon the activities of the middling and lower ranks of society, this new political history of the eighteenth century has tended to ignore the existence of another extra-parliamentary sphere which similarly deserves consideration—the court.” Smith focuses on the court as a politically relevant institution and assesses the political and cultural elements of the court in its entirety, but does not investigate the specific ways that women used the court to behave politically.

Smith’s analysis of the court during the reigns of George I and George II has inspired my evaluation of female courtiers with her indispensable view of the role of the court in politics. She reintroduces politics back into the debate over the political relevance of the monarchy. Smith ascertains that two assessments of the monarchy exist. She explains: “There is an eighteenth century where the burgeoning public sphere, and George I and George II themselves, relegate the monarchy to cipher-like-status in social and cultural terms. Then there is an eighteenth century in which monarchy is an integral component of society, buttressed by aristocracy and Anglicanism.” Smith accepts that both arguments are valid; however, the former ignores the monarchy and the elite women who frequented the court of the early Georgian monarchs. In general, scholars have not addressed the women who spent time at the courts of George I and George II. In this thesis, I agree with and build upon Smith’s assessment

23 Smith, Georgian Monarchy, 193.
24 Ibid., 12.
25 Ibid.
of the court and its relation to the public sphere. She argues the importance of making the distinction between “the court as an institution and the court as a venue.”

Smith contends that the court represented one component within the public sphere, the way the coffeehouse or streets represented the new ways the public participated in politics. The public sphere is a complicated concept, but when I use this term, it refers to the court as an element within the larger public sphere that allowed more people to participate in politics. In opposition to this is the private sphere, which constituted the home, the family, and domesticity. Elite women in early eighteenth-century England had important public avenues such as the court that allowed them to act outside of the private sphere constructed by conduct literature.

My thesis adds to the research of the early Georgian period by concentrating on the court as a public venue that allowed elite women to participate in politics and aid in redefining the role of monarchy and the court as an acceptable way for elite women to become politically relevant. I further attempt to address how women moved within court circles and operated at court from the reign of George I through the death of Queen Caroline, George II’s influential consort. Conduct literature argued that it was essential that women keep to their domestic duties. The seventeenth-century political debate concerned the relationship between the state and the family; authors excluded women from the political sphere and largely situated them with the privacy of the home. Mary Severance contends that Hobbes formulated his work *Leviathan* at the expense

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26 Ibid., 194. Ingrid Tague asserts, “influence was seen and accepted as public power... Influence provided the primary legitimate and accepted means for women of quality to participate in public affairs,” *Women of Quality*, 197. Some situations qualified as exerting influence, but it becomes difficult to prove how much influence someone had over another.

27 The origins of the ideology of a public sphere can be attributed to Jürgen Habermas. Habermas contends that the public sphere became a function of the political domain beginning in the eighteenth century. The public sphere consisted of those deemed the ‘middling sort’ and took its form on the streets, coffeehouses, clubs, and in print; rather than a total emphasis on parliament and the aristocracy, it now focused on the new forum. This new public sphere affected politics in that the “decisions of state authority appealed to the critical public in order to legitimate demands before this new forum” Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 57.
of women and separated the family from the state and placed women in a subordinate position to their husbands.28 John Locke’s Two Treatises responded to Filmer’s assertion that the relationship between the monarch and his subjects was the same to the role of the father in the family. Susan Moller Okin posits that Locke’s attempts to dispute Filmer allowed him to take an unusual stance on women with the family by asserting the independence of the wife from her husband.29 Severance has shown that despite Locke’s argument that women remained independent within the family, he reverts back to the patriarchal model that women are subordinate to their male counterparts and have no place within the political sphere.30 Regardless of this, women gained the opportunity to participate in the public sphere through the family structure of court. An assessment of the courts of George I and George II reveal that women of the aristocracy did not always follow the idea that women’s sole duty resided in the private sphere. The women of the early Georgian court acted politically and used their positions to create political authority. Factors that aided these women include the absence of a queen consort to George I, the role of Princess Caroline, and the power that Caroline gained as queen. All of these factors influenced the ways women operated politically and quite publicly during the reigns of George I and George II. For women, the separate spheres ideology was not so absolute.

CHAPTER II

APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY: THE POLITICS OF SIR RICHARD STEELE AND WOMEN OF QUALITY

Early eighteenth-century English literary discourse focused on defining the proper woman, and of equal importance, the ideal man. The attempt to identify specific expectations of women and men led to the appearance of an ideology of separate spheres that placed women in the domestic sphere and men in the public realm. An incongruity existed between what society dictated as acceptable through print and how women actually behaved. Social class determined the available opportunities women had to act outside the ideal domestic role. For women, the balance between becoming involved in matters prescribed for men and maintaining the proper womanly role was delicate. Sir Richard Steele outwardly supported traditional gender roles while in private relied on women for advancement. Furthermore, Steele’s dependence on women who aided his ambitions reveals the way women operated politically during the reign of George I.

Steele dictated the suitable roles for men and women through his published works. His ambition drove him to become a part of the political world; personal determination combined with constant financial distress drove Steele to seek preferment wherever he could, including the pursuit of patronage from women. Particularly, Steele sought assistance from the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough and Charlotte Clayton, a woman of the bedchamber to Caroline, Princess of Wales. Steele’s reliance on strong women began with his family. His aunt Katherine, Lady Mildmay, provided him with his first opportunity to raise his status by giving him an education. Steele’s dependence on women with connections to the court illustrates that the political sphere was far from well-defined and often blurred appearance and reality. Steele’s
correspondence with these women shows that he believed they held the authority to aid him in the appointments he desired, despite his published statements designating women to the home and family.

The Early Life of Richard Steele and the Development of his Reliance on Women

The decisions that Steele made throughout his life demonstrated his desire to belong in the political world. Charles A. Knight, the political biographer of Steele, suggests that he participated in politics in multiple fashions, namely “as soldier, as Gazetteer, as dramatist, as essayist, as party propagandist, as Member of Parliament, and as writer on economics.”

Although Steele’s reputation came from his writings, his family’s circumstances did not dictate an easy transition to the English world of literature and politics. Steele’s grandfather, also Richard Steele, was a merchant explorer who traveled to Aleppo and Persia to learn the cloth trade. Additionally, he worked for the East India Company assisting in opening the Persian region to trade and his voyages to India allowed his family to make important connections in England. Calhoun Winton suggests that James I and Charles I were familiar with the voyages of the elder Richard Steele and that he received favor from both monarchs as a result. After Steele’s grandfather ended his career as explorer, he returned to England and became a courtier. The life of a courtier became more complicated as the tensions between Charles I and Parliament escalated. Nevertheless, Steele’s grandfather gained favor with Charles I and received the appointment to Gentleman of the Privy Chamber with a pension of £200. He also was able to

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acquire land in Ireland.\(^4\) The actions of Steele’s grandfather provided him with the foundation he needed to receive the preferment he did prior to his fame as a writer.

Richard Steele’s grandfather had ambition, but his father lacked the same determination to rise in society. Richard Steele was born to Richard Steele Jr. and Elinor Sheyles Symes Steele in Dublin in 1672. The second Richard Steele chose the profession of law and obtained insignificant civil positions, namely his appointment to subsheriff of County Tipperary. Steele’s assignment required him to collect unpaid taxes, an extremely difficult task. The law dictated that tax collectors had to pay the amount of the uncollected taxes, which did not benefit the financial circumstances of Richard Steele’s father. Upon the death of his father in 1676 or 1677, Steele and his siblings went to live with his aunt, Katherine, Lady Mildmay, who married the widower Sir Humphrey Mildmay of Essex in 1662.\(^5\) In 1663, Lady Mildmay signed documents in which she relinquished her rights to the Mildmay estate in return for £80 a year and the right to keep her title.\(^6\) Steele and his father shared a similar tendency to fall into financial distress often, but Steele had bigger ambitions for himself, much like his grandfather. His aunt provided an avenue for him to rise in society.

After the death of her first husband, Lady Mildmay made a second marriage, which improved her nephew’s opportunity to rise in society. In 1675, Lady Mildmay married Henry Gascoigne, who was the private secretary to the Duke of Ormonde. Gascoigne served the first Duke of Ormonde until 1688 and the second Duke of Ormonde until 1693. As private secretary to an aristocratic man, Gascoigne performed many everyday tasks associated with governing. He executed the policies of legislators, composed letters, disseminated instructions, and made the

\(^{4}\) Winton, *Captain Steele*, 5.  
\(^{5}\) Knight, *Political Biography*, 10.  
\(^{6}\) Winton, *Captain Steele*, 9-10.
necessary connections to request assistance for his friends. The elite viewed Gascoigne’s position with great honor and prestige. In fact, it allowed members of the gentry, like Gascoigne and Lady Mildmay, an opportunity to attain prosperity without turning to trade. Winton connects Gascoigne’s association with powerful men to Steele’s choice to do the same. Winton argues that “literature and politics were, [and] had to be, subordinate to patronage in this society.” This statement was especially applicable to the career of Richard Steele as he depended on patronage to maintain his lifestyle. Steele often vacillated in his thoughts on women when he required the support from a woman of quality. The death of Steele’s father, his subsequent adoption by the Gascoignes, and their close relation to the Duke of Ormonde assisted Steele’s path and prospects into the political world.

One way Steele’s association with the Ormondes aided his political course was through education. In 1684, at the age of twelve and sponsored by the Duke of Ormonde, Steele enrolled at Charterhouse school. The Duke of Ormonde also patronized the headmaster of the school, Thomas Burnet. Knight argues, “the extent of Burnet’s influence on Steele is hard to determine, but it seems fitting that he was educated by a controversial, pseudoscientific, low-church Master.” He also suggests that the friendship Steele developed with Joseph Addison while they were students at Charterhouse surpassed any possible influence Burnet may have had. Addison left Charterhouse for Oxford in 1687 and Steele followed in 1689. The first Duke of Ormond died in July of 1688, prior to Steele leaving Charterhouse for Oxford, and was succeeded by his grandson, who was twenty-three years old. The second Duke of Ormond declared himself loyal
to William III and secured the position of Chancellor of Oxford, which proved beneficial to Steele.

Steele left Charterhouse for Oxford in 1689 and signed the entry book at Christ Church College in December of 1690. In August 1691, Steele transferred to Merton College where he received a scholarship. Based on his reading of correspondence covering Steele’s time at Oxford, Winton claims “despite [Steele’s] denial, [he had] a high opinion of his own worth, a tendency perhaps to inflate his abilities and performances beyond life-size. The second is the virtual craving for preferment.”12 Winton’s argument supports the idea that, for Steele, patronage provided the best avenue for him to fulfill his political ambitions. Steele’s desire for favor also helps explain the discrepancy between Steele’s proclamations of proper behavior, through his writings, and his own conduct, especially in cases when he sought preferment. In May 1690, Steele wrote his uncle explaining his gratitude for his uncle’s favor, while requesting additional assistance in securing a position:

compleat all the rest by soliciting the Dean who is now in London…I am satisfied that I stand very fair in his favour. He saw one of my Exercises in the House and commended it very much and say’[f] I went on in me Study he did not question but I should make something more than ordinary…I speake not this, S’r, out of vanity or affection but to let you know that I have not been altogether negligent on my part: these places are not given by merit but are secured by friends.13

Steele presented his own worth proudly and revealed that he understood the system of patronage and how to acquire a desired position. Steele realized that his financial and social advancements depended on taking advantage of every opportunity. The political changes that occurred while

12 Winton, Captain Steele, 34.
13 Steele to Gascoigne, 14 May 1690, in Correspondence, 7-8.
Steele was at Charterhouse and subsequently at Oxford influenced the development of Steele’s Whig political thought.\textsuperscript{14}

John Locke published \textit{Two Treatises of Government} in 1689, when Steele was at Oxford. He wrote most of the \textit{Two Treatises} before 1683 in reaction to the Exclusion Crisis, but its publication in 1689 connected the political philosophy that Locke professed with the Glorious Revolution.\textsuperscript{15} Although the work was popular among some Whigs, it gained popularity in 1703. Locke was an Oxonian and, in 1695, the \textit{Two Treatises} allegedly created “a great noise” at Oxford.\textsuperscript{16} The scholarly consensus agrees that Steele strongly identified with Locke’s political philosophy, specifically the idea that secular forces drove civil power and not divine right; that although tradition and history are among those driving forces, certain circumstances necessitate change.\textsuperscript{17} Steele agreed with the essential elements of Locke’s political ideology. Steele affiliated himself with the Whigs and his approval of Locke’s ideas supported his ideas about government.


\textsuperscript{17}Knight, \textit{Political Biography}, 15; Winton, \textit{Captain Steele}, 35.
In Locke’s first treatise, he argued against the work of Robert Filmer, who claimed that the monarch held the same authority over his subjects that a father did in his family.\textsuperscript{18} Filmer claimed that God granted Adam total rule of Eve and Eve received the punishment of childbirth. In response, Locke debated against the complete authority of Adam:

\begin{quote}
the weaker Sex, as by a Law so subjected to the Curse contained in them, that ‘tis their duty not to endeavour to avoid it. And will any one say, that \textit{Eve}, or any other Woman, sinn’d if she were brought to Bed without those multiplied Pains God threatens her here with? Or that either of our Queens \textit{Mary} or \textit{Elizabeth}, had they Married any of their Subjects, had been by this Text put into a Political Subjection to him? or that he thereby should have had \textit{Monarchical Rule} over her? God, in this Text, gives not, that I see, any Authority to \textit{Adam} over \textit{Éve}, or to men over their Wives.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

With this statement, Locke opposed the argument that Adam received complete power over Eve and suggested that women were not subordinate to men. In Locke’s second treatise, he explained the relationship that existed between man and wife and again asserted the independence of women from their male counterpart:

\begin{quote}
the Husband and Wife, though they have but one common Concern, yet having different understandings, will unavoidably sometimes have different wills too; it therefore being necessary, that the last Determinations, i.e. the Rule, should be placed somewhere, it naturally falls to the Man’s share, as the abler and the stronger. But this reaching but to the things of their common Interest and Property, leaves the Wife in the full and free possession of what by Contract is her peculiar Right, and gives the Husband no more power over her Life, that she has over his.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

In opposition to Filmer, Locke argued that this concept contradicted logic and women held independence from their husbands. Despite Locke’s assertion that women existed individually from their male counterpart he, as Mary Severance has observed, does not further the position of women, but reverts to a patriarchal authority where women remained subordinate to men and

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 321.
irrelevant to the political institutions dominated by men. Locke relegates women to the private sphere of the home similar to Steele. Both men failed to acknowledge the real place of women in political society and continued to reinforce women’s place within the social order. Locke guided Steele’s ideas about government and politics, which cemented his Whiggish association. Although Steele held firmly to Locke’s philosophy regarding the relationship between the state and the family, he ignored Locke’s analysis of the family and women’s position within it and instead held to Locke’s assessment that women held a subordinate position to their husband and had no place within politics. Steele’s influence from Locke and his time at Oxford proved significant, but he never completed his studies at Oxford.

Steele’s Published Proclamations of Gender Roles

Steele left his studies to pursue a career in the military in 1692. In 1702, he received his last appointment as Captain of the 34th Regiment of Foot and by 1704, he no longer served in the military. Steele’s first publication appeared when Queen Mary died in December of 1694. He published, *The Procession: A Poem on Her Majesties Funeral*, but only found success when he began writing after his military career ended. Steele achieved fame from a few of his earlier works that included *The Christian Hero, The Funeral*, and *The Lying Lover*. Steele’s ability to combine writing and politics was essential to his success. Winton suggests that as literacy rose in England, propaganda became indispensable to both political factions. With the death of King William and the accession of Queen Anne, the turbulence of party politics resulted in the Whigs and Tories using literature to promote their individual interests. Richard Steele was a Whig and

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22 Ibid., 65.
throughout his career he became an important propagandist for the Whig party. At the same time, his writings gave him a platform to educate a broader segment of society on matters of proper behavior as well as on politics.

Steele’s pointed ideas about women and their role in society, most apparent in his plays and periodicals, classified him as an author of conduct literature. He dictated his position regarding the roles of women, in his most famous publications, the Tatler and the Spectator, that expounded on the suitable roles for men and women. Kathryn Shevelow suggests that Steele believed women’s and men’s nature were complementary, meaning he stressed the differences between and addressed the specific roles of both. Shawn Maurer contends that while the Tatler addressed gender differences, the Spectator “consolidate[d] men’s interests by creating and then effacing an artfully conceived female Other.” Maurer further asserts that Steele recognized the distinct boundaries between the sexes and thus became determined to distinguish the differences between male and female, as well as the political and domestic. The consensus about Steele’s ideology through his published works stresses his intent to separate the roles and responsibilities for men and women. Rae Blanchard posits that Steele did not believe women entirely the intellectual and social inferiors to men, or the view that women were subservient in marriage. Blanchard’s analysis of Steele is convincing in that she concludes that Steele cannot be considered a reformer, because he thought that innate human characteristics of women and men


27 Ibid., 133-4.
were selfishness and desire; he more often represented women as foolish and self-seeking than
driven by reason.\textsuperscript{28} Steele’s written works supported that he was not a reformer and the
discrepancy that existed between his published ideas about women and his actual behavior
suggests two possibilities about the ideas that he avowed in print. First, Steele became dependent
on preferment to gain favor and appointments. Despite his true belief that women remained
outside the public sphere, his desire for patronage superseded his position on women’s roles.
Secondly, he preached prescribed gender roles in spite of his true opinions. The most likely
reason for the incongruity between Steele’s beliefs in print and his behavior is that the ideas he
depicted in print gained him support as an author, which he greatly desired, and that he did not
hold so ardently to these beliefs, because favor and requests for appointment mattered more.

Steele claimed that women’s role in society centered on marriage, a predominant attitude
of men regarding women’s place in early eighteenth-century society. Although he supported the
education of women, he thought the curriculum needed to focus on topics that assisted women in
the management of their homes. Like Steele, Joseph Addison, fellow writer and co-creator of the
Tatler and Spectator, expressed the opinion that women had no place in politics. In the
Spectator, Addison addressed the issue of women of party:

that Party Rage which of late Years is very much crept into their Conversation.
This is, in its nature, a Male Vice, and made up of many angry and cruel Passions
that are altogether repugnant to the Softness, the Modesty, and those other
endearing Qualities which are natural to the Fair Sex. Women were formed to
temper Mankind, and soothen them into Tenderness and Compassion, not to set an
Edge upon their Minds, and blow up in them those Passions which are too apt to
rise of their own Accord.\textsuperscript{29}

Addison, like many writers of the time, emphasized the gentleness of women’s character and
reinforced the idea that women existed to assist man, not to act in the role of a male counterpart.

\textsuperscript{29} Joseph Addison, The Spectator, No. 57, 1:242.
Steele, like other men of his age, expressed the belief that women’s goal was marriage and the home her domain.

Steele, in his works, emphasized and reinforced the ideas that women belonged in the domestic sphere. In Steele’s play The Funeral Or Grief a la Mode: A Comedy he included the couplet “And woman’s happiness, for all her Scorn, Is only by that side whence she was born,” which proposed that women’s place was determined from the beginning of life and that her happiness derived from keeping to this position.\(^\text{30}\) The inclusion of “for all her Scorn” insinuates that women did not agree or approve of this classification. Furthermore, it suggests that Steele understood that women acted outside of their prescribed roles and attested to the importance of women keeping to their position. In the Spectator, Steele further accentuated the roles he found most suitable to women when he introduced the idea and purpose of his work, the Ladies’ Library:

This collection of books shall consist of such authors as do not corrupt while they divert, but shall tend more immediately to improve them, as they are women. They shall be such as shall not hurt a feature by the austerity of their reflections, nor cause one impertinent glance by the wantonness of them. They shall all tend to advance the value of their innocence as virgins, improve their understanding as wives, and regulate their tenderness as parents.\(^\text{31}\)

Steele’s creation of a Ladies’ Library reaffirmed his intent to educate women specific to their societal obligations. He explicitly placed women in the roles of virgin, or wife and mother suggesting that these were the only suitable positions they could hold. Steele prefaced the collection with the purpose “to fix in the mind general Rules for Conduct in all the Circumstances of the Life of Woman,” further supporting that in print he assigned women to the

\(^{30}\) Richard Steele, The Funeral Or Grief a la Mode: A Comedy, Act II (The Strand: Jacob Tonson, 1735), 48.

domestic sphere. In the *Guardian*, Steele definitively placed women in a subordinate position to men when he explained:

> It hath been often said, that Women seem formed to soften the boisterous Passions, and sooth the Cares and Anxieties to which Men are exposed in the many Perplexities of Life. That having weaker Bodies, and less Strength of Mind than Man, Nature hath poured out her Charms upon them, and given them such Tenderness of Heart that the most delicate Delight we receive from them, is in thinking them entirely ours, and under our Protection.

Steele proclaimed that women held a subservient position to men and implied that their sole purpose centered on complementing and serving men. Despite his continued assertions that women belonged in the domestic parts of life and remained under the guidance of men, he goes against everything he believed women stood for by requesting assistance from women who defied this basic idea about the circumstances of their sex.

Steele addressed his position on women’s role in society and maintained his argument that women did not belong in public life. In the *Spectator*, he asserted the repercussions that resulted from women that behaved publically:

> We have indeed carryed Womens Characters too much into publick Life, and you shall see them now a-Days affect a sort of Fame: But I cannot help venturing to disoblige them for their service, by telling them, that the utmost of a Woman’s Character is contained in Domestick Life; she is Blameable or Praise-worthy according as her carriage affects the House of her Father or her Husband. All she has to do in this World, is contained within the Duties of a Daughter, a Sister, a Wife, and a Mother. . . . But when the very Brains of the Sex are turned, and they place their Ambition on Circumstances wherein to excel, ’tis no addition to what is truly Commendable . . . But when they consider themselves, as they ought, no other than an additional Part of the Species, (for their own Happiness and Comfort, as well as that of those for whom they were born) their Ambition to excel will be directed accordingly; and they will in no part of their Lives want Opportunities of being shining Ornaments to their Fathers, Husbands, Brothers or Children.

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Steele relegated women to the domestic sphere and emphasized what qualified as household duties. Moreover, he inferred that the basis of admiration and approval for women depended largely on their commitment to family and activities suitable to their sex. Steele suggested that if women acted within the proper scope of their sex then they would become happy and content with their position and not strive for accomplishments in the public domain. By addressing the issue of women in public life in the *Spectator*, Steele acknowledged that women acted in a public role. Furthermore, Steele recognized that some women did strive to grander positions and used their intelligence for aspirations not deemed worthy of their sex. Steele further solidified his idea that women did not belong in public life.

Steele’s Relationship with Elite Women

Though Steele publically proclaimed his ideas concerning women’s place in society, his personal relationships with elite women proved contradictory. Steele, through his political writings, made the acquaintance of John and Sarah Churchill, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. The Duchess of Marlborough was, arguably, one of the most political women in the early eighteenth century. She had, for many years, a close relationship to Queen Anne and held the appointed positions of mistress of the robes, groom of the stole, keeper of the privy purse, and ranger of Windsor Park. Furthermore, the duchess played a significant role in the leading group of Whig ministers and helped maintain the queen’s confidence in her current ministry. These ministers included the duchess’s husband the Duke of Marlborough, Sidney Goldolphin, and the Marlborough’s son-in-law, Lord Sunderland. Despite her efforts, the duchess was not able to maintain her confidence with the queen, which led to her replacement by

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35 Additionally, Addison wrote on party women twice in the *Spectator*, which supports a common attitude on the subject between Steele and Addison, see Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 57, No. 81, 1:241-44 and 1:346-9.
Abigail Masham, a Tory, and cousin to Robert Harley.\textsuperscript{37} When the Whigs lost power, the Marlboroughs left England for Europe in disgrace. However, Richard Steele played his role as propagandist for the cause of the Whigs and Marlborough in hope that he would receive favor when they regained political prominence.

Addison and Steele, as writers for the Whig cause, sought assistance from Arthur Maynwaring, who was the chief propagandist for the Whigs. Moreover, Maynwaring aided the Duchess of Marlborough and acted as her political advisor.\textsuperscript{38} Steele’s political writing focused on the Whig cause, but it also centered on the defense of the Duke of Marlborough. Steele greatly admired the duke, especially as a military leader. In a dedication to the Duke of Marlborough, before the duke had left England, Steele wrote with esteem that “One cannot indeed without Offence, to Yourself, observe, that You excel the rest of Mankind in the least, as well as the greatest Endowments . . . . We may congratulate Your Grace not only up Your high Atcheivements, but likewise upon the happy Expiration of Your Command, by which Your Glory is put out of the Power of Fortune.”\textsuperscript{39} Steele supported the duchess in a more subtle way. In a dedication in the \textit{Tatler} to William Lord Cowper, Baron of Wingham, he commended Cowper for his defense of the Duchess of Marlborough in his \textit{A Letter to Isaac Bickerstaff} against

\textsuperscript{37} The politics of Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough have been studied at length; for more information see Francis Harris, \textit{A Passion for Government: The Life of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), Virginia Cowles, \textit{The Great Marlborough and his Duchess} (New York: Macmillian, 1983), Iris Butler, \textit{Rule of Three: Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, and her Companions in Power} (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967); for information on the duchess see R. O. Bucholz, \textit{The Augustan Court}.

\textsuperscript{38} For more on the political propaganda of Arthur Maynwaring see, J. Oldmixon, \textit{Life and Posthumous Writings of Arthur Maynwaring} (London: A. Bell, W. Taylor, J. Baker, 1715).

\textsuperscript{39} Richard Steele, \textit{The Spectator}, 5:179-80. Writings that expressed Steele’s loyalty to Marlboroughs are \textit{An Imitation of the Sixth Ode of Horace . . . Applied to His Grace the Duke of Marlborough}, published in \textit{The Diverting Post}, No. 2, 28 Oct. to 4 Nov. 1704. Other publications that show Steele’s devotion to the Marlboroughs include \textit{The Tatler}, No.64, 6 Sept. 1709, and \textit{The Spectator}, No. 139, 9 Aug. 1711.
an attack by Lord Bolingbroke in his *Letter to the Examiner*.\(^\text{40}\) Steele’s public defense of the Marlboroughs gained him their support upon their return to England.

With the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the succession of George I, the Whigs triumphed in government and Steele, who consistently supported the cause, stood to benefit. Barton Booth, Robert Wilks, and Colley Cibber approached Richard Steele and requested that he use his influence to have the theater’s license renewed, which had been stopped after the death of Queen Anne. The group also asked Steele to apply for the commission for Drury Lane Theater.\(^\text{41}\) Steele appealed to the Duke of Marlborough to approach King George and request his assistance, upon his arrival from Hanover, to secure the patent for the theater on his behalf. Additionally, Steele arranged a meeting with the Duchess of Marlborough. Steele related on September 8, 1714 “I shall dine at Cleland’s in order to see Lady Marleborough as soon as she is at Leisure after dinner. I have spoken to two or Three of the Justices and I think all will do Well.”\(^\text{42}\) Steele correctly implied that his endeavors would work out in his favor. Steele, along with Booth, Wilks, and Cibber received the license to the theater on October 8, 1714. Winton argues that the Duchess of Marlborough played an important role in Steele receiving the appointment. He suggests that if the duchess did not approve of Steele then the Marlboroughs would not have endorsed him to the king.\(^\text{43}\) Research concerning the influence and authority of the duchess supports the idea that she had great power within her marriage and the political arena.\(^\text{44}\) Steele’s ardent support for the Duke of Marlborough and inadvertently the Duchess of Marlborough proves contradictory to his constant written beliefs on women’s suitable role in


\(^{42}\) Steele to Mrs. Steele, 8 September 1714, in *Correspondence*, 306.


\(^{44}\) For more information on the Duchess of Marlborough see above note on her involvement in politics.
society. He aligned himself with one of the most powerful women of the period, suggesting that his elevation in political society mattered more.

Steele made the acquaintance of another aristocratic woman, Charlotte Clayton, through their mutual patrons, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough and friend Benjamin Hoadly. The Duchess of Marlborough, through Baron Bothmer, secured a position for Clayton as bedchamber woman to Caroline, Princess of Wales. As for Benjamin Hoadly, a Whig clergyman, who assisted Steele in his paper the *Crisis*, appeared to have a close relationship with Steele and Clayton. It is likely that Hoadly also introduced Steele to Clayton. In 1715, Hoadly received the appointment of Bishop of Bangor for his support of the Hanoverian succession through the support of George and Caroline, Prince and Princess of Wales. Steele’s correspondence with Clayton began soon after George I’s accession to the throne. Steele wrote to Clayton in October of 1715 concerning his desire for the appointment to Master of Charterhouse, the school he had attended as a young boy. Steele wrote “I will not proceed in the affair of the Charterhouse, except I have the direst promise of the majority . . . . I sincerely assure you, that I do not seek this station upon any other lien but to do good to others; and if I do not get it, you will see my opposers repent that they would not let me be humble.” Steele made his desire to become Master of Charterhouse known and hoped that Clayton supported his appointment and persuaded the princess to do the same. Steele clearly announced his desire to receive this particular position in his petition to King George explicitly on the subject of Charterhouse. Steele never

45 Baron Bothmer was one of King George’s German ministers who accompanied him from Hanover. Bothmer continued to served as a minister to the king in England. For more information on Clayton’s connection to the Duchess see, A. T. Thomson, *Memoirs of Viscountess Sundon: Mistress of the Robes to Queen Caroline, Consort of George II*, 2 Vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1847), 1:8.
46 Ibid., 1:47.
48 Steele petitioned the king concerning the Mastership of Charterhouse. He wrote “C’est pour quoi le Suppliant (qui sera toujours devoué au Service de Votre Majesté et qui n’a rien en Vue que de se procurer un establissement, qui le mette en etat de vivre en Gentilhomme pendant le rest de sa vie) supplie Tres Humblement
received the employment, but despite his attitude toward public women contained in his writing, he sought the service of Clayton, who strove to take part in political issues.

Steele continued his acquaintance with Clayton and believed that she could help him in his request. He worried about his finances and estate, a problem he constantly struggled with, but a subject that had become a pressing concern as he now fretted for his children. On 26 May 1724, he wrote to Clayton, “You will, I hope, forgive that I take the liberty, as I am bereft both of limbs and speech, to address the enclosed petition to your care. You have language in perfection, but I know, more for you friends than yourself. I beg the favour of you to obtain of her Royal Highness her pleasure herein, and you will infinitely oblige.”

Steele’s petition discussed the matter of the patent for the theater. He addressed the issue of the patent and stated that it was given to him for his life and three years after his death. Steele appealed to Clayton a second time in an attempt to gain money for his estate:

I cannot but acknowledge to you, your generosity in espousing the cause of so neglected a creature as I am . . . . It is the greatest happiness that tempers like yours can be reared in courts, and I acknowledge to you let her Royal Highness do as she pleases, her doing anything will be a great bounty to a man, who has neglected himself to the most deplorable condition, and hopes only to let his children know their fortunes, and live in a more regular economy and guard for the future.

Whether Clayton had persuaded the princess to assist Steele’s estate in receiving money after his death is unclear, but he did receive £100 from the king in February of 1725. Steele contacted Clayton during a time when he struggled financially and hoped to receive aid from the king through the princess. Clayton’s closeness to the princess gave her a perceived, and possibly real,
power from those seeking her help. Moreover, Clayton’s position as bedchamber woman to Princess Caroline and proximity to those with power allowed her to operate in a very public way. Steele chose to aid his desires by requesting assistance from Clayton. Throughout his life he often did whatever necessary to advance his position, regardless of the stance he took on the appropriate positions for women in his written works.

Steele’s behavior arguably is typical for an early eighteenth-century man. His contradictory behavior between his writings and actions suggests two things: those aristocratic women close to court and powerful political men created avenues to act politically and publically and secondly, procuring positions and favors for oneself or others outweighed ideas about sex. Moreover, while Steele externally supported traditional gender roles, in private he depended on women to rise in society. Steele’s interactions with the Duchess of Marlborough and Charlotte Clayton demonstrated the ambiguous position of women within public life. For women of quality operating in the public sphere, things were not always, as they appeared.
CHAPTER III

POLITICAL WOMEN AT THE COURT OF GEORGE I

Women in early Georgian England did not have recognition under the law that allowed them to participate overtly and completely in the political arena. Despite unfavorable opinions pertaining to women’s participation in politics, some managed to become involved through the court. During the reigns of George I (1714-1727) and George II (1727-1760), the court remained an important political venue, although it arguably began declining in political relevance after 1688.¹ The court functioned as a social center, specifically for those seeking preferment for important court positions, clerical appointments, and other posts that signified royal favor. The early Georgian court allowed elite women access to royalty and to the aristocratic men that held powerful political positions within the English government.² The women examined in this chapter show how some women engaged in politics at the court of George I and assesses elite women’s ability to operate outside of the roles dictated in conduct literature.³ The German favorites who accompanied George I from Hanover held the confidence of the king at court and used this trust to participate politically. George I lacked a queen consort so those closest to him dominated his attention. The absence of royal household appointments limited the opportunities for women at court. Women outside George I’s close circle had to discover other ways to participate, most notably through their husbands or the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Appearance was a key component in women’s ability to operate in the political domain, as the appearance of power allowed women to test their political capabilities. The courtly

¹ The Glorious Revolution of 1688 ousted the Catholic King James II and secured a Protestant line of succession with the installation of William III of Orange and Mary, James’s Protestant daughter.
positions available to women at the court of George I had limits because the king did not have a queen consort. Two women held the confidence of George I, Melusine [Ehrengard] von der Schulenburg, his mistress and Sophia Charlotte von Kielmansegg, his half-sister. Schulenburg was granted the English titles of Duchess of Munster in 1716 and Duchess of Kendal in 1719, while Kielmansegg was named Countess of Leinster in 1721 and Countess of Darlington in 1722. By analyzing Schulenburg’s and Kielmansegg’s activities at court, the power of appearance becomes apparent and furthered women’s ability to act politically. Schulenburg maintained the king’s affections and the Whig ministers understood the importance of gaining her favor. Furthermore, she involved herself in requests for patronage, sometimes in corrupt ways. Kielmansegg’s authority with George I never reached the level that Schulenburg attained, but her close relationship with the king made others believe her influence more substantial. In turn, this permitted Kielmansegg to assist with requests regarding government positions and army appointments. The importance that George I placed on these women allowed them to participate in the politics of early Georgian England. In some instances, women did not have the political authority that many believed; but the belief that these women held power allowed them to try to exert political influence, whether successful or not. Sometimes the perception of power was as important as actually having power.

The absence of a queen consort at George I’s court allowed Schulenburg and Kielmansegg to solidify their favor and authority with the king. A parallel can be drawn between the court of George I and that of William III after the death of Queen Mary in December 1694. After Mary’s death William dismissed his mistress, Betty Villiers, and never remarried despite the English and Dutch ministers’ attempts to find the king a new bride.4 Instead of keeping a mistress, the king’s male ministers and friends became more important and increased their favor

with the king. Hans Wilhem Bentinck, first Earl of Portland, had served William since 1664 and had been the king’s favorite for nearly thirty years. William trusted Portland more than anyone, but since Mary’s death the king developed a new friendship with Arnout Joost van Keppel.5 The years after the queen’s death, Keppel’s influence, and authority with William increased and by 1697, the king made him the Earl of Albemarle and appointed him to major general. When Keppel received these positions from William, Portland decided to leave court.

The king’s relationship with Keppel had become so friendly that rumors circulated about their romantic involvement. In 1695, William had the apartments at Kensington rearranged so that his and Keppel’s suites had connecting doors.6 This type of information added to the suspicions of the king’s relationship, so much so that Portland wrote the king on 30 May 1697 to inform him of the reports that had reached him:

it is your honour that I have at heart, and the kindnesses which Your Majesty shows to a young man and the manner in which you appear to authorize his liberties and impertinences, make the world say things which I am ashamed to hear, and from which I believe you to be as far removed as any man in the world. I thought it was only the ill-intentioned in England who invented these outrageous things, but I was thunderstruck to find that The Hague and the army furnished the same sort of discourse and tarnished a reputation that has never before been subject to such attacks.7

Portland directly informed the king that rumors of him sharing an intimate relationship with Keppel had circulated much further than expected. He urged King William to dismiss Keppel to end the rumors and to stop any further damage to his reputation. Keppel continued as a favorite to the king, but William convinced Portland that the stories were false. Portland must have

6 Ibid., 350.
believed William because he continued in his service. After the death of Mary, William’s male favorites took the place of the late queen. The king chose not to remarry or have a mistress, so Keppel became the king’s leading favorite. The close relationship that Keppel developed with William allowed him more opportunity to gain the superior confidences of the king without competition. Like William’s court, George I reigned without a queen consort. Those closest to George, most specifically, his mistress Schulenburg monopolized the king’s confidences, without much opposition. The courts of William III and George I show how the influence of favorites, whether men or women, grows exponentially when lacking a consort.

George I: His Journey to the Kingship and the Women Closest to Him

George I was born Georg Ludwig at Hanover on 28 May 1660. He was the first child born to Ernst August of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Sophia, the youngest daughter of Frederick V of the Palatinate, Winter King of Bohemia, and Elizabeth, daughter of James I of England. George’s father, through land acquisitions, negotiations with his siblings, and the death of his older brother Johann Friedrich in December of 1679, ascended to the position of reigning duke of Hanover. Ernst August, died on the 23 January 1698, and George became elector of Hanover. George’s connection to the English throne was through his mother, Sophia. Upon the death of William III in 1702 and the accession of Queen Anne, Sophia had become heir to the English throne since Anne had no living children. Hatton argues, most believably, that George did have an interest in the English succession, although he did not want to appear too enthusiastic to others. George’s mother Sophia largely handled English matters while his father was alive, and he continued to allow her to do so when he became elector. In June 1706, George became

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8 Baxter, William III, 70-2. Stephen A. Baxter acknowledges that the suspicions of a sexual relationship between William and Keppel are difficult to disprove, but argued that no evidence confirms the rumor.
9 Ragnhild Hatton, George I: Elector and King (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 31-48. The section traces the efforts of Ernst August to secure the duchy of Hanover through land and the struggle he experienced with his siblings.
unable to leave his mother to her own devices concerning England. According to Hatton, George “challenged her and ordered her to desist in steps which he judged harmful to the house [of Hanover] and to his own policies. But long before this, Sophia’s way of handling matters, and her very personal and somewhat thoughtless way of putting things, had caused trouble.”

Difficulties concerning the English succession continued to plague mother and son, but Sophia would not become queen of England. Sophia died on 28 May 1714; approximately two months later, on 1 August 1714, Queen Anne died. With the death of Queen Anne, Georg Ludwig ascended to the position of elector of Hanover and king of England.

George I did not have a queen consort when he ascended to the position of king of England. The absence of a queen meant the nonexistence of the queen’s household. The lack of positions available to women at the court of George I inadvertently increased the importance of the women who were close to him. In December 1694, George had his marriage to Sophia Dorothea of Celle, mother to his children, dissolved for reasons of adultery on the part of Sophia, who had carried on a love affair with Philipp Christoph von Königsmarck, an officer in the Hanoverian army. The dissolution allowed George I permission to remarry and strictly forbade Sophia Dorothea the same right. Instead, Sophia Dorothea lived the remainder of her life essentially imprisoned at Ahlden. After George’s divorce from Sophia, he had the legal right to remarry, but he never did so publically. Rumors circulated that George had taken Melusine von der Schulenburg as his wife in a morganatic marriage. A suspected marriage between the king and Schulenburg further displayed the king’s favoritism for his mistress. Moreover, the relationship suggests that Schulenburg played the unofficial role of queen, which gave her greater authority with the king. Lord Onslow described Schulenburg as one “who was always

10 Hatton, George I, 72-3. Hatton takes this beginning incident from the Bernstorff Archives.
11 Ibid., 60.
12 Ibid., 51.
considered and treated as the King’s private wife, a character allowed in Germany under some circumstances.”¹³ Schulenburg’s relationship with George I was not the custom, but the connection that existed between she and the king allowed her to become involved in the political sphere.

In England, an official appointment for the king’s mistress did not exist and English monarchs generally avoided making a spectacle of their extra-marital affairs, with the exception of Charles II. The king’s right to have mistresses represented an unstated requirement, one that demonstrated the king’s masculinity and fecundity. J. H. Plumb opines that George’s favorites “were rapacious, both probably took bribes. George I was an indolent man, and allowed them to exploit their position. They were kept a little in check by a lack of certainty in the King’s affections.”¹⁴ Although Schulenburg was the favorite of the two, Kielmansegg’s familial relationship with the king allowed her to project a certain appearance of power.

Sophia Charlotte von Kielmansegg, Countess of Darlington: Mistress or Half-Sister?

English contemporaries often referred to Sophia Charlotte von Kielmansegg as the mistress of King George I. In his Reminiscences Horace Walpole noted, “another acknowledged mistress, whom [George] also brought over, was madam Kielmansegge.”¹⁵ Similarly, William Coxe’s work on the life of Robert Walpole explained that “[George’s] other mistress Sophia Charlotte, daughter of the Count of Platen.”¹⁶ Whereas Kielmansegg has often been described as George’s mistress, Hatton has discovered the familial connection between Kielmansegg and George I. Ernst August, father of George I, took Klara Elisabeth von Meysenbug as a mistress in

¹⁵ Horace Walpole, Reminiscences: Written in 1788 for the Amusement of Miss Mary and Miss Agnes B***y, (London: Thomas Davidson, 1819), 23.
the 1670s. Hatton explains that Meysenbug “married in 1673 to Franz Ernst Baron von Platen, governor to Ernst’s sons by Sophia, Klara presented her husband with a son in 1674 but the daughter, Sophie Charlotte, born in 1675, was accepted in the family circle as Ernst August’s child and treated as the half-sister of the legitimate children. When George I bestowed an English peerage on her, making her the Countess of Darlington in 1722, her coat of arms include that of the house of Brunswick with a bend sinister,” which indicated that she was an illegitimate family member. Furthermore, Hatton observes that George I described Kielmansegg as being of common blood upon her naturalization as an English citizen. Hatton provides sound evidence that George I and Kielmansegg were related. Kielmansegg as half-sister to George explains her importance at the English court and the favor and authority she had with the king. As part of George’s court she was close enough to the king for those outside George’s close circle to see her position as having a possible influence on George’s decisions, but certainly not as dynamic as his mistress Schulenburg. Nonetheless, Kielmansegg, upon her arrival in England with George I, had solidified her position has a favorite of the king in the minds of his English subjects.

Most descriptions of Kiesmansegg, hereafter referred to as the Countess of Darlington, written by her contemporaries emphasized her physical appearance rather than her character. Horace Walpole described one of his earliest encounters of the German favorite:

Lady Darlington, whom I saw at my mother’s in my infancy, and whom I remember by being terrified at her enormous figure, was as corpulent and ample as the duchess was long and emaciated. Two fierce black eyes, large and rolling beneath two lofty arched eye-brows, two acres of cheeks spread with crimson, an ocean of neck that overflowed and was not distinguished from the lower part of her body, and not party retrained by stays—no wonder that a child dreaded such an ogress, and that the mob of London were highly diverted at the importation of so uncommon a seraglio!  

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17 Hatton, George I, 25-6  
18 Ibid., 134.  
19 Walpole, Reminiscences, 23.
Wapole’s account clearly highlights the appearance of Darlington, most noticeably her size and explained why her appearance attracted notice. Walpole’s most celebrated comment about the countess compares her size “to an elephant and castle.” Coxe shows a similar fascination with her outwardly presence in his comment, “She was a women of great beauty, but became extremely corpulent as she advanced in years.” On the contrary, Lady Mary Wortley Montague portrayed the Countess of Darlington differently from her male counterparts:

was both luxurious and generous, devoted to her pleasures...she had a greater vivacity in conversation than ever I knew in a German of either sex. She loved reading, and had a taste for all polite learning. Her humour was easy and sociable. Her constitution inclined her to gallantry. She was well-bred and amusing in company. She knew both how to please and be pleased, and had experience enough to know it was hard to do either without money... and she made what haste she could to make advantage of the opinion the English had of her power with the King, by receiving the presents that were made her from all quarters; and which she knew very well must cease, when it was known that the King’s idleness carried him to her lodgings, without either regard for her advice, or affection for her person, which time and very bad paint had left without any of the charms which had once attracted him.

Lady Mary Wortley Montague’s assessment of the countess is more directed at her character than her appearance. Although Wortley Montagu admiringly writes of her ability to carry on favorable conservation, as well as her fondness for learning, she too assesses her more ambitious side. Wortley Montagu implied that Darlington knew the importance of maintaining the appearance that she held a certain amount of authority with the king, and was mindful that all the esteem and benefits she received disappeared if anyone thought otherwise. Wortley Montagu’s image of the countess’s love for the attention her connection to the king brought her denoted a more avaricious character.

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20 Ibid., 76.
21 Coxe, Memoirs, 1:141-2.
Caroline, Princess of Wales noticed the rapacious character of George’s favorite. Caroline disliked Darlington and the disdain she held for her became apparent to the women that served her. An anecdote from Mary Clavering Cowper, woman of the bedchamber to Princess Caroline exhibited the princess’s contempt for Darlington:

I brought the Princess a Book that Madame Kielmansegge had sent me to give her, and after presenting it I understood by Mrs. Howard that there was a mortal Hatred between them, and that the Princess thought her a wicked Woman. She also told me that her sending it to me was a Design to persuade the Princess that she was very well with me, in order to ruin my Credit with her; ‘For,’ added she, ‘if it had not been so, she would have sent it either by the Duchess of Bolton or Shrewsbury, that are so well with her; but she never stuck a Pin into her Gown without a Design.’

Cowper’s description of her encounter with Henrietta Howard, fellow bedchamber woman, concerning a book she was to deliver to the princess further attested to the character of the Countess of Darlington. Most significantly, it indicated that the countess had an agenda known to some at court. Similarly to Wortley Montagu’s description of Darlington, Cowper’s account highlights that she wanted to maintain the perceived power she had by her closeness with the king. The relationship between Darlington and the king allowed her to exercise her authority and participate in the politics of England.

One of the most substantial ways that the countess participated in politics was by assisting others in gaining positions in the government or military. It was not unusual for her to accept payment for her efforts. Cowper related an incident where Darlington’s attempts proved rewarding for Mr. Chetwynd, who had paid the countess to support him. Cowper related that “Mr. Benson came in the Evening, much mortified with being left out of the Board of Trade, where Mr. Chetwynd had got in by Madame Kielmansegge’s Interest, he having given her (as he told me he is well assured) five hundred Guineas down, and is to pay her a Pension of 200l. per

23 Mary Clavering Cowper, Diary of Mary, Countess Cowper: Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, 1714-1720 (London: John Murray, 1864), 13.
Annum as long as he has the Place; and I have since learnt from another Hand that he gave her also the fine Brilliant Ear-rings which she wears, it being certain she never had any such Jewels abroad.”

Cowper’s account of the situation signified that Darlington helped those who sought her assistance for a fee. Money in exchange for positions in government was not a rare occurrence, but because Darlington had a close relationship with the king, those seeking her assistance for preferment increased.

The Countess of Darlington showed an interest in the army and gained authority with the king to participate in the recommendations for military appointments. It is possible that Darlington had an interest in the army because it was important to George I, and gave her an additional component to maintain his confidence. Colonel Charles Cathcart wrote John Dalrymple, second Earl of Stair, outraged over the changes that occurred in the army and blamed the interference of the countess. Cathcart stated, “I knew your Lordship would be sorry for the removes that have happened in the army; the weight of that measure is laid upon the fat shoulders; it establishes an unlucky precedent for the folks of our trade.”

Cathcart’s refers to the countess as the person who wielded some power over matters that concerned the army. Whether or not George I actually allowed the countess to dictate military affairs cannot be determined, but Cathcart’s assertion that Darlington was responsible for the removals in the army shows that the countess had at the very least appeared to involve herself in military issues.

Descriptions of the Countess of Darlington by her contemporaries commonly described her aiding others to gain political appointments. Patronage continued to be important for anyone

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24 Ibid., 31.
who desired a position within the state and the most obvious way to receive favor was through someone close to those making the decisions. The Countess of Darlington held enough esteem with George I to participate politically at the English court. Her authority and power with the king did not come close to her fellow Hanoverian Melusine von der Schulenburg, who was the king’s mistress and confidant.

Melusine von der Schulenburg, Duchess of Kendal: The Dynamic Mistress

Melusine von der Schulenburg, the favorite of the two women, possessed a superior command over the king. “Melusine was tall and thin enough to be called a malkin (a hoppole or scarecrow) by George’s mother…and the ‘Maypole’ in England after 1714 where she was contrasted to the ‘Elephant,’ . . . Sophie Charlotte von Kielmansegg.”27 Many did not understand George’s attachment to Schulenburg because of her unattractiveness. However, Schulenburg “was pliant and patient . . . she tried to please and to soothe, she shared his interest in music and the theatre, she studied him and his moods, and learnt to manage him.”28 Schulenburg proved equally interesting to Sir Robert Walpole, a leading English politician.

In England, Schulenburg, hereafter referred to as the Duchess of Kendal, made quite a different impression. In a conversation between Henry Etough and Walpole, Walpole gave his assessment of the duchess. He believed “her intellects were mean and contemptible. Money was with her the principal and prevailing consideration, and he was often heard to say she would have sold the king’s honour for a shilling advance to the best bidder.”29 Regardless, the English ministers and others familiar with the pair recognized that King George I favored the Duchess of Kendal. Mary Clavering Cowper related that Walpole told William Cowper “that her Interest did Everything; that she was, in effect as much Queen of England as ever any was; that he did

27 Hatton, George I, 50.
28 Ibid.
29 Etough Papers, Minutes of a Conversation with Sir Robert Walpole, in Coxe, Memoirs, 1:141.
Although Walpole thought that Kendal was largely motivated by money, he clearly recognized the position and power she held over the king. Coxe further illustrated that the duchess’s “influence over the king was so considerable that the different parties in the cabinet and the leaders in opposition, paid the most obsequious court, and even the empress of Germany maintained a private correspondence with her with a view to induce the king to renew the connection between England and the house of Austria.” The duchess managed to become included in the political circle dominated by men because of her influence over the king.

The Duchess of Kendal played a role in the divisions that existed among the Whigs from the beginning of George’s accession to the throne. A major point of contention concerned the relationship between England and Hanover. Specifically, the problem dealt with the level that England concerned itself with the political and foreign policy interests of Hanover. Charles Townshend and Robert Walpole differed in opinion from James Stanhope and Charles Spencer, Earl of Sunderland as to what extent George I was permitted to use the English military and political resources in the assistance of Hanover. A secondary concern existed regarding the turbulent relationship between George I and the Prince of Wales. Townshend and Walpole were suspected of siding with the prince and Archibald Campbell, third Duke of Argyll. Walpole supposed that he and Townshend’s position in the current ministry were fragile, and he wrote to Stanhope expressing these fears:

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30 Cowper, Diary, 132.
33 Beattie, English Court, 230.
Altho’ you were very sensible how affairs stood among us here at you departure, and were acquainted with the heats and divisions betwixt the king’s servants, yett we having pick’d up some particular accounts which may a little contribute to your better informations . . . . We conceive then there is a reason to believe that the designs of lord Sunderland, Cadogan, &c. were carried further, and better supported than we did imagine . . . and that all the foreigners were engaged on their side of the question; and in cheif that the dutchesse of Munster enter’d into the dispute with a more than ordinary zeal and resentment against us, insomuch that by an account we have of a conversation with the king at the dutchesse of Munster’s, they flatter themselves that nothing but the want of time and the hurry the king was in upon his going away, prevented a thorough change of the ministry, which they still proposed to carry on upon the whig foot, exclusive of us, and by the account we have, there was no difficulty at all in removing me; you, it was thought might be taken care of in the army, but they were at a losse about my lord Townshend . . . . That the dutchesse of Munster was very angry at her not being an English dutchesse is most certain, and that she imputes the whole to my lord Townshend, and has express’d a particular resentment against him.34

Walpole suggested that the Duchess of Munster (later the Duchess of Kendal) used her influence to support the favor of Sunderland and his allies over Walpole and Townshend because the latter did not support her elevation to an English peerage.

In March 1717, Stanhope sent a letter to Townshend that dismissed him from the position of Secretary of State. After Townshend’s dismissal, Walpole also resigned from his position as head of the treasury and a new ministry with Sunderland as its leader had the king’s favor. Although it is difficult to surmise how much power Kendal had in this decision, Townshend considered her as one of the responsible parties. He ardently explained, “though these are the topics given out by my enemies, I am far from thinking that they are the true and original causes of my disgrace. I believe the duchess of Munster [Kendal], Mr Bernstorff, and Mr Robethon could give a much more exact and authentic account of the real causes that produced this event.”35 Walpole and Townshend considered the duchess partly responsible for the change of ministry and the release of Townshend. Although, mistresses often faced blame for interfering in

35 Lord Townshend to M. Slingelandt, January 1-12, 1716-17, in Ibid., 2:161.
the politics of her lover, the frequent mention of her participation and interests in the political concerns of George I make it likely that she played a part in the firing of Townshend.

The Duchess of Kendal further revealed her influence through her dealings with Henry St. John, first Viscount Bolingbroke. In May 1723, Bolingbroke obtained the pardon that allowed him to return to England from France, but the pardon did not restore his estate or seat in the House of Lords. Upon returning to England, Bolingbroke began his attempts at completing his restoration and sought the assistance of the Duchess of Kendal. The duchess encouraged Bolingbroke’s full restoration to the king, who in turn recommended it to Walpole. Walpole “was not answerable for the private assurances of the duchess of Kendal [nor] bound by the promises, if any such were positively made, of the sovereign himself.” However, Walpole did not believe it reasonable to defy the king in this matter. Lord Onslow further asserted that when Bolingbroke petitioned for his restoration that the “King was to recommend it to the House, which he did, and, by the means of the Duchess of Kendal, promised him all the support he could give him in it; and to this Sir Robert was, very unwilling for many reasons, forced to submit.”

In the end, Walpole helped Bolingbroke receive total restoration. According to Walpole, “the restoration of lord Bolingbroke was the work of the duchess of Kendal, and that in obedience to the express commands of the king, he supported the act. Bolingbroke . . . gained the duchess of Kendal by a present of £ 11,000, and obtained a promise to use her influence over the king for the purpose of forwarding his complete restoration.”

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36 Bolingbroke was a Tory and supported the Jacobite cause. After the 1715 Jacobite uprising attempted to place the Pretender on the throne, Bolingbroke became the scapegoat for the Jacobites when the attempt failed. Bolingbroke went to France where he stayed in exile until he was able to negotiate his return to England.
37 Coxe, Memoirs, 1:367.
38 HMS, Buckinghamshire, 515.
influence of the duchess and realized her confidence with the king superseded Walpole.

Furthermore, it signified that Kendal was willing to use her authority with the king to assist others in return for gifts or money.40

The Duchess of Kendal undeniably held the king’s favor and exercised her power with the king to participate in affairs of state not only in matters of preferment. The duchess had her own competition for status with king, in her sister-in-law the Countess of Darlington. In July 1716, Lady Cowper received a letter from John Clavering, Esq., who was in Hanover, and described his view on the relationship between the two women:

Surprise . . . at Mademoiselle Schlenberg being naturalized and made an English Duchess. The Countess de Platen is mightily mortified, for you must know we have two Parties here more violent than Whig and Tory in England (which are the Schulenberg and Platen Factions). Madame Kielmansegg writes here that she’s very unwilling to give Place to the new Duchess; therefore she will petition Parliament to be naturalized, that she may have a Title equal to the Other.41

Upon the death of Lord Stanhope and the resignation of Lord Sunderland, Townshend and Walpole were reinstated in their former positions. Townshend again became Secretary of State and Walpole the first Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. A struggle between Lord Carteret and Townshend and Walpole developed over who succeeded as the king’s favorite ministry. The competition between the Duchess of Kendal and the Countess of Darlington becomes evident, as each favorite of the king took a different side.

Rival Factions: Oppositional Whig Ministries and the Impact of Women

As mistresses to the king, the Duchess of Kendal and the Countess of Darlington became engaged in the decision of what administration prevailed; their influence with the king had become apparent to the English ministers. The deaths of Stanhope and Sunderland appeared to

40 The Duchess of Kendal also played a role in acquiring the dukedom for James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon. She received £9500 from Brydges according to his account books. See Baker and Baker, *The Life*, 112.
41 Cowper, *Diary*, 193.
eliminate Townshend and Walpole’s primary competition, but their authority had not been firmly established. John Carteret, second Earl of Granville remained, and he had attached his loyalties to Lord Sunderland when he prevailed over Townshend in 1717. In 1723 on a trip to Hanover, conflict erupted between Lord Townshend, Secretary of State for the North and Lord Carteret, Secretary of State for the South, who competed to become the George I’s leading minister. Coxe recounted that Lord Carteret enlisted the assistance of the king’s German ministers Baron von Bernstorff and Hans Kaspar von Bothmer in addition to the Countess of Darlington and Sophia Karoline, Countess of Platen. Lord Townshend chose to invest his interests, which included the interests of Sir Robert Walpole, with the Duchess of Kendal.

Lord Townshend needed the Duchess of Kendal to support his position and she needed his help in return. Robert Walpole wrote to Lord Townshend in August 1723 “another report that has obtained very much is, that lord Carterett had endeavour’d or procured the bringing over the countesse of Platen into England.” In a responding letter, Lord Townshend informed Walpole that the information he received concerning the Countess of Platen’s desire to come to England was false. Nonetheless, a subsequent letter from Lord Townshend to Walpole described the fear that the Duchess of Kendal had concerning the possibility that the Countess of Platen would come to England. Townshend wrote, “the duchess . . . is very much disturbed at the prospect, she thinks there is of the countess’s making use of the interest this match will give her at the court of France, towards removing into England.” Rumors circulated the Platen was mistress to George I and her daughter belonged to the king. The Countess of Platen was married to Ernst August von Platen, brother to the Countess of Darlington. Hatton provides a more

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43 Ibid., 1:317.
45 Lord Townshend to Robert Walpole, 8 September 1723, in ibid., 2:267.
46 Lord Townshend to Robert Walpole, in Ibid., 2:287
substantial explanation for the relationship between Platen and the king. She argues that George
I suspected Platen was also the son of Ernst August, like Darlington, which explained Platen’s
position in Hanover. Therefore, the attention the Countess Platen received from George I was
due to a family connection.\textsuperscript{47} The authority that the countess exhibited in Hanover may have
contributed to the duchess’s fear of her coming to England, as it weakened her power with the
king. The duchess never exercised the control over the king in Hanover as she did in England. In
Hanover, she had competition from the Countess of Platen. The countess allied herself with
Lord Carteret, who attempted to persuade the king to let the countess return with them to
England. The countess’s return to England had negative implications for the Duchess of Kendal,
so Lord Townshend assisted the duchess in persuading the king to leave the countess in Hanover,
which he did.\textsuperscript{48}

Lord Townshend assisted Kendal in maintaining a monopoly on the king’s affections and
this decision brought the minister and the mistress closer. Lord Townshend wrote to Walpole
about gaining the confidence of the duchess. Townshend related, “this infidelity, in one whom
the duchess honoured with her chief confidence, has, you may be sure, given her great
uneasiness. However, it has had the immediate good effect, of making her more open and
unreserved towards me, and I believe, I may venture to say, she reposes a more entire confidence
in me at present, than in any other person about the king.”\textsuperscript{49} The alliance Townshend made with
the Duchess of Kendal proved rewarding.\textsuperscript{50} The duchess received help from Lord Townshend

\textsuperscript{47} Hatton, George I, 135.
\textsuperscript{48} Coxe, Memoirs, 1:335-6.
\textsuperscript{49} Lord Townshend to Robert Walpole, 1 October 1723, in Coxe, Memoirs, 2:271.
\textsuperscript{50} Beattie, English Court, 244. Townshend wrote to his brother-in-law Sir Robert Walpole, “I make no
secret here of owning my attachment to our friend the Dutchess, yet I endeavour to live on as good terms as I can
with the Countess of Platen, from whom I have received great civilities . . . . I am most obliged to you for your
readiness in paying the arrears of the pension I wrote to you about, which has had a very good affect,” also quoted
in, Beattie, English Court, 246.
and in return, she provided assistance in helping to discredit Lord Carteret. The alliance between Lord Townshend and the Duchess of Kendal came to fruition in April 1724.

Lord Townshend in a letter to the Duke of Grafton explained the fate of Lord Carteret, which meant success for him and Walpole. Townshend wrote “I believe the seals will be taken from my lord Carteret in a day or two, and given to the duke of Newcastle. In that case, the king intends the lord chamberlain’s place for your grace, and Ireland for lord Carteret.” With the demotion of Lord Carteret, Lord Townshend and Sir Robert Walpole further secured preference with the king and for the Whig position. The Duchess of Kendal’s assistance in securing the Townshend-Walpole administration becomes clear. The duchess had the opportunity to contribute to the ousting of Carteret because of her influence and position as mistress to the king. Becoming mistress to the king was not the only way for women to engage in political matters. Behaving politically did not necessarily require direct interaction with the king, but could occur through family members close to the king.

Mary Clavering Cowper: A Politically Minded Woman during the Reign of George I

Mary Clavering married William Cowper, first Earl Cowper secretly in September 1706. At this time, Lord Cowper was the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal under Queen Anne. During the reign of Queen Anne, Lord Cowper had become a part of the Whig opposition, but when George I became king he regained his place as Lord Chancellor and Lady Cowper received the appointment as woman of the bedchamber to Caroline, Princess of Wales. Although Lady Cowper had a place in the household of the Princess of Wales, her political loyalties belonged with her husband. At times, her allegiance to the prince and princess and her husband aligned, specifically during the falling out between the king and the prince. Likewise, her knowledge of the court and government of George I, and her connections and correspondence with the

ministers of George’s reign gave her an appearance of power that derived from her husband’s position as Lord Chancellor. Lord and Lady Cowper befriended Baron Bernstorff, who was one of the German ministers to the king. This relationship gave Lady Cowper the necessary connections to act politically.

The friendship between Lord and Lady Cowper and Baron Bernstorff benefitted both sides. Baron Bernstorff’s could not attend the cabinet meetings, but Lady Cowper often relayed the information discussed during these meetings that she received from Lord Cowper. Lady Cowper documented this agreement in her diary:

There was at this time some misunderstandings in the Cabinet Council. B[aron] Bernstorff desired me to get information of it from Lord Cowper who by me gave B. Bernstorff a faithful Account of every thing that was useful for him to know. It was an employment I was not fond of, but as it was at the request of B. Bernstorff and that I thought he was right in getting all the information he could I consented to it and so did my Ld. Cowper.52

Cowper’s entry explained the agreement that she, Lord Cowper, and Bernstorff had concerning pertinent cabinet information. In return for the Lady Cowper’s assistance in gaining important information, Bernstorff often acted on her behalf and supported her requests for assistance in acquiring placement, as well as concerns she had with Lord Cowper’s role in the ministry.

Lady Cowper sought the help of Bernstorff to secure an appointment for a physician to Caroline, Princess of Wales. Lady Cowper supported the cause of David Hamilton, who had been physician to Queen Anne. On the 2 November 1714, Cowper recorded that “Mr. Bernstorff made me a visit. I desired him to take care of Sir David Hamilton’s being made First Physician, which he promised to do.”53 Cowper’s entry reveals that exchanging services was an acceptable behavior for women that had connections in government. Approximately a month and a half

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52 Quoted in Beattie, *English Court*, 223. Beattie suspects that Croker, the editor of Lady Cowper’s diary, felt it necessary to suppress this quote and did not include it in the published work.

53 Cowper, *Diary*, 12.
later on the 15 December 1714 Cowper reported her success. She recorded that she had
“prevailed for Sir David Hamilton to be sole Physician to the Princess.”⁵⁴ Obtaining an
appointment for a physician might appear insignificant compared to other matters of
government, but the importance of royal appointments remained an integral part of society. Lady
Cowper and her husband’s positions at court gave her the opportunity to acquire royal positions
for her acquaintances.

Lady Cowper made other attempts to solicit placement for her friends, and in some
instances, she encountered opposition, specifically from Lord Townshend and Walpole. In her
diary, she documented that she:

had two other Affairs . . . one in which my Lord Cowper was engaged, the other by the
Commands of the Princess, which I did faithfully. The First was a Place for Lord William
Pawlet, who got it (a Teller’s Place), the Other for Mr. Clayton [husband to Charlotte
Clayton, lady of the bedchamber to Caroline, Princess of Wales]. As I loved Mrs. Clayton
very much, I did what I could for Mr. Clayton. The Place he aimed at was that of
Secretary to Mr. Walpole’s Office. But Mr. Walpole had a Mind Horace Walpole should
have it, and so had Lord Townshend. Mr. Clayton had solicited very much for it, and was
helped by the Prince and Princess, who spoke about it to Lord Townshend, Mr. Walpole,
and Baron Bernstorff.⁵⁵

In this instance, Cowper was unable to gain the appointment that Mr. Clayton desired due to
opposition from Walpole and Lord Townshend who had their own relations they wished to place
in the position. A second attempt was made by George August and Caroline to secure a position
for Mr. Clayton and Lady Cowper used her authority to assist. Lady Cowper explained:

The Prince and Princess then engaged to get another Place for Mr. Clayton: it was one
that Lord Townshend designed for Colonel Selwyn, so that many Difficulties arose about
it. The Princess sent me several Times to Baron Bernstorff, which Lord Townshend and
Mr. Walpole perceiving, they grew enraged to the last Degree, and saw it was from me
that some of the Opposition came.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid., 32.
⁵⁵ Ibid., 49-50.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 52.
Lady Cowper does not specifically say whether the second attempt was successful, but her efforts to place Mr. Clayton, along with the assistance of the Prince and Princess of Wales and Baron Bernstorff are certain. The predicament that Lady Cowper encountered in her attempts to place Mr. Clayton shows her relevance in the politics of George I’s reign. The attempt to obtain Mr. Clayton a position demonstrates the importance of government appointments. Moreover, Townshend and Walpole wanted to place someone in the same position that Mr. Clayton sought who was politically loyal to their ministry. Lady Cowper’s relationship with Bernstorff, the Princess of Wales, and her husband Lord Cowper gave her the opportunity to engage in the politics of George I’s court. Lady Cowper represents how women who had close relationships to their male counterparts gave them the chance to become involved in the political conversations at court and in some instances gain appointment for their acquaintances.

The reign of George I proved difficult for some women to exercise political authority. He lacked a queen consort, which in turn diminished the number of royal positions for women at court. Consequently, his favorites the Duchess of Kendal and the Countess of Darlington dominated his attention. Because of their closeness to the king, these women had a real perception of authority over his decisions and their assistance in political matters was frequently sought. Nevertheless, Lady Cowper, because of her husband’s position in the ministry, was able to befriend the German minister Baron Bernstorff. Their friendship created an avenue for Lady Cowper to participate in the political. All of these women were perceived by their contemporaries to have access to the important people of state and were solicited for their help in aiding others in their political ambitions.
CHAPTER IV

GEORGE AUGUST: WOMEN AT THE COURT OF THE PRINCE OF WALES, 1714-1727

Due to the absence of a queen consort, the court of George I lacked the opportunities available to women to acquire royal household appointments. Therefore, the best chance of receiving employment at court was in Princess Caroline’s service. Caroline of Anspach, Henrietta Howard, and Charlotte Clayton all managed to become participants in politics. All of these women used their positions in the royal household to further their political aspirations by operating through their circumstances at court: Caroline as Royal Princess, Howard as bedchamber woman to the princess and mistress to the prince, and Clayton as the bedchamber woman and friend to the princess. They all had specific situations that enhanced their ability to operate politically. Birth and circumstance allowed these women to take part in public matters that society considered unacceptable, most notably in print. Through analyzing these women, the power of appearance becomes central in understanding the effect it had on women and politics. In some instances, women did not have the political authority that many believed, but the belief that these women held power allowed them to try to exert political influence, whether successfully or not. Sometimes the perception of having power trumped actually possessing it.

The king’s court attracted the attention of courtiers more than did the court of George August and Caroline, Prince and Princess of Wales. As expected, the members of the king’s court, specifically his ministers and mistresses, had direct access to the king himself, which provided more hope for advancement.\(^1\) Furthermore, the new English subjects recognized the animus between the king and the prince. The open distrust that existed between father and son often fostered factionalism. George I preferred to maintain control of his rule, which led to the restricted power of the prince. In turn, Princess Caroline, Henrietta Howard, and Charlotte

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\(^1\) See Chapter 3 of this work for the reign of George I.
Clayton had to alter the ways they participated in public life during his reign. Caroline used the contentious relationship between father and son for political influence, and helped mend that bond to protect her interests. Moreover, the continuous support she showed her husband gave her more political sway. As for Howard, her relationship with Caroline and the prince often gave people the perception of her power. People used this perceived authority to make requests and hoped to benefit from her connections. The friendship that Clayton developed with Caroline prompted people to appeal to her for favor and allowed her to cultivate her own Whig political acquaintances that did not support the Walpole faction. The years that these women spent at court during George I’s rule permitted them to strengthen important relationships and enhance their ability to operate politically, aiding them during the reign of George II.

A Regal Marriage: George August and Caroline of Ansbach

George August was born at Herrenhausen in November 1683 to Georg Ludwig and Sophia Dorothea of Celle, and he ensured the line of succession. George’s parents made a politically arranged marriage not based on affection. Their relationship eventually became problematic due to Sophia Dorothea’s indiscretions with Count Philipp Christoph von Königsmarck. The discovery of the affair left Sophia Dorothea confined to a castle at Ahlden. At the age of eleven, George August’s mother left for Ahlden and from that point all contact with his mother stopped. Andrew Thompson, the most recent biographer of George II, refrains from speculating how the loss of a mother effected George August, but contemporary reports suggest that the absence of his mother made him resent his father and revere his mother. Informed by Henrietta Howard, Horace Walpole recounted a story in which Howard stated that if George’s mother had outlived his father, George would have named her queen dowager of England or

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2 The previous chapter regarding George I covers the incident between Georg Ludwig, Sophia Dorothea, and Count Phillipp Christoph von Königsmarck.
regent of Hanover. Although George lost his mother, he gained a loving wife in Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach in 1705. Caroline was born in 1683 to Johann Frederick of Ansbach and Eleonore of Saxony-Eisenach. Upon her mother’s death, Caroline moved to the court of Lützenburg with Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg and his wife, Electress Sophia Charlotte, who acted as her guardians. Caroline’s position demanded that she marry well and Archduke Charles, later known as Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, attempted to gain her affections. In order to marry the archduke, Caroline needed to convert from Protestantism to Catholicism. Her refusal to convert ended the marriage negotiations. Similarly, George Ludwig attempted to marry his son into the Swedish Royal family, first to Ulrike Eleonore, younger sister to Charles XII of Sweden, and second to the widow Hedwig Sophie, older sister the Charles XII. The efforts failed, and by 1705 George Ludwig lost hope in securing a match with the Swedish royal family. In June 1705, George August journeyed to meet Caroline of Ansbach as a potential bride, and the following month, the couple agreed to a marriage contract and on 2 September 1705 George August and Caroline of Ansbach married in Hanover.

Politics interested Caroline and she fostered a trusting and supportive marriage with her husband George August that enabled her to participate in future state matters. While, George and Caroline had a long and successful marriage, the two initially experienced difficulties. Elisabeth Charlotte, Duchess d’Orléans, niece to the Electress Sophie of Hanover and cousin to George Ludwig, frequently corresponded with her aunt about the marriage of George August and Caroline. Nearly two months after their marriage, the duchess related a story to her aunt about the vineyards of the Bishop of Paris. She explained that the Bishop had claimed, “if a pair of newlyweds can spend the entire first year after their marriage without one of them regretting that

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3 Horace Walpole, *Reminiscence: Written in 1788 for the Amusement of Miss Mary and Miss Agnes B***y* (London: Thomas Davison, 1819), 17.
they were married and without ceasing to love each other for a moment, they can ask for the vineyard of the Archbishop of Paris and will receive it.\textsuperscript{5} The Bishop was so confident that nobody would be without regret that he would bet his vineyard. A similar tradition existed in England, but instead of the Bishop’s vineyards, the couple received the flitch of bacon. In a subsequent letter, the Elisabeth Charlotte declared that George and Caroline failed to obtain the vineyards, suggesting that the electress had reported troubles between the newlyweds.\textsuperscript{6} She assured her aunt that things between George and Caroline would improve, which they eventually did.\textsuperscript{7}

Soon after her marriage to George, Caroline contracted smallpox, and in 1707, she experienced a second illness when she caught pneumonia. In both instances, George never left her side, and devotedly attended to his wife.\textsuperscript{8} The consideration he showed his wife while she suffered from smallpox and pneumonia brought the two closer. In 1707, Caroline gave birth to Frederick Louis, a son and male heir to the Hanover line, which further strengthened the couple’s marriage. Emanuel Howe, as envoy to Hanover under the reign of Queen Anne, described the momentous occasion. Howe related:

This Court having for some time past almost despaired of the Princess Electoral being brought to bed, and most people apprehensive that her bigness, which has continued for so long, was rather an effect of a distemper than that she was with child, her Highness was taken ill last Friday at dinner, and last night, about seven o’clock, the Countess


\textsuperscript{7} Elisabeth Charlotte to Sophia, Versailles, 25 March 1707, \textit{Aus den Briefen}, 2:130.

\textsuperscript{8} W.H. Wilkins, \textit{Caroline the Illustrious, Queen Consort of George II and sometime Queen Regent: A Study of her Life and Times} (London: Longman, Green, & Co., 1901), 72. Liselotte also refers to George spending the majority of his time with his wife. See, Elisabeth Charlotte to Sophia, Versailles 2 February 1707, \textit{Aus den Briefen}, 2:154.
d’Eke, her lady of the bedchamber, sent me word that the Princess was delivered of a son.⁹

Following the birth of Frederick, the couple welcomed three more children: Anne in 1709, Amelia in 1711, and Caroline Elizabeth in 1713, all born prior to the Hanoverian succession. Although Caroline and George August struggled early in their marriage, they eventually developed a loving and supportive relationship that aided Caroline’s ability to become politically active in England.

The English Succession: The Journey to a Foreign Land

In August 1714, Queen Anne died and George Ludwig ascended to the throne. George Ludwig, now George I of England, surrounded himself with those he trusted, consisting mostly of his German ministers, his mistresses, and relatives who joined him from Hanover. On the contrary, George August and Caroline, the new Prince and Princess of Wales, approached their situation in England differently by bringing their own German servants from Hanover, but they also acknowledged their English servants and future subjects to separate themselves from the king. Moreover, the prince and princess provided an energetic court, where the princess held drawing rooms and hosted balls for all courtiers to attend.¹⁰ George I relinquished the task of entertainment to the prince and princess, but the attention brought the royal couple disastrous results, making the king suspicious of their motivations. This strained the already fragile relationship between father and son, while solidifying the bond between Caroline and George August.

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⁹ Emanuel Howe, Dispatch, Hanover, 5 February 1707, quoted in Wilkins, Caroline, 1:88-9.
¹⁰ John M. Beattie, The English Court in the Reign of George I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 262. George and Caroline’s daughter Caroline stayed in Hanover because of an illness, as did their son Frederick. Frederick, as second in line to the throne, remained in Hanover under the observation of his great uncle Ernest August. George Ludwig wanted Frederick to acquire an education and gain an understanding of the electorate. John Van Der Kiste, King George II and Queen Caroline (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 38.
Caroline used the family dynamic to add to her political relevance and further the trust she had with the prince. One argument regarding the dysfunctional relationship between George I and George August emphasizes the debacle that occurred between George I and Sophia Dorothea of Celle. William Coxe argues that George August resembled his mother, which intensified the resentment his father felt for him.11 Furthermore, he suggests that George I’s mother, electress Sophia, behaved differently towards her son and grandson. He explains that the electress treated her son with aloofness and never consulted him in matters regarding the English succession. In contrast, Coxe suggests that Sophia doted on her grandson George August, and that she frequently consulted him on English politics, and even gained him a position in the house of peers as the Duke of Cambridge. The electress acted without consulting or possibly in opposition to her son.12 Thompson simplifies the father and son relationship and equates their dislike to a natural one that existed between ruler and heir apparent. He argues that this particularly afflicted the Hanoverians wherein the heir often lived into adulthood, and found it difficult to discover a role alongside the king in his administration.13 Each of these arguments highlights the turbulent relationship between the two. Caroline used the discord between her husband and father-in-law and the support she showed her husband to strengthen the confidence he held in her, which facilitated her ability to participate politically as princess. The family’s arrival in England did little to end the dissonance between father and son, and the politics of England exacerbated their mutual distrust.

13 Thompson, George II, 36-7.
The Reign of George I: The Prince and Princess Negotiate their Roles

In 1715, James Francis Edward Stuart, the exiled Catholic pretender to the throne of England, challenged the legitimacy of the newly crowned George I. The Jacobites supported the Pretender’s claim to the throne and openly rebelled when the Earl of Mar raised an army in the northern part of Scotland in early September 1715. James Stuart supported the uprising and the Jacobite army controlled the majority of Scotland for approximately five months. James arrived in Scotland in December 1715 and by February 1716, he had returned to France.14 After the Jacobite uprising ended, the ministry and the king debated how to reprimand the apprehended rebels. The rebels in Scotland avoided capture, but in England, Lords Derwentwater, Kenmure, Nithsdale, Widdrington, Nairn, Carnwath, and Wintoun were unable to escape arrest.15 Lady Cowper described the prisoners’ entry into the London, “The Mob insulted them terribly, carrying a Warming-pan before them, and saying a thousand barbarous Things, which some of the Prisoners returned with Spirit.”16 The mob behaved unfavorably towards the prisoners, but the ministry and the king decided their fate.

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15 Wilkins, Caroline, 236.
16 Mary Clavering Cowper, Diary of Mary, Countess Cowper: Lady of the Bedchamber to The Princess of Wales, 1714-1720 (London: John Murray, 1864), 62. The warming pan signified the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the Pretender’s birth. Rumors circulated that James Francis Edward Stuart had been smuggled in the queen’s bed in a warming pan and that his mother, Mary of Modena, did not actually give birth to him.
The sentencing of the prisoners provided Caroline with an opportunity to test her political influence. Caroline’s physician, David Hamilton and Lord Carnwath, one of the apprehended rebels were second cousins, which gave the princess the chance to appeal on Carnwath’s behalf. Lady Cowper reported that Caroline had “a great mind to save Lord Carnwath. She has desired me to get Sir David Hamilton to go and speak to him, to lay some Foundation with the King to save him; but he will persist in saying he knows Nothing.” Lady Cowper later recounted how Caroline responded to Lord Carnwath’s request for assistance:

Sir David Hamilton followed me with a Letter for the Princess from Lord Carnwath . . . . She took the Letter, and was much moved in reading it, and wept, and said, ‘He must say more to save himself.’ Bid Sir David Hamilton go to him again, and beg of him, for God’s Sake, to save himself by confessing . . . . I will give him my Honour to save him if he will confess, but he must not think to impose upon People to know Nothing, when his Mother goes about talking as violently for Jacobitism as ever, and says that her Son falls in a glorious cause.

Caroline understood the most effective way to petition to the ministry and the king. Additionally she knew that Lord Carnwath needed to divulge his participation in the Jacobite cause. Caroline’s appeal on his behalf failed, but eventually Caroline effected Lord Carnwath’s reprieve. The king and ministry sentenced Lords Derwentwater, Nithisdale, and Kenmure to execution, while acquitting Lord Widdrington. Lord Nithisdale, with the help of his wife escaped from prison, as did Lord Wintoun, who received a sentence to go to trial because he had refused to admit his guilt. Lords Derwentwater and Kenmure remained in custody and their executions took place on the 24 February 1716. Caroline’s efforts to gain a reprieve for Carnwath demonstrated her ability to become politically active as princess.

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17 Ibid., 79-80.  
18 Ibid., 81-2.  
19 Wilkins, Caroline, 236-244. See mention of Lord Carnwath’s exoneration, Lord Nithisdale’s escape, and the execution of Lord Derwentwater and Lord Kenmure in Cowper, Diary, 85-6. She also notes the escape of Lord Wintoun, in Ibid., 98.
In reaction to Caroline’s support of Carnwath, Wilkins argues that she sympathized with the Jacobite cause and James Stuart because she attempted to exonerate all the men arrested, even though her political interests conflicted with the rebellion. He also suggests that Caroline remained the only popular member of the royal family because she showed clemency to those arrested. Wilkins lacks the documentary evidence to support the claims that Caroline’s assistance to the rebels showed that she sympathized with the Jacobites and the Pretender and that she gained popularity for her efforts; but it is likely that Caroline wanted to present a more positive and caring image of the new royal family. Unlike her father-in-law, she was attentive to and understood the importance of portraying a positive image. Furthermore, she recognized the damaged relationship between father and son and she adapted to better appeal to her husband as a political advisor and trustworthy confidante. When Lord Carnwath was arrested, her level of authority and persuasion had escalated so much that she had the ability to obtain Carnwath a commuted sentence.

After the Jacobite uprising ended, George I expressed his desire to visit Hanover and the subject of appointing a regent developed. This debate aggravated the already contentious relationship between the king and prince and allowed Caroline to discover her role as princess. Unfortunately for George I, the Act of Settlement that secured the Hanoverian succession restricted the new monarch from leaving England without the consent of Parliament. Concerned about the king’s trip, Lord Townshend told Bernstorff that the cabinet’s apprehensions revolved around the burden it placed on the ministry in England, and that the king

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20 Ibid., 239, 245.
22 Coxe, Memoirs, 1:131.
should follow the standard practice of appointing the prince to regent. Unsurprisingly, the matter of making the prince regent became divisive. While the prince had hoped for the title and role, the king made the final decision. Instead of making the prince regent during his absence, he appointed him guardian of the realm. The king distrusted his son and felt he had too much popularity, and the appointment of regent would give the prince too much control. Whatever George’s intentions, his trip to Hanover in July 1716 allowed the Prince and Princess of Wales regular contact with the ministers who remained in England.

As guardian of the realm, the king limited the decisions the prince could make. The most important responsibilities remained with the king. Nevertheless, George August and Caroline continued to entertain the courtiers and used this opportunity to create a positive image of the royal couple. Soon after the departure of George I to Hanover, Lady Cowper recounted, “The King was no sooner gone, than the Prince took a Turn of being civil and kind to Everybody, and applied himself to be well with the King’s Ministers, and to understand the State of the Nation.” The prince wanted to foster his popularity with the ministers of both factions, in which Caroline also played a role. To a further extent, the English elite expected the court to entertain them, and the prince and princess obliged. This gave the royal couple the opportunity to gain popularity with Whig and Tory politicians and disassociate with the king. At Hampton Court, the prince and princess celebrated George I’s accession, while the king was in Hanover,

23 Lord Townshend to Bernsdorf, Whitehall, 19 May 1716, in Coxe, Memoirs, 2:54.
24 Cowper, Diary, 107-9. Cowper also mentions the ministries concern about Argyll’s influence with the prince, see page 58.
25 Hatton, George I, 197. Ragnhild Hatton argues that George I never intended to insult his son by appointing him guardian of the realm, but introduced a similar system to the one he used in Hanover during his absences in England. Lady Cowper notes the frustration between King and Prince while the issue was being settled. Cowper, Diary, 107-9.
26 Cowper, Diary, 117.
27 Gerrard, Queens-in-Waiting, 147.
and the elite members of society gathered to celebrate.\textsuperscript{28} The locals had the freedom to roam about the gardens and Caroline frequently stopped to “talk to a country lass in a straw hat, with the same gracious air” she showed “persons of the first distinction.”\textsuperscript{29} The royal couple “dined in public every Day in the Princess’s Apartment…In the Afternoon the Princess saw Company, or read or writ till the Evening, and then walked in the Garden.”\textsuperscript{30} The prince arranged a race for the neighborhood girls. The winners received “a smock, quilted petticoat, or sarsenet hood,” while the losers won “ten shillings, and a pair of scarlet stockings.”\textsuperscript{31} Although the actions of the prince and princess seemed innocent, George I had left his trusted minister, Baron Bothmar, behind in England to report the actions of his son and daughter-in-law.

The information that Baron Bothmar conveyed to the king worsened the growing distrust between the king and prince. Bothmar informed the king of the couple’s growing popularity, but also spoke of more disturbing information—that the couple had been entertaining all political factions such as disaffected Whigs, Tories, and supposed Jacobites.\textsuperscript{32} Initially, Townshend and Walpole complained about the prince and princess’s behavior. Walpole informed Stanhope “not only the duke of Argyle and lord Ilay, &c. but duke of Shrewsbury, Dick Hill, Lord Rochester, and their wives and other Tories are constant attendants at Hampton Court. They generally choose to come on private days; but their reception gives great offence.”\textsuperscript{33} Townshend attempted to combat any influence the opposition may have had over the prince. Stanhope used Townshend’s efforts as a way to discredit him and Walpole with the king. The king had feared

\textsuperscript{30} Cowper, \textit{Diary}, 125.
\textsuperscript{32} Wilkins, \textit{Caroline}, 262.
\textsuperscript{33} Robert Walpole to Secretary Stanhope, 7-18 August 1716, in Coxe, \textit{Memoirs}, 2:61
that they had sided with the prince. Townshend and Walpole continued to communicate the prince’s association with the Tories to Stanhope, and urged the king to return to England so the opening of Parliament could occur. Finally in November 1716, George I returned to England from Hanover. Open confrontation between father and son did not occur instantly. Upon George’s return, he faced the threat of another suspected Jacobite plot and had to handle the split in the Whig party. The opening session of Parliament did not happen until February 1717.

As the tension between George I and George August grew, Caroline remained loyal and supportive of her husband. By the summer of 1717, the royal family had removed to Hampton Court and George I attempted to implement a more active role in court life to prove to his subjects that he had the capability to accomplish what the prince and princess had done in his absence. He also hoped to gain support for the Stanhope-Sunderland ministry. The Bishop of Lichfield described to a friend the king’s efforts at gaining popularity:

is now very empty since the Royal family went to Hampton Court, where the public manner in which the king lives, makes it the rendezvous not only of the Ministers and great men but the people of all ranks and conditions. He dines openly and with company every day and the novelty of the sight draws a mighty concourse. After so long a reserve we may easily imagine how great a constraint he puts upon himself.

George I continued to create a more active court life when the royal family returned to St. James’s. The relationship between father and son disintegrated further in October 1717 when Caroline gave birth to a son. Initially, the dispute concerned the name of the new heir. Caroline and George August wished to name the child William while the king’s ministers suggested George after the baby’s father and grandfather. As a compromise, the king proposed the name

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34 Sir Gustavus Hume to Lord Polwarth, HMS, Polwarth, 1:112. Hume’s letter to Polwarth suggests that the Prince had succeeded in making those thought to be obstinate more amenable. Chapter 3 discusses the other troubles that Townshend and Walpole experienced with the King while in Hanover that led to Townshend dismissal and Walpole’s resignation.

George William. Another dispute arose with respect to the child’s godfather. Caroline and the prince wanted the king’s brother Ernst August as godfather, but the English ministers strongly urged that they follow the English custom of appointing the Lord Chamberlain, the Duke of Newcastle, instead. Caroline attempted to make a concession, suggesting that Newcastle act as proxy to Ernst August, but failed to secure that position for her husband’s uncle.36

The final disagreement came upon the baptism of the child in November of 1717. After the ceremony, the prince faulted the Duke of Newcastle for behaving disgracefully regarding the matter of his son’s godfather. The prince told the duke that he would “find him,” but because of his German accent, Newcastle interpreted it as “fight him.” The Duke of Newcastle believed that the prince had challenged him to a duel and informed the king and his ministers. The prince denied this accusation, but reiterated his anger over the naming of his son’s godfather.37

Unwilling to continue the disagreement, George I ended the quarrel and ordered the prince to leave St. James. The king expected Caroline to stay since he declared that the children remained with him under the care of the Countess of Schaumburg Lippe.38 Instead, Caroline continued her relentless support of her husband and left court. The dispute in the royal family allowed Caroline to become the conduit of the Hanoverian succession. An unsigned Jacobite letter dated 6 December 1717, recounted the event:

I have no news to send you but that the P[rin]ce & P[rin]ces of Wales that were banish the Court are going to live at the D[uke] of Devonshire’s house till matters are made up with the King. They are no indispos’d and ‘tis hop’d they’ll be better in a few days; at least I hope so, and that they will be reconcil’d to the King. You know I can’t be but sorry for this difference.39

36 Hatton, George, 206-7.  
38 Historical Manuscripts Commission, The Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace The Duke of Portland (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1931), 5:541-50. George William became ill and died while under the King’s care, which posed another dispute between the King and the Prince and Princess.  
The king furthered the split when he announced that he would not accept anyone at court who visited the prince and princess’s court. By publically feuding with his son, the king made the prince’s court the opposition to his own.\(^{40}\) The prince’s court quickly became a haven for disaffected Whigs and any others that disagreed with the current administration. In 1718, the king attempted to reconcile with the prince, but the prince refused the king’s terms.\(^{41}\)

Caroline became the avenue to uniting the king and prince, and this role allowed her to become politically relevant as the person who maintained the family dynamic and had the ability to persuade the prince to reconcile with his father. Motivated by the debate over the South Sea Stock in 1719 and 1720, Walpole attempted to reconcile the king, his son, and daughter-in-law. During the winter of 1719, Walpole visited Leicester House where he sought Caroline’s help in settling the feud between the king and prince.\(^{42}\) Caroline agreed to help, but her real incentive rested on her desire to see her children. According to Lady Cowper, Caroline informed Walpole that “this will be no jesting Matter to me; you will hear of me and my Complaints every Day and Hour, and in every Place, if I have not my Children again.”\(^{43}\) Walpole promised the princess that he made an effort to open up communication to the king through the Duchess of Kendal in order to regain custody of her children.\(^{44}\) Thompson contends that the king and prince each had political motivations to resolve their dispute, and each hopeful that their political enemies would lose favor upon reconciliation. Lady Cowper’s concerns support this position. She believed Walpole and Townshend used the prince and princess to regain their position in the ministry.\(^{45}\)

\(^{40}\) Hatton, *George I*, 208.

\(^{41}\) Arkell, *Caroline*, 114.

\(^{42}\) Cowper, *Diary*, 134-5. Cowper also mentions that “The Princess was let into it by W. from the Beginning,” in Ibid., 158.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 132.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 129.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 134-5. One example that Lady Cowper gives is that the Prince had been an ardent support of the South Sea stock and Walpole had turned him into opponent.
Amidst negotiations, Anne, the daughter of George August and Caroline contracted smallpox, which increased Caroline’s desire to regain her children. Caroline influenced her husband to contact his father in order to reunite with her sick child. The king responded and requested a meeting with the prince so they could come to an agreement. George I and the prince did not forgive all of the injustices that had occurred, but publically, they had made peace. Caroline reconciled George I and George August when other attempts failed. The influence she had with her husband and her ability to convince her husband of the importance of reconciliation allowed her to exhibit her importance as a conduit to her husband that made her a more politically relevant princess and strengthened her political position as queen.

After the prince publicly reconciled with his father, Caroline met with the king. Lady Cowper related that Walpole had notified her husband Lord Cowper “that the King was very rough with the Princess—chide her very severely in a cruel Way. He told her she might say what she pleased to excuse herself; that she could have made the Prince better if she would, and that he expected from henceforward she would use all her Power to make him behave well.” The king blamed Caroline for his son’s behavior and believed Caroline had a certain power over the prince to make him behave any way she wanted. The constant disagreements between the king and the prince during George I’s reign of England allowed Caroline to define her importance at court and in politics. Caroline used her position to persuade her husband to reunite with the king. Despite the disputes between the king and prince, she supported her husband and that proved favorable to him. The prince respected Caroline and decided to make peace with his father because of her intense desire to see her children. The royal family permitted Caroline to have

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46 Ibid., 141-2.
47 Ibid., 150.
more authority with her husband as the one person who could reach the prince and she continued that role when she became queen.

Henrietta Howard: Mistress to George August, Prince of Wales

Henrietta Howard’s relationship with George August and Caroline frequently gave those seeking favor the appearance that she held power. Individuals used this supposed authority to make requests and hoped to benefit from her close contact to the royal family. Howard married Charles Howard in 1706, a marriage she later regretted. Howard’s husband had a terrible temper, problems with alcohol and gaming, and relations with women of ill repute. Because of Charles Howard’s many vices, the Howards spent their early years of marriage in poverty. Nevertheless, Henrietta Howard found the money for her and her husband to journey to Hanover in hope of securing a position in the royal household. Soon after their arrival, Howard obtained a position as bedchamber woman to Princess Caroline and eventually mistress to Prince George August, the future Prince of Wales. After the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the accession of the House of Hanover, Howard continued to hold a position in the royal household as woman of the bedchamber to Caroline. Her close relationship with the prince and the princess increased the correspondence she received from those seeking preferment or favor with the royal couple. Howard received requests for positions that required royal appointment, household positions, and disaffected persons attempting to regain favor with the new monarchy.

Howard received solicitations from those who believed her influence strong at court, most commonly requests that sought positions for acquaintances or family. In a letter dated 4 September 1718, Mrs. Bradshaw, a frequent correspondent of Howard, asked Howard to assist in

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placing a boy, who she claimed was a gentleman who had no family and whose father was killed while in military service, at Charter House for his education.

I am afraid your master will forget my ridiculous face, unless you will be so good to deliver an humble petition I have to make—it is to put a boy into the Charter-House; he is qualified as being a gentleman: his father was an officer, and killed in the service about twelve years ago, and the child has nothing to educate him but what his relations do in charity for him. I know His R.H. has the putting in one every year, and Christmas is the time: if you would be so good as to take an opportunity when you think it proper to lift up this my humble request.50

Mrs. Bradshaw employed Howard to deliver the petition directly to the prince instead of the princess, who was her employer. Bradshaw, fully aware of the relationship between Howard and the prince, believed it was more effective to take the matter directly to him since he had the option of making a yearly designation. Though unclear if Howard succeeded in obtaining a place for the child at Charter House, Bradshaw believed that Howard offered the most help in securing her request for charity. Howard’s accessibility to the prince made her a primary recipient of wishes for preferment.

Appointments in Prince George’s household were desirable positions, as they allowed courtiers’ access to the prince. Howard’s frequent contact with the prince made her a target of petitions for assistance. Harriet Villiers Pitt sought a position for her brother, the Earl of Grandison, and appealed to Howard in helping him gain the recently vacated position of lord of the bedchamber to the prince. This position gave the one holding it direct access to Prince George and the chance of becoming a part of his political circle. Pitt requested Howard’s support in November 1722:

It was a great mortification to me not to be able to pay my duty to Her Royal Highness last night, but I have been confined to my bed these two days; otherwise I should have had an opportunity to have asked you a question without giving you this trouble, which I

hope you will pardon, and favour me with an answer: which is, whether the lord of the bedchamber to the Prince is appointed in my Lord Herfords place. If not, my brother Grandison would offer his service to His Royal Highness, if you will be so good as to let me know if it would be well received, or if any one else has been named; otherwise, he would engage some friends to speak to the Prince: and if you think it proper (as he has been informed it is usual to make presents on such occasions), I will bring you a thousand guineas to dispose of to whoever is proper, but desire his name not to be used in vain.\footnote{51 Harriet Villiers Pitt to Henrietta Howard, November 1722, in, Croker, \textit{Letters to and from Henrietta Howard}, 1:101-2.}

Pitt reached out to Howard again in December 1722 and stated, “I believe my brother could never intended a bribe to any of their Royal Highness’s family, but was informed a present was usually made on such occasions . . . . I should only be glad to have their Royal Highnesses know my brother’s desire to serve them, whether it is accepted or not.”\footnote{52 Pitt to Howard, December 1722, in Ibid., 1:103-4.} Pitt’s second letter suggests that Howard rejected the offer or bribe that Pitt mentioned, meaning she had declined to help Pitt and her brother secure a position close to the prince. Howard represented one way that Pitt could help her brother Grandison gain preferment, and the perception of Howard’s power at court made her a likely avenue for political gain.

One of Howard’s most notable correspondents was Jonathan Swift, who hoped to gain favor with the new royal family through his relationship with Howard. In 1726, while visiting England, Swift met with Robert Walpole to discuss the economic affairs of Ireland. Swift recounted his meeting to the Earl of Peterborough and reported that “Sir Robert Walpole was pleased to enlarge very much upon the subject of Ireland, in a manner so alien from what I conceived to be rights and privileges of a subject of England, that I did not think proper to debate the matter with him as much as I otherwise might, because I found it would be in vain.”\footnote{53 Jonathan Swift to the Earl of Peterborough, 28 April 1726, in \textit{The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.}, ed. David Woolley, 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 2:642.} Rumors circulated that Swift had attempted to secure a bishopric in England and realized he would not obtain one while George I was king and turned his favor to the Prince and Princess of
Wales. Dr. Arbuthnot was a friend to Swift and frequently visited Princess Caroline. While in England, Dr. Arbuthnot, on an invitation from the princess, invited Swift to Richmond Lodge. Swift met Caroline and she promised him medals and implied that upon her ascension to the throne he would receive a promotion.

Swift and Howard became acquainted through their mutual friendships with Alexander Pope and John Gay. In October 1726, after his visit to Princess Caroline, Swift sent a gift to Howard that he wished her to give to the princess.

I here send you a Piece of Irish Plad made in Imitation of the Indian wherein our Workmen here are grown so expert . . . . I must likewise tell you, to prevent Your Pride, my Intentions is to use you very scurvily; for my reall Design is that when the Princess asks you where you got that fine Nightgown, you are to say it is an Irish Plad sent you by the Dean of St. Patricks, who with his most humble Duty to her Royal Highness is ready to make her another such Present at the terrible Expence of eight shillings and three pence a Yard, if she will descend to honor Ireland with receiving and wearing it . . . . And I command you to add, that I am no Courtier, nor have any Thing to ask.

Swift made it clear that he did not send this gift as an attempt to obtain favor with the princess, but he also made it apparent that he wanted the princess to know exactly where the gift of plaid came from and who sent it. George Sherburn suggests that Swift had other motives in sending the plaid to the princess, specifically to promote the Irish weaving industry. Sherburn is correct in that if Caroline wore the plaid others would follow and the weaving industries economy would flourish. Nevertheless, Leo Damrosch suggests that Swift had other motivations in sending a

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57 Ibid.
gift to Caroline, specifically to cultivate his favor with the princess, so that upon her ascension to the throne the assurances she made regarding a promotion would come to fruition.\(^{59}\)

Alexander Pope, a friend and correspondent of Swift, wrote to Swift about the gift he sent to the princess. Pope indicated, “I’m pleas’d with the nature and quality of your Present to the Princess. The Irish stuff you sent to Mrs. H. her R.H. laid hold of, and has made up for her own use. Are you determin’d to be National in every thing, even in your civilities you are the greatest Politician in Europe at this rate; but as you are a rational Politician, there’s no great fear of you, you will never succeed.”\(^{60}\) The excitement over Swift’s gift of plaid gave him the exact response he had hoped to receive, but he did not profit from royal courtesy. Upon the death of George I, Swift returned to England to kiss the hands of the new monarchs in hopes of soon receiving the appointment he had been promised. Swift’s poem *A Pastoral Dialogue, between Richmond-Lodge and Marble-Hill*, written in 1727 after the death of George I, exposed his displeasure in not receiving his appointment:

> The kingly Prophet well evinces,  
> That we should put no Trust in Princes;  
> My Royal Master promis’d me  
> To raise me to a high Degree:  
> But now He’s grown a King, God wot,  
> I fear I shall be soon forgot.\(^{61}\)

At this point Swift had given up on any chance of gaining favor with the new monarchy, yet he recognized Howard as a potential avenue to increase the chance that Caroline would fulfill her

\(^{59}\) Damrosch, *Johnathan Swift*, 394-5.


promises. In addition to Swift not receiving an appointment he also never received the medals Caroline promised him, a promise he never forgot.

Swift’s frustration in not receiving the benefits he had hoped from the new monarchs is clear in that he was unable to forgive those he had hoped would help him, specifically Henrietta Howard. In a letter to Alexander Pope, Swift chastised Howard and Caroline: “As for your courtier Mrs. Howard, and her Mistress, I have nothing to say, but that they have neither memory nor manners; else I should have some mark of the former from the latter, which I was promised about two years ago; but since I made them a present, it would be mean to remind them.” Swift’s disappointment is apparent and with his realization that Howard held no real power over the queen their friendship started to disintegrate. Swift expounded his grievances to Howard:

First therefore, I call you to witness that I did not attend on the Queen till I had received her own repeated messages . . . I never asked any thing till, upon leaving England the first time, I desired from you a present worth a Guinea, and from her Majesty, one worth ten pounds, by way of memorial. Yours I received; and the Queen, upon taking my leave of her, made an excuse, that she had intended a medal for me, which not being ready, she would send it to me the Christmas following . . . Yet this was never done, nor at all remembered when I went back to England the next year, and by her commands attended her as I had done before . . . I must now tell you Madam, that I will received no medal from her Majesty.

Swift realized that his words would reach the queen, which he directly encouraged: “I am content that you should tell the Queen all I have said of her, and in my own words, if you please.” Swift’s anguish at not receiving the medals from the queen as promised was deeper than the physicality of the medals. Additionally, it represented the queen’s inability to reward him with the promotion she promised. Whether Howard tried to aid Swift in receiving preferment from the princess is not clear, but Swift thought it possible. Swift chose to seek Howard’s help with the

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62 Damrosch, Jonathan Swift, 396.
63 Swift to Alexander Pope, 6 March 1728-9, in The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, 3:213.
64 Swift to Henrietta Howard, 21 November 1730, in Ibid., 3:342-4.
65 Ibid.
princess as opposed to the prince. Swift chose to appeal to Caroline because she alluded to the possibility of rewarding him with royal favor as princess.

Howard represented the opportunity for advancement for many of her acquaintances who often sought her help. The lack of evidence suggests that, in these cases, she never achieved their requests. Regardless of whether or not she actually secured the interests of those who appealed to her for advancement, people still looked to Howard because of her position in the royal household. She had direct access to both the prince and princess, and therefore could potentially advance those who made requests.

Charlotte Clayton: Woman of the Bedchamber to Caroline, Princess of Wales

Holding a position in the Caroline’s household allowed elite women one opportunity to participate in politics at court. Princess Caroline employed Charlotte Clayton as a bedchamber woman when she came from Hanover upon the suggestion from Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough. The duchess, “sought, and obtained from Baron Bothmar, an appointment for her friend, Mrs. Clayton . . . . It was that of Bedchamber-woman to Caroline, then Princess of Wales.”66 The documentation of Clayton’s early life is unclear, but prior to 1714, she married William Clayton of Sundon Hall in Bedfordshire. Her husband worked as a clerk of the treasury and managed the estates of the Duke of Marlborough. Her relationship with the Duchess of Marlborough allowed her to become a part of the princess’s court and have access to those with authority. Clayton became a favorite of the princess as they had many things in common, most specifically their thoughts on religion.67 Her friendship with the princess became public


67 Walpole, Reminiscences, 56.
knowledge, and an anecdote from Horace Walpole suggests that Clayton used it to her advantage:

Lady Sundon had received a pair of diamond ear-rings as a bribe for procuring a considerable post in queen Caroline’s family for a certain peer: and, decked with those jewels, paid a visit to the old duchess [Duchess of Marlborough]; who, as soon as she was gone, said, ‘What an impudent creature, to come hither with her bribe in her ear!’ ‘Madam,’ replied lady Mary Wortley, who was present, ‘how should people know where wine is sold, unless a bush is hung out?’

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu asserted that by wearing the bribe Clayton had publicly announced that she helped all who wished to gain preferment and that she accepted bribes for appointments. During her service to Caroline, Clayton’s correspondence indicated that she received requests for varying types of assistance including questions regarding proper behavior towards the royal family.

Clayton’s friendship with the princess prompted others at court to seek her opinion on the proper conduct toward Caroline. In 1725, upon hearing that the princess had miscarried, the Countess of Pomfret wrote to Clayton asking how she should inquire after the princess. Pomfret stated that she “would not appear too officious, but much less would I be too negligent; and I am sure none can tell me so well as you how to avoid both extremes.” Similarly, in 1726 with the birth of Prince William, the Duchess of Kent wrote to Clayton and wished to pay her respects to the princess. The Duchess of Kent explained that “if it is not improper or forward, (for I leave that to you,) you will oblige me in making my compliments to her upon this occasion.” This manner of correspondence allowed courtiers to pay their respects, as well as make their loyalty to the royal family known, especially if they hoped to profit from future favor. Clayton’s intimacy with the princess made her an avenue for those hoping to gain from Caroline’s good graces.

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68 Ibid., 71.
70 Duchess of Kent to Charlotte Clayton, 23 January 1726, in, Ibid., 1:313.
Furthermore, it made Clayton one of many channels that people exploited in hopes to benefit from royal patronage.

Clayton and Caroline shared an interest in religion and Clayton frequently corresponded with members of the clergy as Caroline’s influence played a significant role in clerical appointments. Clayton communicated with William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury over the princess’s willingness to provide charity for Mr. Echard who had presented the princess with books. Wake implied that he believed he had already made an agreement with the princess that Mr. Echard would receive a reward for his gift. Wake explained “we little folk (I can speak it for my Lord Chancellor and myself, and, I believe, may do it for more) presented him with twenty guineas a-piece for his two last volumes, plain bound. If you know anything is designed him, I beg an account of it; for I shall, God willing, wait upon the Princess to-morrow, and will put her in mind of this charity, if her present trouble has made her forget it; otherwise I should be sorry to speak of it.” Wake hoped Clayton could inform him of the princess’s willingness to accept his request. He clearly did not want to direct his inquiry toward Caroline about the charity of Mr. Echard at an inopportune moment. Wake’s letter to Clayton suggests that Clayton’s intimacy with the princess gave her knowledge of Caroline’s intentions to grant patronage and her inclination to accept requests.

Clayton’s correspondence suggests that she attempted to help those that appealed to her and was even successful in some instances. Clayton sought assistance outside of the princess to aid Mr. Hamilton in December 1724. Lady Carteret’s reply indicated that Clayton had written her concerning Lord Carteret’s assistance on behalf of Mr. Hamilton. Lady Carteret explained, “As soon as I received your letter, I mentioned to my Lord your desire concerning Mr. Hamilton. He immediately ordered his arrears to be paid and promises you with his humble service, that

upon the first vacancy of lieutenancy here, he will take a half-pay lieutenant from England, and
so transfer Mr. Hamilton to the English establishment. We are both glad of serving one whom
you call your particular friend."72 Lady Carteret hinted that Clayton acted on behalf of a friend in
her request to help Mr. Hamilton. Lord Carteret had supported the Stanhope-Sunderland ministry
and when Townshend and Walpole regained favor with George I, he received an appointment
from the king to the Lord Lieutenancy in Ireland. Furthermore, Caroline did not think kindly of
Walpole, which changed when she became queen. If Caroline is the friend that Lady Carteret
speaks of then her comment suggested that Caroline trusted Clayton to handle matters of
patronage. The key to advancement and the attainment of prominent positions depended largely
on knowing others that aided in procuring favor. This type of situation pertained to Clayton. Her
position in the household of the princess, whom she befriended, gave her the perceived authority
to assist in advancement.

Clayton’s connection to Caroline allowed her and her husband, Mr. Clayton, to promote
and help friends separate from the princess. Lady Cowper, who also served Caroline, requested
Clayton’s assistance regarding a vacancy in the post of the Clerk of the Peace in Oxfordshire.

Margaret, who you know I think worth her weight in gold, stands by me, and begs so
hard that I would trouble you about her brother, that I cannot deny her. The Clerk of the
Peace for Oxfordshire is dead, and the place, she tells me, is in the gift of my Lord
Godolphin, who, she says, she believes would willingly put her bother Edward in, if Mr.
Clayton would be so good to name him to my Lord Godolphin . . . he is a zealous Whig. I
can say no more for him, because I know nothing of him but from a fond sister; but Mr.
Clayton knows him, and will do as he sees convenient in this thing.73

Cowper implied that Mr. Clayton exerted enough influence with Lord Godolphin to make a
suggestion on behalf of Margaret’s brother for the position. A common interpretation is that

73 Countess Cowper to Charlotte Clayton, no date, in Ibid., 1:329-330.
Clayton ruled her husband. If so, she had the power to insist, or at least convince Mr. Clayton to recommend Edward to Godolphin.

Clayton’s ability to obtain a place as woman of the bedchamber to Princess Caroline gave her the perception of having a substantial amount of power. This, in turn gave her the ability to use that perceived and possibly real authority. During the reign of George I, Clayton’s abilities had limitations, but the years she spent employed by the princess allowed her to foster her friendship and prove her loyalty to Caroline for all others at court to see. When the prince and princess became king and queen, the perception of Clayton’s power with Caroline increased the amount of people who sought her help and gave her greater opportunity to exercise her political interests.

The court gave Caroline of Anspach, Henrietta Howard, and Charlotte Clayton the opportunities to behave politically, despite acting within the feminine role. They all performed the duties that society had ordered, which in turn provided the specific circumstances that enhanced their ability to become participants in the political business at court. Most sought positions in the royal household, and, in turn, tried to assist relations and friends in procuring positions at court or in government. The perceived power that each of these women held provided the chance to become involved in the political arena reserved for men. During the reign of George I, each of these women had restrictions in what they could accomplish, but in 1727, with the death of George Ludwig, George August and Caroline become the new king and queen of England, giving them all much more opportunity than before.
CHAPTER V

KING GEORGE II AND QUEEN CAROLINE: THE IMPACT OF A POWERFUL QUEEN

On 3 June 1727, George I departed for his beloved Hanover. The king became ill on his journey and insisted that they continued on to Osnabrug, in Lower Saxony. The company arrived at Osnabrug on the 20 June 1727, with the king barely conscious; he died there on the 22 June 1727. A messenger left for London to convey the news of the king’s death. Sir Robert Walpole received the dispatch and set out for Richmond Lodge to inform the new king and queen in person. Upon arrival, Walpole demanded to speak to George August. The new king did not believe Walpole when he informed him of his father’s death. Walpole handed George August the dispatch, which the new king read. Without delay, George August and Caroline left Richmond Lodge for Leicester House where they greeted many courtiers who came to pay their respects to the new king and queen of England.

As princess, Caroline cultivated her authority over George August and her power increased when she became queen. She played a significant role in deciding what ministry prevailed under the new reign, and she sided with Sir Robert Walpole. Caroline’s alliance with Walpole allowed her to enhance her political position. The queen exhibited her political interests and the king valued her opinions on important matters of state. The political image that Caroline created gave women at George II’s court the opportunity to behave politically. Women had more possibilities to hold household appointments and discover their own ways of political participation. Queen Caroline signified power and that permitted elite women at George II’s

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court the chance to facilitate their own political interests. Henrietta Howard, mistress to the king
and member of the queen’s household, continued in her appointed positions she held under
George I’s reign. Her political affiliations did not align with the ministry that George II and
Caroline created. She adopted a differing ideology and her political efforts largely supported the
opposition. Charlotte Clayton and Caroline developed a close friendship during Clayton’s service
to the princess. The two shared political loyalties and Clayton used her relationship with the
queen to become politically relevant. Each of these women employed different political
strategies to participate, they found avenues that allowed them to do so, and Caroline’s role
became a key component in their success or failure. After Caroline’s death, the political activity
of women at George’s court declined since access to court positions and influential people
diminished.

A New King and Queen: The Accession of George II and Queen Caroline

As the new queen of England, Caroline reached the pinnacle of public life. Her
dominating personality suggested to the elite members of both political factions that she had
complete control of the king. Many verses circulated proposing that the king lacked command of
his court.

You may strut, dapper George, but ‘twill all be in vain;
We know ‘tis Queen Caroline, not you, that reign—
You govern no more than Don Philip of Spain.
Then if you would have us fall down and adore you,
Lock up your fat spouse, as your dad did before you.3

The suspected power of the queen had become a way to make the king look weak. George
wanted to portray to his subjects that his mistresses held no power with him. His attitude toward
his mistresses resulted from his father’s relations with the Duchess of Kendal. According to
Coxe, George “had seen, and lamented, that his father had been governed by his mistresses; and

3 Quoted in, Hervey, Some Materials, 1:69.
was so extremely cautious to avoid a similar error.”

Queen Caroline knew that George kept mistresses, but she consciously attempted to maintain the king’s affections and her position as the one he consulted on matters of state.

The historiography emphasizes George’s command over his court. Andrew Thompson, the most recent biographer of George II, argues that the new king was determined to maintain authority over the decisions of his administration. Thompson dismisses the accounts from Lord Hervey and Walpole, who were both favorites of the queen, because they benefited from stressing the value of the queen’s power over the king. Lord Hervey’s allegiances undeniably aligned with the queen and Sir Robert Walpole and his narrative included this bias. Thompson has effectively argued that Hervey displayed his preference for Caroline, while diminishing the king’s importance. Jeremy Black contends that George II’s fundamental character was as a military leader. He effectively supports his claim that the king maintained supreme command over military and foreign affairs. Additionally, he comments that the king preferred to handle these affairs and leave other matters to his ministers or his wife. Black’s research supports the role Caroline played in government affairs. She was influential with George II, but not dominating. The possibility exists that Hervey overstated his accounts, but his description of Caroline, her relationship with her husband, and her role in the government are relevant in assessing Caroline’s power at court. At the very least, Hervey’s memoirs give one version of how Caroline exercised her authority as queen.

The political opposition chose to highlight Caroline’s dominance over George II in order to insult and emasculate the king. Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield

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4 Coxe, Memoirs, 2:4.
6 Ibid., 97-100.
explained George II’s disposition in his published work *Characters*. Chesterfield was a disaffected Whig who having voted against Walpole’s excise scheme, consequently lost his ministerial position.

He [George II] was thought to have a great opinion of his own abilities; but, on the contrary, I am very sure that he had a great distrust of them in matters of state. He well knew that he was governed by the Queen, while she lived; and that she was governed by Sir Robert Walpole: but he kept that secret inviolably, and flattered himself that nobody had discovered it. After their deaths, he was governed successively by different ministers, according as they could engage for a sufficient strength in the house of commons; for, as avarice was his ruling passion, he feared, hated, and courted, that money-giving part of the legislature.8

Chesterfield’s account of George II not only indicated the power that Caroline held with her husband, but also illustrated George’s susceptibility to allow others to govern him, even ministers. Thomas Wentworth, first Earl of Strafford, a known Jacobite, wrote to James, the Pretender, upon the ascension of George II to the throne and explained his expectations for the new reign. Strafford explained, “I am convinced that the same violent and corrupt measures taken by the father will be pursued by the son, who is passionate, proud, and peevish, and though he talks of ruling by himself, he will just be governed as his father was.”9 Strafford never mentioned Caroline’s influence with George II, but he identified the propensity of the king to permit others to rule him. Caroline’s contemporaries, especially those hostile to the king, overstated the extent to which she ruled her husband. Despite this, George II trusted Caroline and valued her opinion enough that she participated in political decisions, however disproportionally represented.

While Chesterfield and Strafford both disclosed Caroline’s influence, Lord Hervey presented more substantial evidence regarding the couple’s relationship. His memoirs revealed


9 Earl of Strafford to James, 21 June 1727, quoted in Wilkins, *Caroline*, 2:20.
how Caroline operated at court and her interests in public matters. According to Hervey, Caroline concealed her influence as princess. When she became queen, the power she employed over George II and his affairs became evident to all:

Whilst the King was Prince there were so few occasions for the Queen to show her credit with him that some were apt to imagine this latent dormant power was much less than it proved itself when the time came that made it worth her while to try, show, and exert it. But as soon as ever the Prince became King the whole world began to find out her will was the sole spring on which every movement in the Court turned; and though His Majesty lost no opportunity to declare that the Queen never meddled with his business, yet nobody was simple enough to believe it; and few besides himself would have been simple enough to hope or imagine it could be believed, since everybody who knew there was such a woman as the Queen, knew she not only meddled with business, but directed everything that came under that name, either at home or abroad. Her power was unrivalled and unbounded.10

Hervey’s statement that Caroline’s power was ‘unrivalled and unbounded,’ is likely an over assertion of her power. Similar to Chesterfield’s description of the king, Hervey recognized that Caroline never intentionally exposed her influence. Caroline knew her husband well and learned how to direct his opinions so that they aligned with hers.11 In 1735, a large fleet was sent to prevent Spain from attacking Portugal, Lord Harrington informed the Duke of Newcastle that “as Her Majesty [Caroline, in London] will be able to have at all times the opinion of those versed in sea affairs, His Majesty orders me to acquaint you that he leaves it entirely to the Queen to send such orders as Her Majesty shall find necessary, for continuing or recalling at the proper session

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10 Hervey, Some Materials, 1:44-5.
11 Lord Hervey gives his account of how the queen managed her husband. He wrote, “And as the Craftsman had not yet lashed their Majesties out of all feeling for these transitory verbal corrections that smart without wounding and hurt without being dangerous, so the King’s vehemence and pride, and the Queen’s apprehension of his being told of her power till he might happen to feel it, made them both at first excessively uneasy. However, as the Queen by long studying and long experience of his temper knew how to instil her own sentiments, whilst she affected to received His Majesty’s, she could appear convinced whilst she was controverting, and obedient whilst she was ruling; and by this means her dexterity and address made it impossible for anybody to persuade him what was truly his case, and that whilst she was seemingly on every occasion giving up her opinion and her will to his, she was always in reality turning his opinion and bending his will to hers,” in Hervey, Some Materials, 1:68-9.
that squadron or any part of it." Harrington’s letter indicated that the king trusted Caroline to make the proper decision. Caroline played a role in the political decisions, which gave those who opposed George the opportunity to use this against him and overemphasize Caroline’s control over the king. Either way, Caroline presented the perception of a powerful and political queen. Coxe portrayed the relationship between Caroline and George II as one of trust and explained that the king valued his wife’s opinion and that she held his complete confidence. No one benefited from the couple’s relationship more than Sir Robert Walpole. Caroline developed a friendship with Walpole, and together the two regulated the information accessible to the king.

A Favorite in Power: The Politics of Caroline and Sir Robert Walpole

Caroline’s first political encounter involved the selection of George’s minister. After Walpole informed George August of his father’s death, he asked the new king for orders. George relayed Walpole to Spencer Compton, who held the post of Speaker of the House of Commons. Compton had remained a loyal member of George’s household since 1715, when he received the appointment as treasurer to the prince. Sir Robert Walpole realized that the new king intended to choose Compton as his minister. Henry Pelham related:

It went so far as to be almost a formal appointment; the king, for two or three days, directing everybody to go to him [Spencer Compton] upon business, and sir Robert, I know, did believe himself it would be so: but by the queen’s management, all this was soon overruled, with a sincere regard, I am persuaded, to what she believed to be most for the king’s real service, with perhaps at the same time a little vanity to have the person deemed the ablest minister in parliament of that age.

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12 Earl of Harrington to Duke of Newcastle, 7 August 1735, in Black, George II, 120.
13 Coxe, Memoirs, 2:5.
14 Minutes of a conversation with Mr. Scrope, Secretary of the treasury, relating to the arrangement of the new ministry on the accession of George the First [Second], in Coxe, Memoirs, 2:519.
15 Anecdote from Mr. Pelham, relating to Sir Robert Walpole’s danger of being dismissed in 1727, in Coxe, Memoirs, 2:571. Mr. Scrope, Secretary to the treasury also relates, “the queen’s aversion to Compton was hearty and real, there remained no doubt but this had been urged and reported to Walpole’s advantage. He added, his having the strongest assurances, that the queen would improve every method and opportunity to disappoint Compton,” in Coxe, Memoirs, 2:519-20.
Pelham’s explanation attributed Walpole’s success to the queen’s influence over her husband. Despite Walpole’s initial concern, he retained his prominent position as the king’s minister and transitioned from serving George I to George II because of Caroline’s role in the decision. Men of political distinction suggested different reasons for Walpole’s success, but Caroline’s preference for him played a significant part.

Spencer Compton’s role in Walpole’s success complemented the importance of the queen’s preference. Sir Robert Walpole’s son Horace Walpole recounted how his father kept his leading position in the government in 1727. Horace Walpole blamed Compton’s ineptitude as the reason he never secured the ministry position. Walpole revealed that Compton was so little qualified to accommodate himself to the grandeur of the moment, and to conceive how a new sovereign should address himself to his Ministers, and he had also been so far from meditating to supplant the Premier, that, in his distress, it was to Sir Robert himself he had recourse, and whom he besought to make the draught of the King’s speech for him. The new Queen, a better judge than her husband of the capacities of the two candidates, and who had silently watched for a moment proper for overturning the new designations, did not lose a moment in observing to the King how prejudicial it would be to his affairs to prefer to the Minister in possession a man in who own judgment his predecessor was the fittest person to execute his office. From that moment there was no more question of Sir Spencer Compton as Prime Minister. ¹⁶

Compton had the responsibility of writing the king’s speech; a task usually performed by the king’s minister. According to Walpole, Compton’s inexperience and lack of confidence forced him to request the help of Robert Walpole, which weakened the perception that Compton could perform the duties the position demanded. Horace Walpole credited the queen for her ability to recognize the opportunity to reveal the accomplishments of both men and emphasized the talents of Walpole. Robert Walpole’s son attributed his father’s victory over Compton to the queen’s ability to instill her husband with her judgment for the ablest minister. The queen’s assistance helped Walpole’s position with the king, but he had other ideas to gain the king’s favor.

Although Caroline’s preference for Walpole helped his position, Walpole recognized the king’s interest in the Civil List, and used his power to provide George II with the best offer. The king made his concerns about the Civil List clear and played Walpole and Compton against one another; Walpole proved triumphant and delivered the king with the most lavish income of all the Hanoverians. Parliament granted George an income of £800,000 per annum, £100,000 more than his predecessor, George Lud wig. Additionally, Parliament agreed to pay any deficits of the Civil List, and permitted the king to receive any surpluses. Hervey attested that Walpole further secured his position in the new reign through “the Queen, by making all his court solely to her, and that he did not weaken his interest with her by adding those two agreeable bribes of making her jointure...just double what had ever been given to a Queen of England before; and persuading the King to make her present establishment £60,000 a year.” While it is plausible that Hervey overemphasized the gifts Parliament granted the queen as the principal motivation in George choosing Walpole as his minister, the additional benefits that Walpole granted the royal couple aided his cause with the king.

Spencer Compton’s inadequacy, Robert Walpole’s victory regarding George II’s Civil List, and Caroline’s preference for Walpole aided his success at maintaining his position of minister to the new king. Caroline’s support of Walpole strengthened their relationship and the queen undoubtedly chose him. Though difficult to ascertain what specifically encouraged Caroline to choose Walpole as her favorite, Hervey revealed, “it is an undoubted fact that she did make choice of him, and that by her influence the King, without getting the better of his dislike to him, at least at first employed him.”

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18 Hervey, Some Materials, 1:47.
19 Ibid.
on Walpole’s behalf to the king. Hervey claimed that the queen explained to the king “that his [Robert Walpole] long experience and approved abilities would certainly enable him to serve the King better than any other body; that his being so much in their power would also make him more humble and submissive than any other minister; that his having made a vast fortune already would make him less solicitous about his own interest, and more at liberty to mind the King’s.”

The queen’s ardent support of Walpole assisted his efforts to secure the foremost position in the government and both recognized the benefits of their alliance. For Caroline, Walpole allowed her the opportunity to participate in government affairs, while Walpole gained the advantage of Caroline’s influence over the king.

Robert Walpole became aware of the relationship that existed between George and Caroline while serving George I, and chose his political alliances carefully, suggesting that Caroline held her husband’s complete trust. According to Horace Walpole, his father:

had early discovered that, in whatever gallantries George Prince of Wales indulged or affected, even the person of his Princess was dearer to him than any charms in his mistresses; and though Mrs. Howard (afterwards Lady Suffolk) was openly his declared favourite, as avowedly as the Duchess of Kendal was his father’s, Sir Robert’s sagacity discerned that the power would be lodged with the wife, not with the mistress; and he not only devoted himself to the Princess, but totally abstained from even visiting Mrs. Howard; while the injudicious multitude concluded, that the common consequences of an inconstant husband’s passion for his concubine would follow, and accordingly warmer, if not public, vows were made to the supposed favourite than to the Prince’s consort.

20 Ibid., 1:48. Hervey also explained how the king gained affection for Walpole. Hervey claimed that “the Queen by frequently inculcating her doctrine, had in five years changed His Majesty’s first plan of government . . . . He intended to have all his ministers in the nature of clerks, not to give advice, but to receive orders; and proposed, what by experiment he found impracticable, to receive applications and distribute favours through no principal channel, but to hear from all quarters, and employ indifferently in their several callings those who by their stations would come under the denominations of ministers. But it was very plain, form what I have just now related from the King’s own lips, as well as from many other circumstances in his present conduct, that the Queen had subverted all his notions and schemes, and fully possessed His Majesty with an opinion that it was absolutely necessary, from the nature of the English Government, that he should have but one minister; and that it was equally necessary, from Sir Robert’s superior abilities, that he should be the one,” Ibid., 1:151-3.

21 Walpole, *The Letters*, 1:cxvii-cxviii. In 1734 when Caroline became ill, Lord Hervey recounted that Robert Walpole visited her and “thanked her extremely for all her goodness and kind thoughts of him: ‘But you know, Madam,’ said he, ‘I can do nothing without you. Whatever my industry and watchfulness for your interest and welfare suggest, it is you must execute. You, Madam, are the sole mover of this Court; whenever your hand stops, everything must stand still, and, whenever that spring is changed, the whole system and every inferior wheel

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Robert Walpole applied his loyalties to Caroline instead of the king’s mistresses, which demonstrated that he recognized the power Caroline possessed and suspected her future authority as queen would increase. Walpole profited from the alliance he made with Caroline and it remained strong throughout her life. In April 1731, John Perceval, first Earl of Egmont noted that he “heard from authority at Court I may depend on, that the King will not suffer Sir Robert to speak to him of affairs, except he send particularly for him; but Sir Robert is ordered to communicate all to her Majesty, and she conveys it to the King.” Once Walpole secured his position in the ministry, he and Caroline succeeded in acquiring the confidences of the king.

The Excise Scheme: The Role of Queen Caroline

In 1723, Walpole introduced reform through the excise of tea, chocolate, and coffee. From 1731 to 1733, the government’s financial dilemma and the triumph of his previous excise bill led him to draw up another that extended the excise to tobacco and wine. In 1732 parliament had re-established the salt duty and Walpole used the public and parliamentary reaction as a template for the acceptance of his proposal for a new excise bill. As Paul Langford comments, the excise scheme expressed two central elements of Walpole’s policy—the increased importance of effective taxation of domestic consumption through the implementation of a tax and the declining emphasis on revenue gained from property taxes. Additionally, Walpole had

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interests regarding commercial reform. Traditionally, domestic taxation focused on items such as liquor. This type of taxation was enacted in addition to the custom duties that applied to imported commodities. Walpole believed that a domestic tax on products could act as a replacement to the custom duties. He created ‘bonded warehouses’ that optimized the collection of revenue, because it allowed the opportunity to separate the products between those meant for internal purposes and those intended for re-export. The excise department taxed the goods released for domestic consumption, while the commodities intended for export could be handled with little government intervention.²⁴ Walpole’s excise scheme planned to make taxation more efficient and limit fraudulent practices. He believed his proposal would receive a positive reception from the public and parliament.

Walpole’s proposed excise plan received public attention from opposition in parliament before the opening session in 1733. This allowed those who opposed the excise plenty of time to prepare and permitted the distribution of oppositional print to the public. Dr. Alured Clarke reported the pandemonium that the excise plan had caused to Charlotte Clayton as early as January 1732. Dr. Clarke reported, “the Excise is now the private and public care. We have had daily meetings among our citizens; and though this is one of the best affected places in England, yet they begin to be almost united in this affair, and the Jacobites and Tories work day and night in warning the people’s minds, and are now trying to make it odious for any citizen though no way concerned, to refuse to set his name to the petitions that are framed for the purpose.”²⁵ Dr. Clarke’s letter described the extent to which the opposition went to create the public’s disapproval of the bill. The public disliked the introduction of an excise tax, especially

²⁴ Ibid., 32.
merchants, and Langford suggests that Walpole underestimated the public’s dissatisfaction.26 On 7 March 1733, Walpole presented his argument for the excise tax to parliament with the oppositions rebuttals prepared in advance. Initially, Walpole anticipated success for his excise scheme, but according to Lord Hervey, Walpole also prepared for an attempt from the opposition to use the issue of the excise to discredit him.27

Walpole’s excise scheme received resistance from leading public figures, notably the Earl of Stair. Lord Hervey recounted that when the Duke of Queensbury resigned his position as Admiral of Scotland “the employment some time after was given to Lord Stair upon his writing the most submissive and supplicating letter to Sir Robert Walpole, setting forth the convenience it would be to his distressed, broken fortune, desiring Sir Robert’s good nature to draw a veil over all that was past, and giving the strongest assurances of his future good behavior.”28

Angered by Walpole’s introduction of the excise, the Earl of Stair, encouraged by other members of the opposition, requested an audience with the queen. Lord Stair endeavored to persuade Caroline to end the excise debate in parliament.

Lord Hervey claimed that the queen and Lord Stair had agreed not to share their discussion with anyone. When Caroline heard that Stair boasted of how he scolded the queen, she decided to give Lord Hervey the full account. Hervey’s detailed account of the conversation

28 Ibid., 100. The Duchess of Queensbury was banished from court for her support of the poet and playwright, John Gay. Gay had written the extremely popular play, *The Beggars’ Opera*, which was a satire that reflected upon the court and Sir Robert Walpole. Gay wrote a subsequent play, *Polly*, that was according the Lord Hervey was “less pretty, but more abusive” to Walpole. Walpole through the Duke of Grafton, who was Lord Chamberlain, stopped the production of the play. Upon this, Gay decided to print the work and the Duchess of Queensbury assisted him in gaining subscriptions. Lord Hervey recounts, “her solicitations were so universal and so pressing, that she came even into the Queen’s apartment.” Such a blatant disrespect for what the King had ordered got the duchess expelled from court. Her husband, the Duke of Queensbury, supported his wife and resigned his position of Admiral of Scotland, despite attempts to change his mind. For Hervey’s account see, Hervey, *Some Materials*, 1:98-100. John Gay also alludes to the situation in letters to Jonathan Swift. See, John Gay to Swift, 2 December 1728, in Woolley, *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 3:203-204; and Gay to Swift, 18 March 1728-9, Ibid., 3:222-4.
emphasized the opposition’s hostility towards the excise, Walpole, and the queen. According to Hervey, Lord Stair explained that the excise scheme “was injudiciously at first concerted and hastily undertaken; that it was known to have been so now even by Sir Robert himself, and was only at present pushed by him in obstinacy, because he would not own himself guilty of an error, which must end in his disgrace or the total ruin of the nation.” Stair proceeded to chastise the queen’s attachment to Walpole and informed Caroline that “he [Walpole] absolutely governs Your Majesty nobody doubts, and very few scruple to say; they own you have the appearance of power, and say you are contented with the appearance, whilst all the reality of power is his, derived from the King, conveyed through you, and vested in him.” Lord Stair behaved zealously towards the queen over the excise proposition and even more passionately towards her alliance with Walpole. Lord Stair believed reporting his grievances to Caroline most effective, which suggests that he realized the position the queen held in the ministry. Stair’s comments to the queen concerned the issue of the excise, but he focused more on Walpole. Stair wanted to discredit Walpole by opposing the excise; the bill presented an opportunity for the Tory

29 Lord Egmont also relates what he had heard about the Earl of Stair’s conversation with the queen. He recounted, “Horace Walpole and his lady dined with me. He told me the Earl of Stairs is a man of good parts, with the worst judgment in the world, and insufferable proud and haughty; and that Sir Robert Walpole got him a few years ago the Admiralship of Scotland, contrary to the judgment of all his friends. That he has now lost it by going to the Queen and talking improperly to her, and then publicly discoursing what passed in private between them. I had, indeed heard that, exposing to her the unfitness of pushing Sir Robert Walpole’s scheme for excising tobacco and wines, he asked her whether there was never an able Minister to serve the Crown but Sir Robert? Which she could not but resent, Sir Robert being her favourite. He told me also that Lord Clinton, lately removed from being Lord of the Bedchamber to the King, fancying himself a favourite to his Majesty, and being a conceited, proud man, though nothing in him, took the liberty to speak against the Excise to his Majesty with too much pertness, and this was the reason of his removal,” see Egmont, Manuscripts, 1:374-5.

30 Hervey, Some Materials, 1:137.

31 Ibid., 1:139. Hervey also gave an account of how Caroline responded. According to him, she said “you think you are either talking to a child or to one that doats; for supposing this Bill to be everything which you have described it to be, do you imagine I should be weak enough to believe that you would oppose it for the reasons you have give? or that it would be natural for you to think that these arguments you have mentioned would weigh with anybody? Do you, my Lord, pretend to talk of the opinion of electors having any influence on the elected?” Ibid., 1:141.
opposition, of which he belonged, to regain control. Stair understood Caroline’s authority because he appealed directly to her rather than consulting the king.

Walpole fought ardently to increase support for the excise bill, but the unrest prevented him from continuing to advocate his plan. On 11 April 1733, Walpole spoke to parliament and decided to abandon the debate over the excise of tobacco and wine. Fearing for his safety, friends and constables escorted Walpole to his carriage when he left the Commons to protect him from the mob that had gathered.\(^3\) That same night the mob hanged and burned effigies of Walpole and Queen Caroline in Fleet Street, Smithfield, and Bishopsgate Street.\(^3\) The mob chose to burn Walpole and Caroline in effigy, which supports the public’s knowledge of their political alliance. Caroline’s role as trustworthy advisor to her husband and king and the political friendship she developed with Walpole allowed her to participate in politics and allowed Walpole to maintain his supremacy.

The Politically Weak Mistress: George II and Henrietta Howard

Henrietta Howard’s unofficial position as mistress never followed a specific trajectory, and did not always present the opportunity for her to become involved in issues of state. Hopeful applicants seeking to advance their circumstances genuinely believed that the king’s mistress held power over her lover and thus had the ability to influence preferment. For Henrietta Howard, the choice to become royal mistress meant a less rewarding political position than she expected. The mistresses of George II gained power and authority differently than the mistresses of George I. George II had Caroline, whose active role in the cultural and political issues of


\(^3\) *Fog’s London Journal*, 14 April 1733, in Langford, *The Excise*, 91. On 12 April 1733, Lord Egmont recounts that “the City rang their bells for joy the Bill was dropped, and made more bonfires and illuminations than was ever known. They broke the windows of the Post Office, and of all other houses not illuminated, and would have done it of the Parliament House while we were sitting, if they could have come within reach of them. They burnt Sir Robert in effigy . . . in several places, and in others dressed up a pole and whipped it,” Egmont, *Manuscripts*, 1:362.
court superseded all other positions for women. Unlike the Duchess of Kendal, who undoubtedly exerted political power, Henrietta Howard represented a different kind of mistress and further illustrated that being a mistress did not guarantee power, but lacking substantial power did not debar her from participation in politics. For those at court, Howard’s lack of power with the king became apparent, but for her correspondents that sympathized with the Tory faction, the real relationship between Howard and the king proved difficult to detect.

Those that attended court often recognized that Howard did not exhibit the authority over the king that many of her correspondents suspected. Lord Hervey, a favorite of both Queen Caroline and Sir Robert Walpole, described Howard’s relevance as the king’s mistress and her position at court:

Mrs. Howard . . . was too wise and too prudent to have given herself the air of a favourite without feeling she was so, or to have affected the appearance of power without knowing whether she should be able to maintain it, yet, without doubt, she had tried her strength in private, and was mortified to find she had tried it to so little purpose, well knowing that some degree of contempt would attend the not having what in her situation the world would expect her to have, though she had never pretended to be possessed of it, and that a mistress who could not get power was not a much more agreeable or respectable character than a minister who could not keep it.34

Hervey’s description of Howard’s character and circumstances at court emphasized that she failed to gain any authority with the king. Nevertheless, Hervey acknowledged that Howard tested the king to see what kind of influence she may have had, but ultimately discovered that she had none. Hervey’s portrayal professed the belief that the unofficial position of mistress usually brought power and influence, and if unable to exercise these assumed benefits of the position, then the station of mistress appeared more demeaning. Howard may not have had

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34 Hervey, Some Materials, 1:40.
political power with her royal lover, but she did not quit her position with nothing; she received financial profits and the funds to build a new home in Twickenham, Marble Hill.  

Despite holding the position of mistress, Howard possessed no significant influence on the king directly, but she received solicitations from those desiring patronage and believed her influence strong at court. The poet and playwright John Gay hoped to receive preferment by making court to Howard. The poet Alexander Pope, a friend of both Gay and Howard, expressed concern to Jonathan Swift regarding Gay’s efforts to receive an appointment. Pope explained that “our friend Gay is used, as the friends of Tories are by Whigs, (and generally by Tories too)...He puts his whole trust at Court, in that Lady whom I describ’d to you, and whome you take to be an allegorical Creature of fancy. I wish she really were Riches for His sake.” Pope implied that Gay would never receive the advancement he desired through his application to Howard. Pope, a close acquaintance of Howard, demonstrated awareness of her relationship with the king, or he suspected Howard’s steady correspondence with notable members of the Tory faction had not gained her favor with the Whig administration. Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield, another close friend of Howard’s, described her character and circumstances at court:

The busy and speculative politicians of the anti-chambers, who know everything, but know everything wrong, naturally concluded, that a lady with whom the King passed so many hours every day must necessarily have some interest with him, and consequently applied to her. Her lodgings grew more and more frequented by busy faces, both of men and women. Solicitations surrounded her, which she did not reject, knowing that the opinion of having power often procures power. Nor did she promise to support them,

35 Hervey continues his evaluation of Mrs. Howard by stating, “Mrs. Howard was in the right to continue there even on this foot, since she could not put herself on any better; for though she had not all the advantages which the sole mistress to a king might expect, yet it enabled her at least to gain that very material point of bettering her fortune; and the exchanging indigence and distress for affluence and prosperity was a consideration that no doubt often comforted her in the many mortifications, disappointments, and rebukes which her ambition met with when she endeavoured to join the éclat and power of a king’s mistress to those less agreeable appurtenances of that character, the scandal and confinement of it.”, in Ibid., 1:43-4.

conscious that she had not the power to do it. But . . . the difficulties of doing it, and all that trite cant of those who with power will not, and of those who without power cannot, grant the requested favours. To my knowledge she sincerely tried to serve some, but without effect; she could not even procure a place of 200l. a year for John Gay, a very poor and honest man, and no bad poet, only because he was a poet, which the King considered a mechanic.37

Chesterfield and Hervey shared a similar opinion of Howard’s relationship with the king. Chesterfield indicated Howard’s cognizance of the importance of projecting the appearance of power. Although Howard failed in elevating her friends to powerful positions, her failures do not reflect her inability to become involved in politics.

Henrietta Howard attempted to test her power when George Augustus ascended to the throne in 1727. With the change in monarch, many believed a change in administration followed, ending the dominance of Walpole and the Whig party. Spencer Compton, a member of the opposition, competed with Walpole for the place as king’s minister. Compton’s loyal service to George convinced his colleagues that he had a chance at challenging Walpole’s supremacy. The opposition underestimated the influence of Caroline. She believed that the benefits of retaining Walpole outweighed the negatives, and persuaded the king to recognize Walpole as an asset. Caroline advocated the rewards of keeping an established administration to the king, and informed him that Walpole had agreed to increase the civil list if kept in office.38 Coxe related the event based on Walpole’s papers:

On the 24th of June, the very day in which Swift said the ministry would be changed, Walpole was re-appointed first lord commissioner of the treasury and chancellor of the exchequer, and lord Townshend again received the seal of secretary of state. An attempt was finally made by the party, through Mrs. Howard, to prevail on the king to confer an earldom on lord Bathurst; but that measure being thwarted by the influence of the queen, they relinquished all hopes of success, and Bolingbroke retired from London in disgust.39

37 Philip Dormor Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield, Characters, 441.
39 Ibid., 2:32.
The Tory opposition saw the death of George I and the ascension of George II as the perfect chance to regain political prominence. The Tories had not secured the government since the death of Queen Anne and many in the political faction felt the king’s ascension to the throne offered the best opportunity. Howard’s correspondence suggested that she associated with the Tory party. Many of her closest acquaintances contained members of the Tory faction, including her future husband George Berkeley. The opposition considered Howard a viable option to aid their attempts to overthrow Walpole’s hold on the ministry.

Those who opposed Walpole courted Howard because they assumed that she held authority with the king. Jonathan Swift, Lord Bolingbroke, Lord Bathurst, and Lord Chesterfield all devoted their attention to Howard hoping she provided the path to George II’s favor. Horace Walpole recounted that the opposition:

> founded their hopes on Mrs. Howard’s influence; but astonished and disappointed at finding Walpole not shaken from his seat, they determined on an experiment that should be the touch-stone of Mrs. Howard’s credit. They persuaded her to demand of the new King and earl’s coronet for Lord Bathurst. She did—the Queen put in her veto, and Swift, in despair, returned to Ireland, to lament Queen Anne and curse Queen Caroline, under the mask of patriotism, in a country he abhorred and despised.40

According to Walpole, the Tories decided to test Howard’s influence and ability by asking her to request Lord Bathurst an ‘earl’s coronet.’ To show her loyalty to the Tories, Howard relented and requested the advancement of Bathurst’s title to the king. Though her attempt failed to better Bathurst’s position, her role as mistress encouraged her to participate in party politics, and further illustrates that women at court held political motivations. Queen Caroline had placed her favor with Walpole and Howard never had a chance to compete with the power of the queen.

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40 Walpole, Reminisces, 41.
Howard’s relationship with members of the opposition led to her decline in the king’s affections. She remained at court until November 1734 when she resigned her position. Involvement in politics meant that not every attempt at securing votes for a bill or elevating a favorite to a post came to fruition. Failure indicated political involvement as much as success, as Howard’s circumstances revealed. She never succeeded in achieving influence over the king, nor did she have any power with Queen Caroline or Sir Robert Walpole. Yet, she never ceased attempting to test her position, which indicated her desire to take part in politics. The king was not the only avenue for women to become involved in politics at court.

Charlotte Clayton: A Lady of the Bedchamber’s Political Ambitions

The unofficial position of mistress in early modern England indicated political power, but women found ways to maintain involvement in court politics through the queen. The women Caroline appointed to positions in her household had direct access to her Royal Highness. Charlotte Clayton developed a close relationship to the queen when she served her as princess. When Caroline became queen, those who paid court to Clayton increased since many had become aware of their friendship. Lord Hervey commented that, “this lady having been always though her favourite when Princess, and from her first coming over constantly in her service, and seemingly in her confidence, everybody imagined she would have power in the new reign.” Hervey suggested that Robert Walpole tried to end Clayton’s influence because he suspected their interests did not align. Furthermore, Hervey equated Clayton’s supposed power over the queen with Henrietta Howard’s lack of power over the king. Hervey believed that in reality,

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41 Hervey suspected that Howard’s importance declined because of the “King’s being thoroughly tired of her; her constant opposition to all his measures; her wearying him with her perpetual contradiction; her intimacy with Mr. Pope . . . the acquaintance she was known to have with many of the opposing party, and the correspondence she was suspected to have with many more of them; and, in short, her being no longer pleasing to the king in her private capacity, and every day more disagreeable to him in her public conduct,” Some Materials, 2:382.
42 Hervey, Some Materials, 1:66.
43 Ibid., 1:66-7
Clayton held no influence over the queen. Recurrent features of early Georgian narratives represent women suspected of holding power as false. So, an attempt to diminish the perception that women operated outside their designated role does not surprise. Yet, Charlotte Clayton’s circumstances imply she had ambition and managed to become a political threat to Sir Robert Walpole.

Clayton managed to gain authority with the queen and Walpole suspected she held a secret of the queen’s. Walpole discovered that the queen had a rupture from a complicated birth of one of her children. Clayton knew of the queen’s illness and that she wanted to keep it secret, especially from the king. Walpole concluded that Clayton’s knowledge of the queen’s rupture gave her power with Caroline. Walpole disliked Clayton and presumed that she worked against and attempted to discredit him. Lord Hervey relayed a conversation in which Walpole complained that, “it was those bitches Lady Pomfret [Henrietta Louisa Fermor, countess of Pomfret] and Lady Sundon [Charlotte Clayton], who were always bemoaning the Queen [making] it difficult to bring the Queen to do what was right and sensible for her to do.” Hervey’s story suggested that Walpole blamed Clayton when his meetings with the queen did not go as planned. Horace Walpole indicated that Clayton had bigger ambitions and approached Robert Walpole. Clayton “proposed to him to unite with her and govern the kingdom together: he bowed, begged her patronage but said he thought nobody fit to govern the kingdom but the King and Queen.” Clayton’s remark depicted a woman who desired power beyond the influence of patronage.

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45 Hervey, Some Memoirs, 3:605.
Clayton and Walpole supported the Whig party, but they competed with one another for the queen’s confidence. They disagreed on clerical appointments, and Horace Walpole recounted that “As Sir Robert maintained his influence over the clergy by Gibson, Bishop of London, he often met with troublesome obstructions from Lady Sundon [Charlotte Clayton], who espoused…the heterodox clergy: and Sir Robert could never shake her credit.” Clayton and the queen shared similar religious ideology and the queen respected her opinion in appointments of clergy more than Walpole’s. The level of authority that Clayton maintained with the queen had strength enough to stand firm against Walpole’s wishes. At times, her influence rivaled the leading ministers.

Clayton challenged Walpole’s authority regarding clerical appointments, but a substantive disagreement concerned Lord Carteret. The same Carteret that Walpole and Townshend, with the assistance of the Duchess of Kendal, had succeeded in ousting from favor earlier during the reign of George I. In 1735, Lord Carteret attempted to reconcile with the court in hope of regaining his previous position. Lord Hervey reported:

When I inquired of Sir Robert Walpole if there was any truth in this report, he asked me if I thought him mad enough ever to trust such a fellow as that on any consideration, or on any promises or professions, within the walls of St. James’s. “I had some difficulty,” added he, “to get him out; but he shall find much more to get in again.” He told me, too, at the same time, that, to his knowledge, Lord Carteret had opened two canals to the Queen’s ear, but that he hoped to prevent either stream having water enough to turn his mill, though he knew one of them ran much stronger than the other.

Charlotte Clayton and Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London conveyed information concerning Carteret to the queen. In this instance, Walpole believed Bishop Sherlock embodied the greatest threat, but he again suspected Clayton’s participation. Although Bishop Sherlock and Clayton sought to advance Lord Carteret, their attempts proved ineffective. Walpole again showed his

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47 Ibid., 1:cxxxii.
power by keeping Lord Carteret from attaining any real influence over the king and queen. Despite this, Lord Carteret continued to vie for the queen’s attentions. In 1737, Carteret’s course of action shifted to flattery. He planned to write the history of the times emphasizing the magnificence of the queen along with the declaration that he had power over the two leaders of the opposition, William Pulteney and William Wyndham. Walpole once again believed those that wished him ill had attempted to sing the praises of Carteret while diminishing his value.49 Lord Hervey explained “These reports Sir Robert suspected to be made to the Queen by Sir Luke Schaub, Monsieur de Montandre, and Lady Sundon; and when he told Lord Hervey that he believed the last had the greatest share in them, added: “I know you have a partiality for her, but she is a damned inveterate bitch against me, and I know where and when she has seen Carteret lately more than once or twice.”50 Hervey indicated that Walpole believed Clayton had conspired with Carteret against him. Walpole’s claim against Clayton holds truth, as Clayton corresponded with Lady Carteret and had requested the assistance of Lord Carteret through his wife.51

Clayton and Walpole sought to exercise exclusive authority over the queen. Walpole appeared to have the queen’s complete confidence and benefited more from his influence with the queen than did Clayton, while Clayton proved a surprising challenge for Walpole. Though Clayton was loyal to the monarchs, she refused to support Walpole. She managed to become adversarial to Walpole from inside the court by continually opposing his preferences, whether

49 Sir Robert Walpole, according to Lord Hervey, stated to the queen, “Madam, I understand all this perfectly. People who wish Carteret well, and me ill, have made this report to Your Majesty to set off the dexterity of my Lord Carteret; but it is mere dexterity on one side, I believe, and I hope it is so on the other; for he tries this way of bragging of his power over Pulteney and Wyndam to get an interest with Your Majesty, and boasts to them of his interest in Your Majesty in order to get a weight with them, which I am convinced he has not; but, supposing it true, and that Pulteney did speak favourably of Carteret and resolve to submit to him, and that Carteret spoke with so little regard of Pulteney, what would these two circumstances, taken for granted, amount to further than this—that Pulteney says that of Carteret’s interest with you which Carteret had made him believe; and that Carteret, to recommend himself to you, speaks of Pulteney as he imagines you, who do not love Pulteney, think of him yourself and like to hear him say of him?,” in Ibid., 3:753.
50 Ibid., 3:753.
concerning the clergy or supporting a member of the Whig opposition. Sir Robert Walpole embodied power politics during the period; for a woman to become his strong adversary demonstrates she operated outside her “proper” role. Clayton had ambition but her goals had limits. By becoming a member of the royal household and developing a friendship with the queen, she was able to exercise some power in the political system that continued through the early Georgian court.

The Death of Queen Caroline and its Effect on Women and Politics under George II

On 9 November 1737, Queen Caroline visited her new library in St. James and complained that she experienced pain in her stomach. She took ‘Daffy’s Elixir’ as her physician recommended and went to bed. George proposed canceling the drawing room, but Caroline insisted that she felt better and the drawing room continued as planned.\(^{52}\) Caroline endured the drawing room, but the king reproached her for not acknowledging the Duchess of Norfolk. Caroline spoke to the duchess and made her apologies that she had overlooked her and then retired to bed. Caroline’s condition continued to worsen, and she soon believed her illness involved the ruptured hernia at her navel that she had become aware of after her pregnancy with Louisa. The mildly informed king insisted that they notify the surgeons of this condition, despite Caroline begging him not to.\(^{53}\) Lord Hervey commented that he believed “she carried her abhorrence to being known to have a rupture so far that she would have died without declaring it, or letting it be known, had not the King told it in spite of her.”\(^{54}\) Although the queen’s prognosis looked poor, the surgeons decided to operate anyway and made an incision in attempt to push the

\(^{52}\) The following account of the queen’s illness and death comes from Lord Hervey’s who extensively documented her last days, Hervey, Some Materials, 3:877-915.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 3:889-891.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 3:891.
bowels back into place. Unfortunately, the queen never recovered from her illness, and on 20 November 1737 Queen Caroline died.

While Caroline lived, she made a political impression with her husband’s administration and developed a role for herself that allowed her to participate in the politics of his reign. Her household gave women with similar aspirations, such as Henrietta Howard and Charlotte Clayton, the opportunity to cultivate the important relationships that gave them the status of possessing political authority. Caroline requested that George look after her servants and he honored £13,000 of pensions that Caroline had paid out.\textsuperscript{55} Nevertheless, the loss of Caroline affected the women who had gained a political presence at court. These women no longer had the same opportunity to be a constant attendance at court and their political aspirations declined. The importance of a queen, especially in the case of Caroline, in offering a chance for women to behave politically proved monumental. Without Caroline, neither Howard nor Clayton would have succeeded at establishing a political presence.

\footnote{Mary Selwyn to Hannah Lowther, 29 November 1737, in Thompson, \textit{George II}, 124.}
Caroline’s death was a turning point for George II’s court as Amalie Sophie Marianne von Wallmoden was not as politically adept as Caroline. The discussion of who would succeed her in the king’s confidence became a concern to the ministers. The Dukes of Grafton and Newcastle supported Princess Amelia, while Sir Robert Walpole disagreed and instead supported the king’s mistress, Wallmoden. Lord Hervey recorded the encounter between Walpole and the dukes:

Sir Robert Walpole, in his short, coarse way, asked these Dukes, with more sense and penetration than decency or politeness: “Does you Princess Emily design to commit incest? will she go to bed with her father? or does he desire she should? If not, do not tell me the King intends to make a vow of chastity, or that those that lie with him won’t have the best interest with him. I am for Madame Walmoden. I’ll bring her over and I’ll have nothing to do with your girls. I was for the wife against the mistress, but I will be for the mistress against the daughter.1

Walpole’s positions triumphed as he convinced the king that it was in everyone’s best interests for him to bring his mistress Wallmoden over from Hanover. Wallmoden arrived in England in June of 1738 and remained George II’s mistress until the king’s death in 1760. Wallmoden was the only mistress of the king’s that ever held any influence with him, but she rarely participated in political matters.2 Horace Walpole recounted that “She was created a countess [of Yarmouth], and had much weight with him, but never employed her credit but to assist his ministers.” 3 The Countess of Hartford remarked on the absence of courtiers at court in a letter to the Countess of Pomfret dated in November 1738 after the arrival of Wallmoden. Hartford explained, “I was at

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3 Horace Walpole, Reminiscence: Written in 1788 for the Amusement of Miss Mary and Miss Agnes B***y (London: Thomas Davison, 1819), 61.
court on the birth-day. There were more people than I expected, but fewer of our fellow-servants than one would naturally have supposed.4 Court life declined after Caroline’s death and when the drawing rooms occurred, they were much more intimate.5

Elaine Chalus has argued that imposing modern ideas of political participation, such as voting, onto eighteenth-century politics is anachronistic. Having political influence involved a broader meaning, and did always include casting a ballot. Additionally she contends that by understanding the political elite the participation of women in politics becomes apparent.6 Other scholars, including Amanda Vickery and Judith S. Lewis have demonstrated how women became active political participant after 1760.7 This study has contributed to the way elite women participated politically in the early eighteenth century through the court. Additionally, it has highlighted the ways women became involved in politics despite societal attempts through conduct literature to attach dishonor to acting outside the feminine role. It is important to understand that women, by becoming involved, were not attempting to fight for equality or in any way aiming to change their status before the law. Women used their assigned gender roles and status and still infiltrated into the political sphere. Most sought positions in the royal household and in turn tried to assist relations and friends in procuring positions at court or in government, and in lieu of these operations, involved themselves in the political arena reserved for men.

5 Horace Walpole recounts, “The king’s last years passed as regularly as clockwork. At nine at night he had cards in the apartments of his daughters, the princesses Ameila and Caroline, with lady Yarmouth, two or three of the late queen’s ladies, and as many of the most favoured officers of his own household,” in Reminisces, 62.
The early Georgian court gave women of quality the opportunities to take part in public matters. The court allowed women an alternative public venue that provided elite women the opportunity for political participation. The literary dialogue of Sir Richard Steele contained in his written works stressed the appropriate womanly behavior, which accentuated the purity and domestication of women. The evaluation of Steele and his published ideas about women’s roles and his actual behavior with aristocratic women provides an example of how these women became politically relevant by having the appearance of influencing preferment due to the political relationships they developed at court. Furthermore, Steele’s circumstances display the discrepancy that existed between appearance and reality. While society professed a private and domestic life for women, the reality for elite women involved a complicated system where political opportunity often presented itself. Steele typified the early eighteenth-century man, and the disparity that existed between his writings and actions contribute to how this study has presented the ambiguous position for women.

With the succession of the Hanoverian line in 1714, George Ludwig brought members of his German household to England, including his mistress Melusine von der Schulenburg and half-sister Sophia von Kielmansegg. His divorce from Sophia Dorothea of Celle allowed these women power at his new court. George’s lack of a queen consort led to the disposition of many royal household appointments for women who shifted to seeking positions in Princess Caroline’s service. This in turn gave the women close to the king more authority. Lady Cowper’s circumstances exemplified the best way for women to become politically relevant at George I’s court, most notably through their relationship to the princess or their husband’s positions in politics. Two essential elements contributed to Cowper’s political activities: one, her husband held a leading position in George I’s ministry, which made Lady Cowper the ideal person to
approach on matters of state, and two, she held the position of woman to the bedchamber to Caroline, Princess of Wales, which gave her access to the prince and princess’s court. Lady Cowper’s dual importance made her access to information valuable as the divisions between the court of the king and that of the prince continued to deteriorate.

As princess, Caroline developed her political presence and countenanced other women to become political participants during George I’s reign. During George I’s reign, Caroline made her political acumen known and cultivated a strong relationship with her husband. The politically forthright steps she took as princess further increased the political influence she gained as queen. Caroline’s political interests permitted women, like Charlotte Clayton, to become close to the queen and used this appearance of power to gain authority. Clayton became a key correspondent for those seeking preferment and favor with the royal couple, a reputation that grew as she continued to serve Caroline as queen. Henrietta Howard’s position as mistress to the Prince of Wales also gained attention from her peers and though she also served Caroline, her appearance of power came from her intimate relationship with George August. During George I’s reign, the prince and princess’s court became a hub for women who sought a more public role, which allowed the three women to develop and strengthen their positions in a public setting. Upon the ascensions of Caroline and George August to the throne in 1727, the perceived power of these women increased.

When Caroline became Queen of England, the authority over her husband became well known, and it gave her the opportunity to take on a stronger role in politics and the ministry. Caroline created the circumstances that permitted her to pursue and practice her political interests on a larger scale, most importantly the trustworthy and supportive relationship she developed with her husband. The strength of Caroline’s political position affected how women
at George II’s court were able to behave. Charlotte Clayton aligned herself and developed a friendship with Caroline as princess and this further reinforced her position under the new monarchy. Caroline’s authority supported women like Clayton to become more political, but the queen’s power also inhibited the suspected influence of Henrietta Howard. The ministers who aligned themselves with Caroline during George II’s reign maintained political power with the support of the queen. The death of Caroline left an absence at court that gave women the chance to develop the necessary political relationships that allowed them to behave publically.

By assessing the way elite women participated in early Georgian politics through the court, I have demonstrated how some women used the court to become politically relevant and have added to other scholarly examinations of how women behaved politically in the eighteenth century. The importance of appearance was vital for these women, as the appearance of power gave them the chance to attempt political acts or requests. In reality, the political relevance of these women depended on multiple factors, as this study illustrates. Becoming mistress to the king or prince often made women politically significant, but this concept did not always hold true. A determining factor to the success or failure of a mistress depended on the power of the princess or queen. The early Georgian monarchs represented both aspects, as George I’s mistress possessed real authority, while the power of Caroline superseded any power of George II’s mistress. A powerful queen marked the success of women at court to become politically influential and gave them access to the important state issues. Despite the varying dynamics that allowed women to take on a public role, one thing is certain, the perception of power created avenues for women to apply that potential political authority.
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