Introduction
A Mad, Wicked Folly?

At various moments during her long rule, Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901) made clear that she was no fan of women's rights. In a letter written in 1852 to her Uncle Leopold, King of the Belgians, the queen – then in the throes of motherhood – observed that her husband Albert "grows daily fonder and fonder of politics and business, and is wonderfully fit for both – showing such perspicuity and such courage – and I grow daily to dislike them both more and more. We women are not made for governing: and, if we are good women, we must dislike these masculine occupations!"[1] In 1870, faced with the prospect of a women's franchise bill passing in Parliament, the now-widowed queen engaged in a lengthy correspondence with Prime Minister William Gladstone, in which she registered her "strongest aversion for the *socalled & most erroneous 'Rights of Woman*.'" The "movement of the present day to place women in the same position as to professions – as *men*," she explained, was "mad & utterly demoralizing," and "[t]he Queen feels so strongly upon this dangerous & unchristian & unnatural *cry &* movement of 'woman's rights' . . . that she is most anxious that Mr. Gladstone & others shld take some steps to check this alarming danger & to make whatever use they can of her name . . . Let woman be what God intended; a helpmate for a man – but with totally different duties & vocations."[2] Later that same year, the queen condemned women's rights even more vociferously in her exchanges with the author Theodore Martin, whom she had commissioned to write the official biography of Prince Albert. "The Queen," she fumed, "is most anxious to enlist some one who can speak & write etc. checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Woman's rights,' with all the attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex seems bent, viz. In forgetting

[1] Queen Victoria to Leopold, King of the Belgians, February 3, 1852, in Theodore Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, volume 2 (New York: D. Appleton, 1877 [1876]), p. 352.
[2] See, respectively, Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, Osborne, February 10, 1870, and Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, Osborne, May 6, 1870, cited in Philip Guedalla, *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*, volume 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), p. 221 and pp. 227–228. Emphasis Victoria's.

every sense of womanly feeling & propriety . . . .It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious that she can't contain herself. God created man & woman different – & let each remain in their own position."[3]

Bracing words indeed, yet considered in isolation they actually tell us very little about how Queen Victoria figured in nineteenth-century conversations about women's rights in Britain. Victoria's opinions about female emancipation, after all, were initially registered in private, not public. While her opposition to women's rights would have been well known to her correspondents and a small circle of friends and associates, it was not conveyed to a broader public until decades later. The queen's letter of 1852 to her Uncle Leopold, for example, only came to public attention in 1876, when it was included in Theodore Martin's *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort.* It would then be reprinted again in the second volume of Arthur Christopher Benson and Lord Esher's *The Letters of Queen Victoria 1837–1861*, published in 1907. Similarly, Victoria's now famous and far more damning exchange with Martin in 1870, with its indictment of the "mad, wicked folly of 'Woman's rights,'" entered the public record in 1902, following the queen's death, when the influential editor Sidney Lee included her letter in a footnote of his *Queen Victoria*, based on an obituary of the sovereign that he had written for the *Dictionary of National Biography* the previous year. Lee had received a copy of Martin's intimate *Queen Victoria as I Knew Her*, printed "for private circulation" in 1902 and published in 1908, which included Martin's correspondence with the queen on female suffrage.[4] Perhaps most striking, Victoria's comments to William Gladstone on the vote from 1870 were only made public in 1933, when the barrister and historian Philip Guedalla published his *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*; this was over sixty years after the conversation between the sovereign and her prime minister had taken place.

For most of the nineteenth century, then, Britons would have been largely unaware of the queen's personal views on women's rights, and only in the early twentieth century would they have encountered her direct opposition to female suffrage. This is an important point, because it requires us to rethink many long- and widely held assumptions about

[3] Queen Victoria to Mr. Theodore Martin, May 29, 1870, RA VIC/MAIN/Y/168/29. This letter was subsequently published (in slightly revised form) in Theodore Martin, *Queen Victoria as I Knew Her* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1908), pp. 69–70. Nor were these Victoria's only hostile outbursts. In 1872, she complained to her eldest daughter Vicky about "those fast, wild young women who are really unsexed." See Queen Victoria to Vicky, February 24, 1872, in Roger Fulford, ed., *Darling Child: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the Crown Princess of Prussia* (London: Evans, 1976), p. 30.

[4] See Sidney Lee, *Queen Victoria* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1902), p. 555.

the queen's limited value to the nineteenth-century women's movement. To date, only a few scholars have cottoned on to the gap between the private exchange and public circulation of Victoria's scathing letters.[5] As a result, the correspondence tends to dominate most discussions of the queen vis-à-vis what her nineteenth-century subjects dubbed the "Woman Question." This does not mean that Victoria has been written entirely out of the story of British women's emancipation. Several historians and literary critics have suggested that the queen carried a certain subversive potential, simply by dint of being a female monarch, which no degree of disavowal on her part could ever entirely resolve.[6] She was, writes Julia Baird, the "unwitting, prickly muse" of the early women's movement.[7] To this end, some have even noted that Victoria – despite her personal pronouncements – was "successfully appropriated" in the mid–nineteenth-century campaigns for female employment, and that she was invoked in the "call for the admission of women to the political system," where she "gave a steady, rarely articulated impetus to the suffragette campaign," although none have yet elaborated on these claims.[8] Still

[5] See, for examples of those who have recognized this gap, Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 43; Julia M. Walker, *The Elizabethan Icon: 1603–2003* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 153; Walter L. Arnstein, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 203; and Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Feminization of the Monarchy 1780–1910: Royal Masculinity and Female Empowerment," in *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present*, ed. Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 76–107 at p. 101. Yet, even these scholars do not flesh out the particulars of Victoria's letters' ways into the world, nor do they consider how the letters were received once they entered wider circulation.

[6] For this perspective, see Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets and William Veeder, "Queen Victoria and 'The Shadow Side,'" In *The Woman Question: Defining Voices, 1837–1883*, volume 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), pp. 63–77 at p. 70; Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800–1914* (New York: Routledge, 1996), esp. chapter 3, "The Queen the Beauty, and the Woman Writer"; Gail Turley Houston, *Royalties: The Queen and Victorian Writers* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), esp. chapter 1, "'In the Reign of Queen Dick': Legal Fictions and the Constitution of Female Sovereignty," pp. 11–50 at pp. 15–17; Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837–1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. on "The Problem of a Female Monarchy"; Arnstein, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 202–204; Melanie Renee Ulrich, "Victoria's Feminist Legacy: How Nineteenth-Century Women Imagined the Queen," PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2005; and Julia Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire* (New York: Random House, 2016), esp. p. 403.

[7] See Julia Baird's refreshing recent reassessment of the queen, *Victoria the Queen*, p. 403.

[8] For the passages cited, see Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790–1865* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 130; Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: The Woman, the Monarchy, and the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), p. 100; and Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, p. 490. For others who have acknowledged –

others have ventured that Victoria helped to further women's agendas in different ways, through her literary and philanthropic activity, for example, or through her personal choices, including her controversial decision to use chloroform during the birth of her son Leopold in 1853.[9] Rights, we must remember, were not the only path to women's liberation.

Overall, however, assessments of the queen's impact on the nineteenth-century women's movement have been rather less charitable. Guided by Victoria's own caustic remarks, most scholars posit Victoria as a marginal figure in, if not an active foil to, the struggle for women' equality, especially in the political arena – and treat her monarchy on the whole as one that did far more to preserve than to undermine traditional gender roles. Consider Roger Fulford's classic *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle*, which foregrounds this antipathetic dynamic by making "This Mad, Wicked Folly of Women's Rights" the title of one of its chapters. Similar views appear again and again in more recent literature. For Dorothy Thompson, most feminists found "little help in the image of the female monarch," as Victoria "made known her hostility to woman's entry into the major professions, including medicine, and successfully concealed the extent of her own concern with the day-to-day politics of the country, allowing an image to be presented which was almost entirely domestic." Audrey Kelly, meanwhile, describes Victoria as lacking "any sympathy with 'this mad, wicked folly of women's rights with all its attendant horrors' as she wrote in a letter to Sir Theodore Martin." And

although not elaborated on – this tendency to invoke the queen in a suffrage context, see esp. Houston, *Royalties,* pp. 35–36; Homans, *Royal Representations,* p. xxv; Helen Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 426; Sandra Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), p. 145; David Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), esp. pp. 78 and 132; Arnstein, *Queen Victoria*, p. 203; Brian Howard Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 82; Ulrich, "Victoria's Feminist Legacy"; and Pugh, *The March of the Women*, esp. pp. 42–43.

[9] For a discussion of Victoria's contributions to "womanist" (as opposed to "feminist") developments, see esp. Orr, "The Feminization of the Monarchy 1780–1910" pp. 76–107; and Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 91. On the implications of Victoria's decision to use chloroform, see Judith Schneid Lewis, *In the Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760–1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), esp. p. 83; and Susan Kingsley Kent, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). As Kent notes, p. 54, "Overnight the strictures against the use of chloroform fell away: The queen's imprimatur on the practice made it possible for generations of subsequent women to ask for the anesthetic without being made to feel they were sinful or monstrous for using it."

for Christine Bolt, "the edge" that "Queen Victoria gave British feminists was a limited one," given the queen's "reliance on male political advisers" and the fact that "she was known to regard the women's rights agitation as a 'mad, wicked folly.'" A. N. Wilson perhaps captures this view most succinctly in his recent biography of Victoria: "Queen Victoria deplored feminism."[10] Little wonder that Victoria has remained peripheral to the study of the nineteenth-century women's movement, and the women's movement peripheral to the study of the female sovereign.

Once we begin to treat Victoria's inflammatory comments as private musings rather than public pronouncements, however, our aperture widens considerably. Revisiting the nineteenth-century women's movement with an open mind – and careful and creative combing of the Royal Archives, National Archives at Kew, Girton College Archive at Cambridge, and The Women's Library at the London School of Economics (LSE), among other collections and digital databases – we find that the queen in fact played a significant and surprisingly sustained role in the Victorian feminist imagination. This is not to suggest that Victoria the person offered much concrete encouragement on such matters. While the queen may not have openly declared her opposition to the campaign for women's rights, she never presented herself as a supporter either. Victoria *was* committed to a relatively restrictive domestic ideology – even if she did privately support the passage of the Infant Custody Bill in 1839, and twice described the marriage game for women as a dangerous "lottery" in her intimate exchanges with her eldest daughter Vicky.[11] To this end, the queen made sure

[10] See, respectively, Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle* (London: White Lion Publishers Limited, 1957), p. 73; Thompson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 141–142; Audrey Kelly, *Lydia Becker and The Cause* (Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancashire, 1992), p. 1 (Kelly goes on to refer, p. 18, to Victoria's "known antipathy to women's rights"); Christine Bolt, "The Ideas of British Suffragism," in *Votes for Women*, eds. Sandra Holton and June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 34–56 at p. 34; and A. N. Wilson, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Penguin, 2014), p. 334. For similar assessments of Victoria's negligible to negative impact on women's rights campaigning, see also, among many others, Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 173; Kent, *Queen Victoria*, p. 64; Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 403; Kaevan Gazdar, *Feminism's Founding Fathers: The Men Who Fought for Women's Rights* (Winchester: Zero, 2016), esp. the prologue; Simon Schama, "Victoria and Her Sisters," History of Britain television series, BBC production (2002); and Amanda Vickery, "Suffragettes Forever!," BBC production (2015).

[11] Victoria described marriage as a "lottery" on two occasions, both in correspondence with her eldest daughter Vicky shortly after her daughter's marriage to Frederick, heir to the Prussian throne. See Queen Victoria to Princess Frederick William, May 3, 1858: "I think people really marry far too much; it is such a lottery after all, and for a poor woman a very doubtful happiness." And Queen Victoria to Princess Frederick William, May 16, 1860: "All marriage is such a lottery – the happiness is always an exchange – thought it

throughout her long rule to keep a careful distance from any activities that might be construed as too overtly pushing the gender envelope. As the suffragist and foreign political correspondent Emily Crawford put it in 1903, reflecting on Victoria's life, "[S]he rather stood aloof from the women's movement than opposed it."[12] But this perceived "aloofness" did not stop women's rights activists from appropriating her image, and doing whatever they could to leverage the fact that a woman was head of the British state. This was especially true during the first four decades of Victoria's rule, when the meanings of modern constitutional monarchy were still very much being negotiated. We must remember that Victoria came to the throne just five years after the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, the success of which had hinged on the willingness of her uncle, King William IV, to intercede in parliamentary affairs.[13]

In this context, understandably, the crown could exert an irresistible feminist pull – even for those who might not necessarily describe themselves as royalists. After all, was it not extremely paradoxical that a woman was permitted to rule while her female subjects, up until the last third of the nineteenth century at least, were denied most of the formal rights and privileges accorded to men?[14] "Every wife except a queen regnant," Linda Colley reminds us, "was under the legal authority of her husband, and so was her movable property" – this until the passage of the Married Women's Property acts in 1870 and 1882.[15] On the political front, the disjuncture was even more striking. Even at the close of Victoria's rule, in 1901, British

may be a very happy one – still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband's slave. That always sticks in my throat." For copies of these letters, see Christopher Hibbert, ed., *Queen Victoria in Her Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1984), pp. 104–105.

[12] See Emily Crawford, *Victoria, Queen and Ruler* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1903), p. 372.

[13] On this point, see esp. Antonia Fraser, *Perilous Question: Reform or Revolution? Britain on the Brink, 1832* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013). In *The British Monarchy and the French Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 27, Marilyn Morris similarly demonstrates that long after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, "England still had a strong monarch; the significant change came in the rules of the game ... The limitations on the power of the Crown remained vague in theory and had to be worked out in practice."

[14] Formal exclusion from many rights and privileges does not mean that women were unable to exercise informal power – especially for women from aristocratic and elite backgrounds. On women's engagement in public and political pursuits before their attainment of social and political rights, see esp. Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds. *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Amanda Vickery, ed. *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); K. D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754–1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

[15] See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 238. Baird, *Victoria the Queen,* p. 397, offers a similar

women still lacked the parliamentary franchise, a right that men had secured through the successive Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884, but that women would only be granted in 1918, with the passage of the Representation of the People Act (and, even then, the law only applied to women over the age of thirty who met certain property requirements). As one "Penelope" would recall, writing just a week before Victoria's death in 1901, "[W]hen Queen Victoria ascended the throne, the incongruity was at its height, of a reigning female sovereign, with women shut out from the right of having a voice on any single subject affecting the race."[16]

Pioneering women's rights campaigners recognized this paradox, seized on it, and tried to exploit it. To demonstrate their deference to the queen, to celebrate (and sometimes even inflate) Victoria's political prerogatives, to call attention to the national tradition of including women in the royal line of succession (unlike the practice in France and the German lands, where the Salic law precluded women from inheriting the throne) – all of these became prominent features of early women's rights campaigning, especially in regard to the question of the female franchise. For reasons primarily practical and opportunistic, activists considered the fact of the "presence of a woman in the highest office of state" a highly compelling argument for securing women's political equality, at least for a time.[17] Thus, Victoria's frequent appearances in Chartist and Dissenting tracts, in parliamentary petitions and debates, in Langham Place periodicals, and in the statements and speeches issued by members of the numerous women's suffrage societies organized in the post-1867 period. "[C]onsidering that the First Personage in the realm is a Queen, and that no sane mind in the three kingdoms would willingly exchange her for any of her male predecessors in the House of Brunswick," declared the classicist and radical evangelical Francis W. Newman, in a lecture delivered before the Clifton and Bristol Society for Women's Suffrage in 1869, "I should not find anything paradoxical or rash in wishing that the law would let the two sexes, like other things, find their own level, instead of elevating one sex over the other."[18]

Elucidating this strategy is an interesting and important exercise on its own. It shows us that several generations of women's rights activists

assessment: the Queen was "a model of female authority in a culture preoccupied with female domesticity."

[16] See Penelope, "Our Ladies Letter," *Derby Daily Telegraph*, January 14, 1901, p. 4.

[17] See Dorothy Thompson, "Review of Remaking Queen Victoria," *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 1 (October 1, 1998), pp. 137–140 at p. 138.

[18] See Francis W. Newman, *A Lecture on Women's Suffrage* (London: London Society for Women's Suffrage, 1869), p. 3.

identified Victoria as a key ally, and that her rule provided them with crucial ammunition – and, at times, useful cover for their proceedings. To this end, documenting activists' expansive engagement with the queen is one of the central aims of *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women*, the first book to reconstruct and offer a sustained analysis of Victorian women's rights campaigners' intense, even if increasingly strained, appropriations of their sovereign. But the exercise becomes only more meaningful when we take into account the effects that their strategy produced. For activists' enthusiastic invocations of the queen did not go unnoticed by their opponents. Many conservative-minded moralists, journalists, politicians, and pundits saw this tactic as a real threat – an "argument of a very popular character," in the words of the anti-suffragist MP Henry James – and one that actively needed to be countered.[19]

Beginning in the 1830s, and only accelerating from the 1860s, a range of traditionalists (at least on questions of sex and gender) strove to undermine this strategy by stressing the female monarch's long dependence on her male advisors, by drawing attention to her particularly circumscribed role within a modern constitutional framework, and by emphasizing her status as an ornamental figurehead rather than a political agent. If the queen modeled anything, they insisted – albeit incorrectly – it was a woman's deference to the men around her, men with the expertise and energy required to run the state. Consider the words of the anti-suffragist journalist and historian Goldwin Smith in a piece on "Female Suffrage" published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1874. Victoria, in Smith's opinion, didn't "rule" at all. This was a "constitutional queen whose excellence consists in never doing any act of government except under the guidance of her Ministers."[20] Even as Victoria's own staid views on women and politics began to circulate publicly, from 1876, traditionalists continued to push the notion of the queen as a passive figure, a cipher, and a vehicle for male interests.

This book, then, is about Victorian women's rights campaigners' savvy and sometimes stubborn efforts to appropriate their sovereign. But it is also about how these appropriations prompted a dramatic cultural and political backlash, a backlash, moreover, of lasting consequence. For, in insisting on Victoria's very limited political role, on her deference to others, and on her largely symbolic value, anti-suffragists and their associates served as unwitting architects of modern British constitutional monarchy. They were not the only architects, of course, nor were they always

[19] See *The Times*, March 8, 1879, p. 9, col. d.
[20] See Goldwin Smith, "Female Suffrage," *Macmillan's Magazine*, 30, May–October 1874, pp. 130–150 at p. 148.

motivated solely by misogyny – Victoria's youth was also initially a grave concern, as was the recognition that theirs was a democratizing polity. Nevertheless, in attempting to wall the queen off from suffragists and their sympathizers, they provided some of the most distilled, uncompromising, and impassioned statements regarding the monarch's removal from the realm of politics.

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I have structured *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women* to highlight these entanglements by drawing attention to the intricate and often overlooked connections between the histories of women, the monarchy, and the state (particularly the ideologies underpinning modern constitutionalism) during the nineteenth century. In five chapters that move roughly forward in time, I not only chronicle women's rights activists' extensive leveraging of Victoria, but also show how their opponents responded to this strategy, and the broader cultural and political significance of these exchanges. In tracing these Victorian conversations, my emphasis is decidedly on rhetorical analysis. Pamphlets, essays, parliamentary speeches, letters, petitions, flyers, newspaper columns, and journal articles – these are my key sources. And I focus on teasing out the ways in which arguments about queenship were developed, delivered, and rejected by actors working toward different goals for women in different contexts. For the purposes of clarity, moreover, I have assigned these actors labels that at times belie some of the complexity of their thinking on the Woman Question. To write of women's rights activists and their opponents – or of progressives and traditionalists, egalitarians and anti-egalitarians, suffragists and anti-suffragists, and especially feminists and anti-feminists – is necessarily to introduce a degree of binary thinking that does not always accord with my subjects' sometimes slippery and evolving notions of what constituted a woman's proper place in Victorian culture.[21] As much as possible, I have tried in specific cases to signal the particularities of my subjects' positions. Do bear in mind, though, that I adopt such terms primarily as heuristics.

The nineteenth century is at the heart of this study, but it would be impossible to understand the developments traced here without placing them in conversation with earlier periods. Chapter 1, "The Radicalism of Female Rule in Eighteenth-Century Britain," therefore surveys the long eighteenth century to show that many Britons were already beginning to

[21] On this point, see esp. Lucy Delap, "'The Woman Question' and the Origins of Feminism," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 319–348, and esp. pp. 337–338.

equate female sovereignty with robust interpretations of liberty and equality, well before Queen Victoria's accession in 1837. One can, of course, find traces of these egalitarian impulses in Tudor England, where some saw queens Mary I and Elizabeth I – England's first female sovereigns – as harbingers of a new social and sexual order. There was good reason why the Protestant theologian John Knox feared the "monstrous regiment of women" in 1558.[22] Yet, it was the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 that ultimately enabled radical readings of queenship to flourish. By doing away with "divine right" monarchy, the revolution made it difficult to conceive of female rule as primarily God's will.[23] Going forward, women's inclusion in the royal line of succession would have to be seen largely as a cultural preference, something actively chosen by the British people rather than assigned to them.

Several eighteenth-century radicals identified an opening for reform here, and began to explore its potential. In their hands, the absence of the Salic law in Britain became evidence of a broader British commitment to fairness, individual rights, and even sexual equality.[24] Only nascent during Queen Mary II's rule (1689–1694), this discourse gained traction as the century progressed, fueled especially by the American and French revolutions. "The want of this right [women's right to vote]," declared the Norwich-based political activist Richard Dinmore in 1793, "is peculiarly absurd in this kingdom, where a woman may reign, though not vote for a Member of Parliament."[25] Royal developments would soon lend urgency to these arguments. The year 1796 saw the birth of Princess Charlotte, the only child of George, Prince of Wales (the future George IV) and his soon-to-be-estranged wife Caroline of Brunswick, and the

[22] See John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women," in *The Works of John Knox*, volume 4, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855 [1558]), pp. 363–422 at pp. 373–374. For an extended discussion of sixteenth-century feminism and female sovereignty, see esp. Sarah G. Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[23] On this important shift, see Cynthia Herrup, "The King's Two Genders," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006), pp. 493–510.

[24] On the peculiar history of the Salic law as it pertained to the prohibition of women from the royal succession, especially within a French context, see Sarah Hanley's probing scholarship, particularly *Les droits des femmes et la loi salique* (Paris: Indigo and Cite-Femmes, 1994); "Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pisan and Jean de Montreuil," in *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 78–94; and "The Salic Law," in *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women*, ed. Christine Fauré (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2–17.

[25] See Richard Dinmore, *A Brief Account of the Moral and Political Acts of the Kings and Queens of England, from William the Conqueror to the Revolution of the Year 1688* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1793), pp. 178–179.