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# "An Offence New in Its Kind": Responses to Assassination Attempts on British Royalty, 1800–1900

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**Abstract** Attempted assassinations have only rarely been given sustained and systematic attention by historians. This article focuses on a series of attempts to assassinate members of the British royal family across the nineteenth century. In exploring the responses of political elites and wider publics to these attacks, the author argues for the development of a robust and enduring script with which to navigate physical attacks on the sovereign and his or her family. Overall, this script tended to support the monarchy by articulating visions of the proper relationship between crown and people and contrasting these with political regimes in Europe and elsewhere. It also, however, served to highlight some of the key tensions within a modernizing institution between accessibility and publicity on the one hand and security on the other.

On 13 June 1981, a young British man, Marcus Sarjeant, fired six blanks from a replica Colt Python pistol while the queen was trooping the color on the Mall. In the extensive media coverage that followed this sensational event, a number of key themes were developed. First, the "fantasy assassin" was revealed as a moody and troubled youth, "a bit of a loner" who had been dazzled by Mark Chapman's fame following the assassination of John Lennon and galvanized by John Hinckley Jr.'s even more recent attempt on the life of Ronald Reagan.[1]

Journalists seized on this combination of mental disturbance and the poisonous effects of sensationalized mass-media reports as explanation, with no real or sustained suggestion of any political motivation.[2] The immediate responses of the queen and her subjects were minutely described. The queen was lauded as "Queen Courage" for her near-complete composure and ability to bring her startled horse, Burmese, under control. Over the following week, she was widely praised for returning to normal public duties, unruffled by Sarjeant's attack.[3] The reactions of those around her

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[1] "Gun Boy," *Daily Express*, 15 June 1981; "The Fantasy Assassin," *Daily Mail*, 15 June 1981; "The Teenager Who Wanted Fame," *Times*, 15 September 1981. (All newspapers, unless otherwise indicated, are published in London.)

[2] "Gun Boy"; "The Fantasy Assassin"; "The Teenager Who Wanted Fame."

[3] "Smiling Queen Is Back among the Crowds," *Times*, 16 June 1981; "The Coolest Lady in Britain," *Daily Mail*, 15 June 1981; "Business as Usual for Queen Courage," *Daily Express*, 16 June 1981;

were described in a different register. The Scots Guard corporal who disarmed Sarjeant, Alec Galloway, "felt anger and hate" and a desire to bayonet the assailant.[4] In the following days, newspapers and letters columns provided platforms for a curated public condemnation of the attack, and in September, the lord chief justice, Lord Lane, explained his sentence of five years' imprisonment in terms of the wider public response: "[T]he public sense of outrage must be marked."[5]

The statute under which Sarjeant was sentenced, the Treason Act of 1842, had been devised following a spate of attacks and intrusions on Queen Victoria. It aimed to provide a legal answer to "an offence new in its kind," a crime principally "calculated to excite the alarm and apprehension of the Sovereign, and to disturb the public mind."[6] Indeed, not only the legislative response but also the wider script of royal and public reactions to attacks on the monarch and her family were created in lasting ways during the early part of Queen Victoria's reign, with some important precursors in the reign of George III. With the convergence of widespread identification and discussion of the "social question," concerns about the moral effects of the mass media, and considerable space in which to encode all sorts of behavior as emanations of "morbid" minds,[7] official and public reactions to attempted violence on royals crystallized in a way that was to be remarkably enduring. As in so many other areas of social, political, and cultural life, a distinctly modern way of navigating such sensational occurrences and ascribing meaning to them was forged in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[8]

Even successful assassinations have, until quite recently, evaded systematic investigation in political science and historical disciplines.[9] Attempted assassinations are even less well served, though work on other national contexts such as Germany has highlighted possibilities.[10] For the period I examine in this article, however, the numerous attacks on both George III and Queen Victoria have been richly researched and examined and highlight important changes from mid-century. Steve Poole maps a long retreat from the "myth of accessibility" that had marked George III's reign, while Paul Murphy places at the center of his account Victoria's responses and the "triumphant renewal" of monarchy.[11] Rachel Hoffman, in her

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"Trooping the Colour (Incident), 15 June 1981)," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 6th series, vol. 6 (1980–81) cols. 729–34.

[4] "I Thought about Using My Bayonet," *Daily Mail*, 16 June 1981.

[5] "Shots at the Trooping," *Times*, 18 September 1981.

[6] Treason Act, 1842, 5 & 6 Vict, c. 51; "Security of the Queen's Person, 12 July 1842," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 65 (1842) cols. 20, 26.

[7] *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 65 (1842) col. 20,

[8] James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley, 2014).

[9] Rachel G. Hoffman, "The Age of Assassination: Monarchy and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Europe," in *Rewriting German History: New Perspectives on Modern Germany*, ed. Jan Rüger and Nikolaus Wachsman (Basingstoke, 2015), 121–41; Zaryab Iqbal and Christopher Zorn, "Sic Semper Tyrannis? Power, Repression, and Assassination since the Second World War," *Journal of Politics* 68, no. 3 (2006): 489–501.

[10] See, for example, Rachel G. Hoffman, "Political Murder Plots in Germany, 1840s–1914" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2014); Marcus Mühlnikel, *"Fürst, sind Sie unverletzt?" Attentate im Kaiserreich, 1871–1914* (Paderborn, 2014).

[11] Steve Poole, *The Politics of Regicide in England, 1760–1850: Troublesome Subjects* (Manchester, 2000), 3; Paul T. Murphy, *Shooting Victoria: Madness, Mayhem, and the Rebirth of the British Monarchy* (London, 2012), 2.

excellent synoptic account of assassination in nineteenth-century Europe, makes similar points on a continental scale, highlighting the practical changes required to ensure royal security, but also the dynamic effects of such attacks: "[A]ssassination constituted an essential ingredient, and one so far overlooked by scholars, in the preservation of monarchy in the modern era and in the development of modern nationalism."[12] Most recently, in two important articles, Simon Ball traces how the state and policy makers in twentieth-century Britain navigated assassination, first in the imperial context and then, from the 1970s onward, in Britain itself, as political murder came to be reinterpreted as a serious and ongoing threat that required systematic responses.[13] Ball proposes the development of what he calls a liberal "script"—shared widely by ministers and the bureaucratic cultures of the state, if not always by "the men on the spot"—to deal with episodes of political murder within the British world.[14]

In what follows, I trace the earlier development of a script around attacks on the monarch and her family. Rather than examining policy makers and legislators alone, I also focus on how the print media became central to furnishing a robust and enduring framework for ascribing meaning to attacks on royalty. In interpreting these responses, I am inspired by the ways that sociologists have analyzed "cultural trauma."[15] Ron Eyerman's work on contemporary assassinations, in particular, foregrounds the "meaning struggle" that follows these occurrences rather than the events themselves. He assigns the media a central role in transforming an occurrence into a social drama: "[I]t is they who construct the facts and give them coherence by creating a story. They produce the first narratives that are diffused to the public."[16] My focus is similarly on the "gap between event and representation" and on those "carrier groups"—principally politicians and the press—who ascribed meaning to attacks on British royals.[17] While the responses discussed below do not quite meet the high bar of cultural trauma, the conceptualization of the trauma process and its agents provides a useful framework that has been deployed effectively to examine individual assassinations and assassination attempts in the nineteenth-century British world.[18] In the terms of the 1842 Treason Act, these attacks aimed to "disturb the public mind."[19] In doing so, they opened a fertile space for elites and the press to engage in the kinds of meaning making and claim making identified by cultural sociologists.

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[12] Hoffman, "Age of Assassination," 136. See also David V. James et al., "Attacks on the British Royal Family: The Role of Psychotic Illness," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 36, no. 1 (2008): 59–67.

[13] Simon J. Ball, "The Assassination Culture of Imperial Britain, 1909–79," *Historical Journal*, no. 56 (2013): 231–56; Simon J. Ball, "The State and the Assassination Threat in Britain, 1971–1984," *Historical Journal*, no. 62 (2019): 241–65.

[14] Ball, "Assassination Culture of Imperial Britain," 234, 253; Michael Silvestri, *Policing "Bengali Terrorism" in India and the World: Imperial Intelligence and Revolutionary Nationalism, 1905–1939* (Cham, 2019), 144–49.

[15] For a good introduction, see Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, 2004).

[16] Ron Eyerman, *The Cultural Sociology of Political Assassination: From MLK and RFK to Fortuyn and van Gogh* (New York, 2011), 1–32, at 13, 142.

[17] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma*, 1–30, at 11.

[18] Gordon Pentland, "'Now the Great Man in the Parliament House Is Dead, We Shall Have a Big Loaf!' Responses to the Assassination of Spencer Perceval," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012): 340–63; Gordon Pentland, "The Indignant Nation: Australian Responses to the Attempted Assassination of the Duke of Edinburgh in 1868," *English Historical Review* 130, no. 542 (2015): 57–88.

In the case of the British monarchy, the responses to attempted assassinations across the course of a century reveal the development of a remarkably durable script with two principal features that satisfy, at least in part, Eyerman's definition of cultural trauma as "a deep-going public discourse on the foundations of collective identity."[20] First, the response of politicians and press served to position the monarchy outside of the political realm and provided opportunities to underline, in Walter Bagehot's terms, its "dignified" rather than "efficient" role within the constitution.[21] While attacks on royals were far from being the only factor at play, they did provide intermittent and widespread opportunities to articulate the relationship between the monarchy and the people. Second, this script developed in conscious contradistinction to the assassination cultures of other regimes. In the absence of successful attempts on the lives of British royals, the murders of foreign heads of state and members of their families, especially in the 1880s and 1890s, provided further evidence of the superiority of Britain's constitutional and political arrangements.

I develop this argument by closely examining a range of attempted assassinations or attacks against members of the British royal family across the long nineteenth century, focusing on four incidents that generated sustained and widespread discussion in the press. In May 1800, George III was shot at in the Theatre Royal Drury Lane by James Hadfield. A heavily scarred veteran of the French wars, Hadfield had been wounded catastrophically at Lincelles in Flanders in 1793 and—against the background of the French Revolution, the recent closing of the London Corresponding Society, and concerns about an interconnected insurrectionary radical underworld—there was considerable scope for wider public discussion about his attack on the sovereign. Four decades later, in June 1840, Queen Victoria, then recently married to Prince Albert, was shot at by Edward Oxford, aged eighteen years, on Constitution Hill near Buckingham Palace. In the context provided by insurgent Chartism and considerable economic distress, party political instability and controversies attendant on the beginning of Victoria's reign, and previous recent intrusions on the royal person, Oxford's actions generated an enormous amount of discussion (and, indeed, a number of imitators over subsequent years). The last apparent attempt on the life of Queen Victoria occurred in 1882, at Windsor train station. As she sat in her carriage, she was fired on by Roderick Maclean, a delusional and disappointed poet who had a visceral fear of the color blue and was convinced that the British people were conspiring to annoy him. In the context of escalating Irish political violence and the successful assassinations of President James Garfield and Alexander II in 1881, the decade has been seen as inaugurating the first of four waves of global terrorism. Finally, Queen Victoria's eldest son and the heir apparent, Edward, Prince of Wales, was fired on while departing from Brussels Nord station with his wife en route to Denmark in April 1900. The would-be assassin, Jean-Baptiste Sipido, was a young Belgian anarchist who held Edward responsible for the iniquities of British foreign policy in Africa.

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[19] Treason Act, 1842, 5 & 6 Vict, c. 51.

[20] Eyerman, *Cultural Sociology of Political Assassination*, xv.

[21] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Paul Smith (Cambridge, 2001), 5.

In addition to the official responses of ministers and the state, the press discussed and assigned causes to the individual attempts on the life of the sovereign, narrating the details of the attacks themselves and the wider public responses they elicited. In this way, news media provided a narrative frame through which contemporaries could make sense of these events.

## OFFICIAL RESPONSES

In examining the shots fired at George III in 1800, the immediate context of the French Revolution is impossible to ignore. George III had previously been physically attacked, by Rebecca O'Hara in 1778, Margaret Nicolson in 1786, and John Frith in 1790.[22] All three had been unfit to plead and were confined to asylums. The heightened political temperature around the French Revolution was, of course, a key element in shaping contemporary attitudes to assassination. From 1792, the emergence of popular radical organizations and a vociferous loyalist movement brought such questions to the forefront of public debate. Most notoriously, two substantial plots directly aimed at the crown were identified. The first was the arrest and then confinement of millenarian prophet Richard Brothers who had, among other things, prophesied George III's death. The second was an alleged shot fired at the king's coach as it returned from the opening of Parliament on 29 October 1795.[23]

The attack on the king's coach in particular became the pretext for legislation toward which ministers and law officers had been moving in the preceding two years, embedding the new constructive definitions of treason that had been arrived at in part through contesting what it meant to "imagine the king's death."[24] From the legislation and the continuing fears of a connected insurrectionary underground in the years that followed, it has been easy to derive a caricature of a malign government happy to seize on the slightest pretext to call treason. Such was the import of Richard Newton's 1798 satirical print, which had Pitt shouting treason at a mischievous John Bull who was farting in the direction of a startled likeness of George III.[25] Many contemporaries were prepared to go further and pointed to proposed and actual attacks as the invention of ministers themselves. John Barrell in his work has partly endorsed this verdict on the infamous "Pop-Gun Plot" of 1794, and many radicals were convinced that the shot said to have been fired at the king's coach the following year was an alarm invented by government.[26] Francis Place summed it up: "[I]t was much more likely they caused the attack to be made, than that it was produced by any other means."[27]

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[22] The fullest account of Nicholson's and Frith's attacks are in Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, chaps. 3–5.

[23] Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, chap. 5. For Brothers, see J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780–1850* (London, 1979), chap. 4; Deborah Madden, *Paddington Prophet: Richard Brothers' Journey to Jerusalem* (Manchester, 2010).

[24] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793–1796* (Oxford, 2000).

[25] Richard Newton, "Treason!!!," 19 March 1798, print on paper, 322 mm x 247 mm, British Museum Satires 9035, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-6712.

[26] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, chap. 14.

[27] "Notes Respecting the London Corresponding Society," British Library, London, Francis Place Papers, Add. MSS 27808, fol. 42. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as BL.)

When the king was again fired upon in Drury Lane in May 1800, the context was similarly challenging. Tense discussions about Irish Union were ongoing, and there was a backdrop of widespread food shortages, even famine conditions, and periodic rioting and unrest.[28] The Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons had in the preceding year highlighted the existence of a "systematic conspiracy" to overturn the British constitution and a connected underground encompassing French revolutionaries and domestic traitors.[29] The *Anti-Jacobin Review* had recently been established as a brilliant pioneer of the counter-conspiratorial periodical and, as Kevin Gilmartin has reminded us, had the application of Abbé Barruel's and John Robison's conspiracy theories to British experience at the center of its vision.[30] The potential for Hadfield's actions to be viewed through this paranoid optic was clear. His actions were speculatively tied by the press and ministers to an incident earlier the same day. The king had been reviewing the Grenadier Guards in Hyde Park when a spectator, William Ongley, was shot with a ball that went through his upper thigh, entered his groin, and exited at the back of his hip. That the guards were supposed to be exercising with blanks and Ongley was only twenty paces from the king gave immediate cause for concern.[31]

Examinations of Hadfield's family and associates revealed the crucial influence of a millenarian preacher, Bannister Truelock, who, according to his landlady, was a convinced "Revolutionist or Jacobin."[32] The foreign secretary was confident that Hadfield would plead insanity but was also concerned about his wider associations: "He certainly has since that time lived among some of the people of the Corresponding Society; and such a man is just the sort of instrument that they would naturally pitch upon to execute so diabolical a purpose."[33] The Home Office received reports from Germany and from England that claimed to have evidence of prior knowledge of the attempt on the king, thus pointing to a wider conspiracy.[34]

Ministers were doubtless constrained by the facts of the case. Hadfield was challenging as a traitor. His distinguished loyal service ensured that he recognized the Duke of York at his trial and cheered him when he entered the court as a witness for the prosecution: "The Prisoner immediately explained with the greatest enthusiasm, and in a very wild manner—'God Almighty bless him; he is a good soul; I love him dearly.'"[35] Much of Hadfield's behavior, indeed, seemed to point to his insanity, and ministers had recent memories of the challenges of the slippage between lunacy and treachery from dealing with Richard Brothers.[36] Most ministers would have agreed with the verdict of Pitt's friend, Henry Bankes: "It would have appeared inhuman to put a madman to death."[37] There were divergent voices, however; the secretary at war, William Windham, argued that the death penalty ought to remain for such attacks as a means of preventing imitators, "notwithstanding the plea of insanity."[38] Some contemporaries questioned the authenticity of Hadfield's madness, believing he was shamming. Richard Sheridan, the playwright and controlling proprietor of the Drury Lane theater, had examined Hadfield: "He declares his answers were collected and distinct, until Sir Wm. Addington questioned him, who was extremely drunk, and suggested to the man ye plea of insanity by his mode of examining—a plea the man craftily availed himself of."[39]

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[28] E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 2nd ed. (London, 1980), 515–17; Roger Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795–1803* (Gloucester, 1983); Roger Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793–1801* (Gloucester, 1988).

[29] *Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons; Ordered to be printed 15th March 1799* (London, 1799), 2.

[30] Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790–1832* (Cambridge, 2007), 106.

[31] "Review in Hyde Park: Singular Accident," *Morning Chronicle*, 16 May 1800; [Thomas] Keate to the King, 15 May 1800, in *Later Correspondence of George III*, ed. A. Aspinall, 5 vols. (London, 1962–1970), 3:349.

[32] Richard Moran, "The Origin of Insanity as a Special Verdict: The Trial for Treason of James Hadfield (1800)," *Law and Society Review* 19, no. 3 (1985): 487–519, at 495; *Star*, 17 May 1800.

[33] Buckingham and Chandos, Richard Plantagenet Temple Nugent Brydges Chandos Grenville, Duke of, *Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George III*, 4 vols. (London, 1853–1855), 3:70–71.

[34] George Maxwell to Duke of Portland, 15 June 1800 and James Crawfurd to Duke of Portland, 17 June 1800, The National Archives, London, Home Office Correspondence, HO 42/50, fols. 227–28, 244–46. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA.)

Overall, though, what is perhaps most striking is the ministers' comparative restraint. Their response was summed up by Lady Holland (herself no fan of Pitt and his colleagues): "The Ministers have not attempted to convert this mad freak of Hadfield's into a Jacobinical plot; they let the affair stand plainly as it is."[40] Their position was not only down to the nature of the particular case but also an acknowledgment of the double-edged nature of Jacobin scares in the 1790s, which had further poisoned the political atmosphere and opened ministers to accusations of acting on their own overheated imaginations. In the aftermath of Hadfield's trial, efforts were made to tighten the law. The Treason Act and Insane Offenders Act were both passed in 1800, the first removing the elaborate procedural requirements for a treason trial when the overt act on which it rested was a direct attempt on king's life, and the second clarifying the judge's ability to order the confinement of offenders acquitted because of insanity.[41] And, in common with previous and future incidents, while security around the person of the sovereign was tightened, Pitt took the opportunity provided by the legislation to underline the ministerial conclusion that the attempt was fundamentally apolitical: "We are all of us happy that the barbarous attempts that have been made against his majesty's person are totally free from any combination or conspired design."[42] Ministers made similar efforts to confine and contain the implications of the assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1812, stressing both the foreign and apolitical nature of the crime.[43]

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[35] "Trial of James Hadfield," *Morning Chronicle*, 27 June 1800.

[36] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 504–47.

[37] "Journal of Henry Bankes, July 1800," Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, Bankes Manuscripts, D-BKL/H/H/1/9.

[38] "House of Commons, 11 July 1800," *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England*, 36 vols. (London, 1812–1820), 35:392.

[39] Holland, Elizabeth Vassall Fox, *The Journal of Elizabeth, Lady Holland (1791–1811)*, ed. Giles Stephen Holland Fox-Strangways Ilchester, 2 vols. (London, 1908), 2:89.

[40] Holland, *Journal of Elizabeth, Lady Holland*, 2:83.

[41] Treason Act, 1800, 39 and 40 Geo. III, c. 93; Insane Offenders Act, 1800, 39 and 40 Geo. III, c. 93–94.

[42] "House of Commons, 11 July 1800," *Cobbett's Parliamentary History*, vol. 35, col. 391; Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, 128–33.

[43] Pentland, "'Now the Great Man in the Parliament House Is Dead,'" 344–49.

This reticence around weaponizing such attacks is partly explicable in terms of changes within the monarchy and its public presentation. Linda Colley identified the latter half of George III's reign as witnessing a process whereby the crown was lifted above day-to-day involvement in politics to become both a celebrated national symbol and an exemplar of domesticity.[44] In the year following Hadfield's attempt, George III demonstrated the unevenness of this withdrawal from politics by his acceptance of Pitt's resignation over the issue of Catholic emancipation. Nonetheless, the development had profound implications for ministerial approaches to attacks on the royal person. The increasing centrality of monarchy as a symbol of insurgent Britishness raised the rhetorical stakes when suggesting that a portion of the king's subjects aimed at his destruction. While the disappointed petitioner driven mad by personal frustrations would remain one model for assigning causes to attacks on the sovereign, it was increasingly hazardous to attribute other outrages on the royal person to political motives or an organized conspiracy. In the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, as in twentieth-century imperial contexts, ministers became "more rational than anxious" in responding to attacks on the royal person, even when they might be charged with being more anxious than rational in responding to other forms of political insurgency.[45]

This "rational" position was evident in early 1817 when, in a bizarre rerun of the events of 1795, shots were allegedly fired at the prince regent's carriage on his return from the opening of Parliament. The incident occurred in the context of a swelling reform movement, the abortive Spa Fields insurrection of December 1816, and numerous assassination threats aimed at the prince and his ministers.[46] Very few parliamentarians made an explicit link between the alleged attack and "the machinations of evil-disposed persons."[47] Ministers may have been constrained in part by efforts of opposition Whigs to accuse them of reviving the atmosphere of the 1790s and seizing upon any opportunity "for artful men to affright the timorous."[48] They either dismissed the attack on the regent as a deliberate confection of ministers "who pretended that an outrageous and traitorous attack had been made on his royal person" or else as a nonevent, indeed a near-impossible event: "[H]owever heinous the offence in itself, and however justly exciting our indignation, there do not appear any strong grounds for suspecting that any criminal design was entertained against his royal highness's life. I am anxious to state this because I see no advantage that this country could derive, either at home or in the eyes of Europe, from its being supposed that there could be found an individual capable of contemplating so detestable an act."[49]

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[44] Linda Colley, "The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760–1820," *Past and Present*, no. 102 (1984): 94–129.

[45] Ball, "Assassination Culture," 256.

[46] Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, chap. 7.

[47] "Address on the Prince Regent's Speech at the Opening of the Session, 29 January 1817," *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 1st series, vol. 35 (1817) col. 42.

[48] "Address on the Prince Regent's Speech at the Opening of the Session, 29 January 1817," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 1st series, vol. 35 (1817) col. 107.

[49] "Petitions Relating to Reform, &c., 11 February 1817," and "Address on the Prince Regent's Speech at the Opening of the Session, 29 January 1817," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons and Lords, 1st series, vol. 35 (1817) cols. 318, 55–56.

The alleged attack on the prince regent was a very small ingredient in the cocktail used by ministers to justify the Suspension of Habeas Corpus Act and the revival of a number of other pieces of repressive legislation from the 1790s. In acting on the regent's request for a secret committee to inquire into dangerous combinations and meetings in London and elsewhere, for example, Castlereagh expressly distanced the alleged attack from the committee's wider inquiry, maintaining that "the present proceedings did not arise in any shape out of that outrage."[50] That wider inquiry dwelt principally on the incidents around Spa Fields and the activities of the insurrectionary ultraradicals known as Spenceans, though the attack on the regent was presented as "an additional and melancholy proof of the efficacy of this system to destroy all reverence for authority, and all sense of duty, and to expose to insult, indignity, and hazard the person of the immediate representative of the sovereign."[51]

Two decades later, when Edward Oxford fired two shots at Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1840, there would seem to be clear prompts for ministers to be anxious about wider associations.[52] Severe economic distress was coupled at the time with a widespread Chartist movement. The Newport Rising of November 1839 had issued in the first high treason trials since 1820 in early 1840, and the imprisonment of Feargus O'Connor for seditious libel, and his self-stylings as a patriot martyr seemed to portend a reprise of the politics of the 1790s and the 1810s.[53] On the day following Oxford's attack, one cabinet minister bumped into the Duke of Buckingham (not then a member of the government), who "said he had no doubt the assassin was a Chartist and hoped he . . . would be hanged."[54]

It is hardly surprising then that members of the cabinet tended to read the situation in light of the alarms of the age of revolutions and drew multiple direct analogies between their own situation and that in the decades either side of 1800. Indeed, as both Melbourne in the Lords and Russell in the Commons commented, they had ready models to hand for the parliamentary ritual of a joint address to the crown on the queen's providential escape.[55] One of the first acts of the cabinet was to initiate a careful search for precedents, bringing up the cases of Margaret Nicholson (who attempted to stab George III in 1786), Hadfield, and the Cato Street conspirators (who had planned the assassination of cabinet ministers in 1820). On that basis, the decision was made to adopt the method of investigation by cabinet rather than full Privy Council to contain and control the examination.[56]

When Oxford was examined, there appeared to be very strong prima facie grounds to suspect a political conspiracy originating not on the political left but the right. A search of Oxford's lodgings uncovered the rules of a secret society calling itself

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[50] "Prince Regent's Motion Respecting Certain Combinations 4 February 1817," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 1st series, vol. 35 (1817) col. 209.

[51] "Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Lords Respecting Certain Dangerous Meetings and Combinations, 18 February 1817," *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 1st series, vol. 35 (1817) col. 418.

[52] *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 9, 10 June 1840, 274–47, Queen Victoria's Journals (website), http://qvj.chadwyck.com/home.do?instit1=peking&instit2=p3k1ng.

[53] Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, 2007), chaps 4–6.

[54] J. C. Hobhouse, 11 June 1840, BL, Broughton Diaries, Add. MSS 56563.

[55] "Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty, 11 June 1840," *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Commons and Lords, 3rd series, vol. 54 (1840) cols. 989–90, 1046–49.

[56] Charles Greville, *The Greville Memoirs (Second Part): A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1852*, 3 vols. (London, 1885), 1:289.

Young England, a black crepe cap with a bow on it, an almanac that the attorney-general remarked ominously opened on the list of the royal family of England, letters hinting at "news from Hanover," and an orange silk handkerchief.[57] All of these seemed to point to a plot in favor of Victoria's uncle, the ultra-reactionary king of Hanover and Duke of Cumberland. Similarly, as in previous attempts, the home secretary, Normanby, received numerous communications implicating Oxford in wider supposed conspiracies. Some reports were clearly more trustworthy than others: "[A]nother [man] at one o'clock this morning whilst making water in the streets overheard two fellows talking of the plot and saying they would get a better man than Oxford next time."[58]

No doubt, the attempt could have been politically useful at a time of Whig ministerial weakness. On the face of it, Oxford linked neatly to the idea, widely publicized in the 1830s, of an Orange plot, revolving around the Duke of Cumberland and his influence over Orange lodges and the military, to alter the line of succession.[59] There was, however, immediate skepticism in the cabinet and, indeed, on the part of the queen, who dismissed such "wonderful improbabilities."[60] This reaction was based at least in part on experiences and interpretations of earlier episodes of alarmism. Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne and, at this point, lord president of the council, for example, urged, "[W]e ought not to fall into the error of Lord Plunket's *little* plot as Dublin theatre"—a reference to the accusations of ministerial overreach in the case of the United Irishman Robert Emmet in 1803. Part of the skepticism was based on meeting with Oxford, whose heavy hints of a conspiracy came across as confected and clumsy. Some of it was underlined in other ways; a police officer reclaimed the offending orange handkerchief as his own, and "thus one proof of the plot disappeared."[61]

Another part of the circumspect approach, though, was premised on the developing relationship between the queen, the rapidly proliferating press, and deranged admirers. In many ways, this relationship was a logical development from the remodeling of the monarchy after the 1780s. The increasing frequency of efforts to attack the person or invade the home of the monarch is perhaps the clearest example of the consequences of the crown's efforts to cultivate both a culture of national celebration around monarchy and a "myth of ordinariness" around the monarch.[62] The sensationalized outpouring of effusive loyalty that greeted Victoria's reign caused uneasiness in some quarters; it seemed to constitute a form of mass hysteria, dubbed "Reginamania" by the *Spectator*. This public mania was coupled with multiple instances of individual derangement, initially by would-be suitors of Victoria who sought access to her person. Most famously, it was embodied in the much-publicized exploits of Boy Jones, a young intruder caught inside Buckingham Palace several times between 1838 and 1841.[63]

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[57] J. C. Hobhouse, 11 June 1840, BL, Broughton Diaries, Add. MSS 56563; see also "Treasonable Attempt to Assassinate the Queen and Prince Albert," *Leeds Mercury*, 13 June 1840.

[58] J. C. Hobhouse, 20 June 1840, BL, Broughton Diaries, Add. MSS 56563.

[59] Cecil Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Life and Times*, vol. 1, *1819–1861* (London, 1972), 434–35.

[60] *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 9, 15 June 1840, 286.

[61] J. C. Hobhouse, 11 June 1840, BL, Broughton Diaries, Add. MSS 56563.

[62] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), 233; John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford, 2006), chap. 3; Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, chap. 9.

Both Poole and John Plunkett have summed up well the dilemma these developments presented. During the reign of George III, assailants such as Nicholson had demonstrated the thin line between "king killing and king loving."[64] As the queen encouraged and benefited from a symbiotic relationship with the press, the even greater focus on her private life "indirectly assisted" efforts to intrude physically into that sphere: "Royal privacy remained intractably caught in the ideology of its own making."[65] In that context, the immediate response to Oxford of another close observer, Charles Greville, becomes comprehensible: "I expect that it will turn out that he had no accomplices, and is only a crackbrained enthusiast, whose madness has taken the turn of vanity and desire for notoriety."[66] In other words, Oxford was just a marginally more dangerous version of Boy Jones.

Any concern about plots was mixed with ministerial unease about encouraging excessive loyalty and adoration. While loyalty was perfectly natural if "lively and spontaneous" and coming from a "high-class mob" such as the one which surrounded the Queen after Oxford's attempt, it was potentially atavistic and problematic.[67] Whig ministers in particular might be expected to be uneasy at effusive loyalty, but it was an uneasiness more widely shared. Two years later, on Queen Victoria's first tour in Scotland, another home secretary, James Graham, saw dangers from both Chartism and excessive love of the monarch: "The loyalty in these places was very unruly: the pressure in the streets made me fear not one but a hundred accidents."[68]

In navigating Oxford's attempt, ministers grappled to come to terms with a new species of crime prefigured during the reign of George III and forged in the context of a burgeoning mass media. In the following years, attempts on Queen Victoria's life and the lives of her children provided plentiful opportunities to wrestle with this new crime. Two years after Oxford's attempt, he had two imitators, John Francis and William Bean, leading to vexed letters from Victoria and Albert about the safety of the monarch.[69] Even while the assassination attempts were represented as foundering on the people's love for their sovereign, the monarchy was consistent in demanding increased levels of protection after each incident. In 1842, these demands included a memorandum from Prince Albert, which was being circulated as late as the 1880s. It noted:

1. That the life of the Sovereign is the most valuable and important in the Community.
2. That the life of the Sovereign is more exposed than the life of any other individual.

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[63] Julia Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire* (London, 2016), chap. 13.

[64] Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, 49.

[65] John Plunkett, "Regicide and Reginamania: G. W. M. Reynolds and *The Mysteries of London*," in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, ed. Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Farnham, 2004), 15–30.

[66] Greville, *Greville Memoirs (Second Part)*, 1:289.

[67] Greville, 1:288.

[68] Charles Stuart Parker, ed., *Sir Robert Peel from His Private Papers*, 3 vols. (London, 1899), 2:545.

[69] Murphy, *Shooting Victoria*, chaps. 10–12.

3. That the liability to be injured is increased, when the Sovereign is a female.
4. That the increase of democratical and republican notions, with the licentiousness of the Press in our days, must render the People more prone to crimes of that kind.[70]

While monarch and court tended understandably to take each attack seriously, viewing claims of "madness" with suspicion and calling for effective punishments, ministers had a challenging situation to manage.[71] Recommending and effecting enhanced personal-security measures were straightforward enough, but in providing legislative answers to royal concerns, and given the long shadow cast by the 1790s, ministers had to tread carefully to avoid introducing any "mere constructive Treason."[72] The new legislation addressed this new kind of crime in two ways, both targeted at what Peel called the "morbid vanity" and Russell the "morbid love of notoriety" taken to actuate these young men.[73] As in the aftermath of the Hadfield case and the attack on the regent's carriage, ministers tried to ensure that, procedurally, cases such as Oxford's could dispense with the cumbersome "armour of the law" that surrounded those indicted for treason. Doing so would remove "the dignity of traitors" from offenders, something that, according to Peel "almost tempts them to commit the crime, for the sake of the supposed importance which it gives them."[74] The second part of the legislation aimed at making the punishment fit the crime by attaching penalties of either transportation or imprisonment, with discretionary "personal chastisement." As Russell summed it up, "[A]s it is the offence of base and degraded beings"—and, he might have added, youthful ones —"a base and degrading species of punishment is most fitly applied to it."[75]

These efforts to downsize the significance of such crimes was apparent elsewhere. While the failure of Oxford's attack attracted national prayers of thanksgiving, ministers expressly ruled out the greater disruption of a nominated day of thanksgiving, fearing that it might act as a lightning rod for criticism and provide an opportunity for radicals to preach violent sermons.[76] Notably, the attack by John Francis was the last time that such an attack on the person of the monarch received the additional "dignity" and notoriety provided by national prayers of thanksgiving that been a standard feature of the ministerial response since the second half of the eighteenth century; ministers ordered no special prayers for subsequent assaults in 1849, 1872, and 1882.[77]

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[70] Memorandum of Prince Albert, 2 July 1842, BL, Peel Papers, Add. MSS 40434, fol. 163; Queen Victoria's Journals, vol. 14, 1 July 1842, 1–2; A. G. Gardiner, *Life of Sir William Harcourt*, 2 vols. (London, 1923), 2:405.

[71] *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 10, 10–11 July 1840, 20–22; *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 13, 30 May 1842, 207–9; *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 14, 1 July 1842, 1–2,.

[72] Memorandum of Sir James Graham, 10 July 1842, BL, Peel Papers, Add. MSS 40434 fol. 177. See also "Security of the Queen's Person, 12 July 1842," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 65 (1842) col. 20.

[73] *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 65 (1842) cols. 20, 27.

[74] Memorandum of Sir James Graham, 10 July 1842, BL, Peel Papers, Add. MSS 40434 fol. 177; *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 65 (1842) col. 22.

[75] *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 65 (1842) col. 27.

[76] *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 9, 13 June 1840, 283; Michael Ledger-Lomas, *Queen Victoria: This Thorny Crown* (Oxford, 2021), 30–32; Phillip Williamson, et al., eds., *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation*, vol. 2, *General Fasts, Thanksgivings, and Special Prayers in the British Isles, 1689–1870* (Woodbridge, 2017), 812–15.

In their actions and legislation after the spate of attacks beginning in 1840, ministers put in place an important and enduring part of the script for dealing with these kinds of offence. Early foreclosure on speculations about conspiracy and plotting and the starting assumption that such attacks were most likely to come from deranged individuals with morbid passions stoked by the mass media were to be the hallmark of the many subsequent attempts on Victoria's person. This strategy of containment and depoliticization contrasts with responses to experiences elsewhere. In 1878 in the German empire, for example, the second of two efforts on the life of Wilhelm I, an attempted shooting by Karl Nobiling, a failed academic, was weaponized by Bismarck to dissolve the Reichstag and neuter the Liberal Party.[78]

Four years later, in the potentially explosive context of international anarchist assassinations and Fenian conspiracies (the fatal stabbings in Phoenix Park, Dublin, of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Henry Burke occurred two months later), Victoria was fired on by Roderick Maclean, a Scot. The home secretary received the news in the evening at dinner, and by the following morning it was clear that the assailant was "not an Irishman" and that "the would-be assassin was only released from the Wells asylum last July, which is a relief to everybody as it entirely precludes any idea of it being a political offence."[79] Indeed, so habitual was this mode of explaining attacks that Gladstone premised his initial decision not to call for a parliamentary address not only on his being a stickler for precedent but also on his analysis that "such attempts on the Queen proceed from men of weak and morbid minds, to which the highest reward and inducement to do the deed is notoriety, and a parliamentary Address specially partakes of this."[80]

## PRESS RESPONSES

The script surrounding these events was not, of course, crafted by ministers alone. Their responses and those of other political elites—as articulated through interrupted parliamentary debates and the immediate formulation of loyal addresses—were communicated through the press. Breakneck growth and significant changes within the form and content of the press, especially from mid-century, supported the development of a widespread and increasingly formulaic set of responses to attacks on British royalty. The development of overland and then undersea telegraph technology dramatically enhanced the simultaneity of national and, ultimately, international news. Across the same period, more careful news management, not least on the part of monarchy, saw the incorporation of the press into royal occasions and something like the emergence of the modern royal correspondent. With a much greater number of newspapers adopting a "principle of combination" enshrined in the emergence of news agencies, there was frequent comment from the 1860s and 1870s on the sameness of newspaper reports.[81]

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[77] Williamson et al., *National Prayers*, 828–29.

[78] Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life* (Oxford, 2001), 266–68; John C. G. Röhl, *Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser's Early Life, 1859–1888* (Cambridge, 1998), 262–66; Ledger-Lomas, *Queen Victoria*, 161.

[79] Dudley W. R. Bahlman, ed., *Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton, 1880–1885*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1972), 1: 231; Patrick Jackson, ed., *Loulou: Extracts from the Journals of Lewis Harcourt (1880–95)* (Madison, 2006), 35.

[80] Bahlman, *Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton*, 1:235.

A central part of the press response was, of course, investigating, discussing, and articulating the causes of so shocking and potentially traumatic an occurrence as an attack on the sovereign. Across the nineteenth century, and especially from mid-century, newspapers and periodicals developed a narrative framework that, in common with ministerial responses, pushed assassination of royalty ever further from the political realm. In place of explanations based on aberrant politics, sustained discussions of each attempt entrenched a set of causes that understood violence against the monarchy in terms of social pathology or individual psychology.

In the context of the French Revolution, the press had been predisposed to assign Hadfield's attack political causes, either an organized conspiracy or the more generalized specter of Jacobinism. The qualified ministerial retreat from conspiracy as an explanation for these attempts was shared only in part by newspapers. Hadfield's attack, the earlier misadventure in Hyde Park, and other circumstances, such as a letter to the prince regent indicating an attempt to murder his father found by Lady Albemarle's servants, bore all of the hallmarks of a possible plot, while reports of Privy Council examinations of Bannister Truelock and others hinted to "traitorous design."[82]

It did quite quickly become clear that the most likely explanation was that "the unfortunate man is deranged in his mind."[83] Hadfield's trial and subsequent legislation led to wider discussions about the role of insanity as a legal defense, parts of the medical community congratulating Lord Kenyon and crown and defense lawyers for "admitting all the light of science to elucidate the fact of sanity or insanity of mind, in one of the most momentous cases on which a jury was ever impaneled."[84] The lack of a specific conspiracy prompted the expanding loyalist press to focus instead on a much more generalized Jacobin conspiracy as the cause of the attack. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* was at the fore of such efforts, and its review of William Hamilton Reid's *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in This Metropolis* (1800) provided the perfect opportunity to identify the clubs and publications of popular radicalism as the ultimate culprits: "Can we wonder at the atrocious attacks which have been made on the most illustrious character in the kingdom, equally illustrious for his virtues as his rank, when schools for inculcating the duty of assassination have thus been suffered to exist in the heart of the metropolis; or when publications have been industriously circulated throughout the country, the professed object of which was to render the Sovereign an object of ridicule and contempt!"[85]

Hamilton Reid wrote to the editor with further information on these "Schools of Assassination" and the additional juicy detail of the apprehension of some United

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[81] David Brown, "The Press," in *Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1800–2000*, ed. David Brown, Robert Crowcroft, and Gordon Pentland (Oxford, 2018), 154–72, at 164; Catherine Waters, *Special Correspondence and the Newspaper Press in Victorian Print Culture, 1850–1886* (Basingstoke, 2019), chap. 6; Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London, 1981), chap. 3.

[82] *Evening Mail*, 16 May 1800; see also *Times*, 16 May 1800; *Star*, 16 May 1800.

[83] *Times*, 17 May 1800.

[84] John Johnstone, *Medical Jurisprudence: On Madness* (Birmingham, 1800), ii.

[85] Review of *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in This Metropolis* [by William Hamilton Reid], *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 6, no. 23 (May 1800): 59–64, at 62.

Englishmen activists who had been discussing "*a Committee of Assassinations*" as part of their constitution.[86] Quite in spite of the evidential challenges of drawing a direct link between popular radicals and Hadfield's actions, numerous newspapers and ministers were still delivering loyal sermons that were prepared to assign the event to Jacobinism or the plotting of "seditious assemblies and private cabals" acting under the influence of "publications of an infidel or immoral tendency."[87] Nor was such reporting confined to ultra-loyalist periodicals or fringe publications. In 1800, the *Times*, despite reaching the conclusion after two days of "confusion and anxiety" that Hadfield was likely insane and there was nothing to lead to "the inference of conspiracy," still used the opportunity to address other imagined conspirators: "[I]n aiming at his sacred life, under the present fortunate circumstances of public affairs, the Revolutionary monster would commit but a barren and unprofitable crime. No advantage would accrue to the horrid cause of France and of Jacobinism, from a demise of the crown."[88]

Given the artful hints prepared by Oxford, it is not surprising that his actions were lent ominous connections. In the face of all evidence, the idea of his attack being linked to Chartism or to democratic politics was muted, but it was present. *John Bull* was unequivocal: "It seems certain . . . that he is but *one* of an association of ruffians who, taking this title from those seminaries of atheism and revolution, banded together under the name of *La Jeune France*, called themselves, in equally wicked and absurd imitation of those levelling plotters—'Young England.'" Who really was to blame was tortuously traced: "The course of what is termed Liberalism lies before us, beginning in absurd theories, ending in criminal practices."[89] One of the only satirical prints of Oxford, by a pre-*Punch* John Leech, revived the iconography of the age of revolutions in portraying Oxford sporting a tricolor cockade, with a cap of liberty on his coat of arms.[90]

Such claims became less credible not least with Oxford's widely reported remark on being questioned as to whether he was a Chartist or an Owenite, "I belong to the other party."[91] Sections of the conservative press fell back on presenting his attempt as a ministerial plot. The absence of a bullet, the gentlemanly dress of a humble pot-boy, and his treasonable documents being written on paper "of the sort generally used in the Government offices" were all highlighted and given a name redolent of a confected assassination attempt of the 1790s. The "Pop-Gun Plot" of 1794 became the "Pot-Boy Plot," said to be the result of "the notoriously desperate condition of the ministry, and their equally notorious inclination to go to any length to keep place."[92]

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[86] William Hamilton Reid, "Upon the Levelling Society, English Assassins, &c. to the Editor," *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 6, no. 25 (July 1800): 354–56, at 354.

[87] Rev. C. Daubeny, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Late Desperate Attempt on the Life of His Majesty; Preached at Christ's Church, in Bath, on Sunday, June 8, 1800* (London, 1800), 24–25.

[88] Editorial, *Times*, 17 May 1800.

[89] *John Bull*, 14 June 1840, 282.

[90] John Leech, "The Regicide Pot-Boy!!!! Or Young England alias Oxford; (Alas for Old England) The *Patriotic* Imitator of Young France," June 1840, BM 1868-0808.9542, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-9542; *Literary Gazette*, 26 June 1840, 417.

[91] *Morning Herald*, 16 June 1840; *Northern Star*, 20 June 1840.

[92] *John Bull*, 21 June 1840, 294; "The Pot-Boy and the Whigs," *Blackburn Standard*, 24 June 1840.

While ministers did not take the act seriously as part of a wider Orange conspiracy, liberal papers were less reticent. They reported initial rumors that Oxford had recently been "initiated into the mysteries of Orangeism" in Ireland and might have consorted with Colonel Fairman, a central figure in plans for an alleged coup d'état in the 1830s: "In speech at least he is an earnest Orangeman, and perhaps his pistols were loaded with orange pips."[93] Such accusations were frequent enough to prompt Fairman to appeal to the home secretary.[94] It was a charge extensively and explosively pursued by Daniel O'Connell, the great Catholic Irish politician, who had made a point of coupling his calls for repeal of the Union with effusive and theatrical loyalty to the crown. In a widely reported letter, he expressly assigned the crime to "some of the underlings of that Orange Tory faction, which naturally detests the virtues of our beloved Queen."[95] Liberal newspapers also hinted at a more subtle conspiracy through which the Tory press and the public language of individual Tories had knowingly created the conditions for the attack. Tories themselves were blamed for their hostile language in print and in person around the queen. Outspoken clergymen such as the Reverend Hugh "Jezebel" McNeile, Tory journals such as *John Bull*, and the more moderate *Quarterly Review* were all "on trial in this affair; and before a different tribunal, that of public opinion."[96]

Chartists, for their part, blamed the entirety of the political elite: Tories for the hypocritical mouthing of loyalty while traducing the queen and Whigs for misgoverning in her name. In a neat formula, the *Northern Star* voiced its own loyalty to the queen and branded both parties as traitors: "None know better than the wretches who compose both factions, that the unreflecting hold the Queen responsible for all the injustice and oppression committed in her name; and thus the traitors labor by all these, and by a thousand other means not less revolting, to bring the royal person into disrepute, and, through the maddened sense of keen and undeserved suffering, to compass the Queen's death."[97] The *Southern Star* featured a similar mix—personal loyalty to the queen and abhorrence of assassination were abundantly evident but ran alongside more damning criticism of the system, or what it called in bold capitals "THE CONCERN, AND THOSE WHO MANAGE IT."[98]

While conspiratorial language thus featured in different types of newspapers at mid-century, allegations of organized plots were treated most seriously and extensively in what might be considered comparatively marginal publications. *John Bull*, for example, had its origins as a mischievous counterblast to Whig propaganda during the Queen Caroline affair of 1820, its deliberately frivolous and libelous style falling out of fashion and circulation by the 1840s.[99]

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[93] "The Bullet Question," *Political Examiner*, 21 June 1840; "Latest News," *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 June 1840.

[94] Lieut-Col Fairman "Deputy Grand Secretary of the late Orange Institution" to Earl of Normanby, 6 July 1840, TNA, Home Office Correspondence HO44/35/56, fol. 250.

[95] Daniel O'Connell, "To the People of Ireland," *Freeman's Journal*, 18 June 1840; O'Connell to P. V. Fitzpatrick, 14 June 1840, in W. J. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell the Liberator*, 2 vols. (New York, 1888), 2: 241.

[96] Editorial, *Morning Chronicle*, 23 June 1840; "Meetings to Address Her Majesty," *Bristol Mercury*, 27 June 1840.

[97] Editorial, *Northern Star*, 20 June 1840; Paul Pickering, "'The Hearts of the Millions': Chartism and Popular Monarchism in the 1840s," *History* 88, no. 2 (2003): 227–48.

[98] "The Right View for the Unrepresented Millions to Take of Edward Oxford's Shooting at the Queen and Prince Albert," editorial, *Southern Star*, 21 June 1840; see also "Attempt to Assassinate the Queen and Prince Albert," *Southern Star*, 14 June 1840.

Underpinning much more of the newspaper coverage (and evident in the responses of ministers) was a set of essentially social explanations for these crimes. These could certainly be lent different political complexions but did not in themselves constitute political rationales for the attack on the queen. They located the attempt securely at the nexus of youth, madness, and the pernicious effects of emerging mass media (though not normally including their own publications among the latter category). These were all concerns of Victorian moral reformers and came together with particular force in the response to attacks on the sovereign.[100] On the day following Oxford's attack, the *Standard* eschewed serious consideration of conspiracy to lament the crime as reflecting "deep disgrace upon the character of our country" and to highlight evils of urbanization, unruly youth, and the growing gulf between the rich and the poor that was to become such a standard trope of the "condition of England" question: "[I]n the large towns of England, boys now constitute a more distinct and, so to speak, a more independent clan than at any former period: they are the most common agents in every crime—they fill our gaols. In this respect the lower classes in the great towns present a precise contrast to the classes above them; for while in the latter the rising generation is decidedly *better* than that which is passing away, the sons of the former are, it is to be feared, generally worse than their fathers."[101]

These acute anxieties around an increasingly youthful population (the 1841 census put England and Wales' population of under-twenties at over 45 percent) and the growing concern around "juvenile delinquency" were assigned various causes.[102] The potentially poisonous impact of "that most filthy and abominable nuisance, the penny press," was a common part of the discussion around Oxford's actions.[103] The sensational trial of François Benjamin Courvoisier for the murder of Lord William Russell in April 1840 was linked to Oxford's attack as both a dangerous exemplar for Oxford and additional evidence of malign social forces at play. Courvoisier had claimed inspiration in part from reading accounts of Jack Sheppard, the notorious thief and prison-breaker, and so the attack on the queen could become a lightning rod for these wider concerns about crime and its reporting and representation in popular culture: "With regard to the rapid increase and deepening dye of crime in this country, the causes may be found, we think, mainly in the demoralizing influence of French example, and profligate writings at home, working on the weakness of a half-educated and excited generation, taught to believe themselves superior to restraint, and led by the maudlin sympathy and pestilent pandering of a portion of the newspaper press, to admire all delinquencies which procure such enviable notoriety, and too often impunity, for the most atrocious order of delinquents."[104]

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[99] R. H. Dalton Barham, *Life and Remains of Theodore Edward Hook*, 2 vols. (London, 1853).

[100] M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England* (Cambridge, 2004), chaps 4–5.

[101] "Attempted Assassination of the Queen," *Standard*, 11 June 1840.

[102] B. R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), 12; Susan Margery, "The Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Labour History*, no. 34 (1978): 11–27.

[103] "The Late Attempt at Assassination of the Queen and Prince Albert," *Standard*, 15 June 1840.

As this writer went on to make clear, the final focus for discussion around Oxford was to provide social-psychological explanations rooted in the "depraved passion . . . to be NOTORIOUS" that the crimes allegedly exhibited: "[T]he first conclusion is that the person must be deranged. We do not mean that madness which 'influences speech and action' so as to attract common observers, but an ill-constituted mind, constantly liable to some insane act by a sufficiently exciting causes . . . Two great generic causes of this delirium, however, seem to be morbid excitability, and a sickly craving after distinction."[105]

Assassination attempts in the early 1840s took place at moment when, according to Andrew Scull, "the boundary between the normal and the pathological was left extraordinarily vague and indeterminate," with the result that "insanity was such an amorphous, all-embracing concept, that the range of behavior it could be stretched to encompass was almost infinite."[106] Indeed, on the basis of Oxford's trial and that of Daniel M'Naghten for the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Peel in 1843, David Jones has argued that the 1840s were the high-water mark of "moral insanity" as an explanation for high-profile crimes, at a time when the emerging practice of psychiatry was attempting to gain respectability and shed the disreputable associations of "mad doctoring" through expert-witness testimony in the courts.[107] There was thus considerable space in which to encode all such crimes as manifestations of the kinds of morbid minds referred to widely by politicians and the press and which would prove influential in wider European treatments of similar incidents.[108]

None of these broad explanations was exactly new, but they came together with particular clarity and force in discussing Oxford's attack and those of his subsequent imitators. They provided a sort of consensus on the immediate cause of an attack on the sovereign but were still capacious enough to accommodate different political inflections. In the wildly successful *Mysteries of London* serial of the mid-1840s (which at its peak sold 250,000 copies per week), the radical George W. M. Reynolds provided readers with a composite of royal intruders and would-be assassins in the figure of Henry Holford, a pot-boy who sneaks into Buckingham Palace on several occasions. One obvious purpose for Reynolds was to provide the prurient view into the private and domestic life of monarchy that audiences craved to critique the monarchy and wider social inequalities.

After he is ejected from the palace by Prince Albert, Holford's "morbid excitement" develops as he reads accounts of previous assassinations and meditates on the inequities of Victorian society: "I will be talked about—my name shall be upon every tongue! Obscurity shall no longer enshroud me: its darkness is painful to my soul. I will do a deed that shall make the Kingdom ring from one end to the other with the astounding tidings:—the newspapers shall struggle with all the eagerness of competition to glean the most trivial facts concerning me;— and when the day arrives for me to appear before my judges, the great nobles and the high-born ladies of England shall crowd in the tribunal to witness the trial of the pot-boy Henry Holford!"[109] Reynolds's amalgam of Boy Jones and Edward Oxford is true to his word. He makes his attempt on Victoria on the same spot as Edward Oxford, and readers follow his route through the cabinet interrogation on to Bedlam.[110]

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[104] "Editor's Portfolio; or Naval and Military Register," *United Service Magazine*, July 1840, 413.

[105] "The Late Atrocious and Treasonable Attempt against the Queen," *Spectator*, 13 June 1840, 563–64.

[106] Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700–1900* (New Haven, 1993), 349.

[107] David W. Jones, "Moral Insanity and Psychological Disorder: The Hybrid Roots of Psychiatry," *History of Psychiatry*, 28, no. 3 (2017): 263–79.

[108] See, for example Katariina Parhi, "YOUNG MAN M: Political Violence, Moral Insanity, and Criminal Law in Finnish Psychiatry in the 1870s and 1880s," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 43, no. 3 (2018): 348–64.

The shift away from a political framework to an essentially social one has obvious resonances with literature that explores the fate of conspiratorial modes of politics (or more famously in the American context, the "paranoid style") under complex democratizing regimes.[111] Across the first half of the nineteenth century, the shift amounted to a depoliticization of crimes against the crown, which was to have lasting effects. The idea of assaults on the queen being a characteristic crime of deranged youth became so prevalent that the rare instances that did not conform—such as the 1850 attack by Robert Pate, a wealthy thirty-year-old gentleman and former army officer who struck Victoria on the head with his cane—evoked especially vituperative responses.[112] Ministers and journalists expressed relief when would-be assassins could be quickly and uncomplicatedly squeezed into the template, as was Roderick Maclean in 1882. When Jean-Baptiste Sipido (a card-carrying anarchist) fired and narrowly missed the Prince of Wales in 1900, the press was primed and ready immediately to wheel out the established assumptions: "The arrest of Sipido cannot be expected to result in the detection of any widespread conspiracy. Secret societies, though their members are sometimes careless, are not in the habit of sending boys to kill Princes. It is extremely improbable that Sipido had any accomplices. If he is not a dangerous lunatic, who ought to have been under lock and key, he is in all likelihood a heady, moody youth with violent passions and no mental ballast."[113]

Sipido was a committed, albeit young anarchist, who apparently quite calmly stated that "he wanted to kill the Prince of Wales because his Royal Highness had caused thousands of men to be slaughtered in South Africa." Such misunderstanding of the niceties of British constitutional arrangements was additional evidence of his unsoundness of mind: "We can only attribute so dastardly an attempt on a Prince . . . who personally has no influence whatever upon the policy of the British Government, to an impulse of absolute madness."[114] Sipido was a near-perfect canvas on which to project the whole repertoire of explanations for attacks on royalty developed after the 1840s: vanity, love of publicity and advertisement, impressionable youthfulness, feeblemindedness, and a form of "moral ataxia" all made it into the analysis in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* by the English literary journalist Charles Whibley.[115]

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[109] George W. M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London*, 4 vols. (London, 1846), 2:247.

[110] Reynolds, *Mysteries of London*, 2:210–12, 230.

[111] Alfred Moore, "Conspiracy and Conspiracy Theories in Democratic Politics," *Critical Review* 28, no. 1 (2016): 1–23, at 4.

[112] Murphy, *Shooting Victoria*, chaps. 16–17.

[113] "The Attempt on the Prince," *Daily News*, 5 April 1900; Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878–1934* (Cambridge, 2013), 185–87.

[114] "Attempt to Shoot the Prince of Wales, Arrest of His Assailant," *Times*, 5 April 1900. Sipido was still being watched six years later.

These discussions around attempts on the lives of royalty thus supported and were supported by wider arguments about the elevation of monarchy above politics. Even when ascribed to some inchoate political instinct, the actions could barely rank as meaningful political action. As Thomas Carlyle observed, "Are not these strange times? The people are sick of their misgovernment, and the blackguards among them shoot at the poor queen . . . as a man that wanted the steeple pulled down might at least fling a stone at the gilt weathercock."[116] Discussion of and responses to the multiple early physical attacks on Victoria therefore played a role in the transition from a politically powerful monarchy to one whose claims to power were based on the love and affection of its subjects. This was a complex process embracing the increasing scale and complexity of legislative business, the death of the consort and the feminization of the monarchy, and the reinvention of royal ceremonial.[117] Attacks on the monarch and the sustained public interest and discussion that followed them, however, were also preparing the way for Bagehot's definitive statement that monarchy was there for loyalty, affection, spectacle, and ornament.[118]

In assigning causes to assassination attempts, the implied and frequently explicit contrast was, of course, with the experiences of other monarchs and states. Attempted and successful murders of foreign monarchs certainly met with general abhorrence, and the British press scouted a similar set of social and psychological explanations. Frequently, however, newspapers also lent assassination more credibility as a comprehensible political act, especially within autocratic regimes. The *Times*, for example, responded to the assassination of Alexander II with a reflective review on the comparative rareness of "this irrational kind of outrage" in Britain (while admitting the exception of Ireland): "No doubt the reason is to be found in the despotic, and therefore responsible, character of the Continental Sovereigns. They represent emphatically the principles of their own government. The enemies of the State therefore fly straight at the head of it."[119] By contrast, in Britain, it was politically irrational—a form of madness, even—to aim at that dignified part of the constitution.

## PUBLIC RESPONSES

In terms of how the press and public discussion narrated the events themselves, the behavior of the intended victims, and the wider public response, such attacks served as key moments to articulate the relationship between monarchy and the people. In describing royal behavior, the press circulated heroic notions of courage and resolution as unflappable royals quickly resumed their public lives, safe in "the impenetrable guard of the united British people's love, respect and loyalty."[120] Yet this notion of royal accessibility became increasingly stretched as each successive attack and the prevalence of assassination in the wider world prompted enhanced security and protection measures.

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[115] [Charles Whibley], "Musings without Method," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1900.

[116] Thomas Carlyle to his mother, 4 July 1842, as quoted in Murphy, *Shooting Victoria*, 213.

[117] See especially William M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861–1914* (Basingstoke, 1996).

[118] Bagehot, *English Constitution*, chap. 3.

[119] *Times*, 16 March 1881.

So, too, there were important changes in how the press narrated the widespread and often theatrical demonstrations of loyalty that followed on from each attack. While the role of loyalism in the nineteenth-century British world has attracted considerable scholarship, Matthew McCormack has suggested that historians should take the emotional dimensions of loyalty more seriously.[121] In the sustained discussion of popular responses to attacks on royalty, the press provides a lens onto changing public emotions as the loyalty of the Age of Sensibility gave way to a more restrained style.[122]

One notable preoccupation of the press was to describe the response of the intended royal target of any attack. In 1800, the loyal press universally presented George III as unalarmed. The *Morning Chronicle* contrasted both the "murderous and diabolical passions" of the would-be assassin and the "most violent emotions" of the audience with the king's "utmost serenity."[123] Omnipresent in the press, this image was circulated by female correspondents as well. The sister of the writer and philanthropist Hannah More remarked that the king's "self-control is astonishing," while Lady Holland expanded further: "His behavior was like that of a hero of antiquity; he was in full possession of all of his faculties, and was cool enough to tell the Queen, who was not in the box when the pistol was fired, that the report was from a squib. He remained on during the play with the utmost sang-froid."[124]

This position represented a qualified withdrawal from the language of sentiment that had characterized outpourings of loyalty during the king's illness in 1788.[125] In the public response, there was no pity for George III's own derangements; instead, it was left to Hadfield's defense counsel, Thomas Erskine, to transfer pity onto the king's assailant.[126] Such efforts to underline the king's avoidance of "embarrassment or defection" highlights the available space for representing his actions. Indeed, some of the very earliest accounts had related the king's great confusion and agitation.[127] Any such reports were now drowned out in the public prints, which elaborated on the king's behavior using family imagery. The *Times* related how the Duke of York rushed from his box with his wife as the king was "eagerly surrounded by his family." George III's manly conduct was emphasized in relation to the women around him—he was protective and solicitous of his wife, while his daughters "melted into tears" or fainted or managed to do both.[128] The attack provided an opportunity to present the sovereign's behavior in the face of real physical risk, akin to the dangers of the battlefield. On his birthday, the *Sun* reminded readers that "while our Monarchs now do not risk the happiness of the Empire by personal danger," the king's response to Hadfield's attack demonstrated that had he gone to war, "his spirit and enterprise would most probably have equaled the most celebrated of our Martial Kings."[129] One pamphlet account presented the king's unruffled masculinity in military terms with the repeated refrain "THE KING REMAINED AT HIS POST."[130] The endlessly reiterated accounts of the king's exemplary response as a man, father, and husband sit neatly within that wider history of refashioning George III into an appropriate figurehead of insurgent Britishness.

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[120] Herbert T. Fitch, *Traitors Within: The Adventures of Detective Inspector Herbert T. Fitch* (London, 1933), 55.

[121] Allan Blackstock and Frank O'Gorman, ed., *Loyalism and the Formation of the British World, 1774–1914* (Woodbridge, 2014); Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent, ed., *Mistress of Everything: Queen Victoria in Indigenous Worlds* (Manchester, 2016); Miles Taylor, *Empress: Queen Victoria and India* (New Haven, 2018); Matthew McCormack, "Rethinking 'Loyalty' in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 3 (2012): 407–21.

[122] Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford, 2015), chap. 13.

[123] "Attempt to Assassinate the King," *Morning Chronicle*, 16 May 1800.

[124] William Roberts, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, 4 vols. (London, 1834), 2:58; Holland, *Journal of Lady Holland*, 2:81.

[125] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death,* chap. 1.

[126] See Erskine's defense speech in T. J. Howell, ed., *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, 34 vols. (London, 1816–1828), 27:1307–30; Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, 141–42.

[127] *Sun*, 17 May 1800.

That gendered language presented some interesting issues when it was Victoria who was the target for attack. With Oxford's attempt, press accounts of the royal response diverged. Did the pregnant Victoria rise and protect Albert—or was it the other way round?[131] Many papers disaggregated the public Victoria from the private one, contrasting the "courage and resolution" of the public sovereign with her "flood of tears" on returning to her apartments.[132] Widely reported ministerial statements, often the first tone-setting part of any wider public response, invariably lauded the queen's courage and calmness, regardless of the actual nature of the event. In 1872, when eighteen-year-old Arthur O'Connor managed to get into the Buckingham palace courtyard with a pistol and a petition seeking the release of Fenian prisoners, Granville in the Lords and Lord John Russell in the Commons reported Victoria's calm response to the wider public as much as to their immediate audiences.[133] That account contrasts sharply with the response Victoria recorded in her own journal: "Involuntarily, in a terrible fright, I threw myself over Jane C., calling out 'save me'. . . All were white as sheets, Jane C. almost crying, and Leopold looked as if he were going to faint."[134] Similarly, after another attempt, the home secretary, William Harcourt, reported in the Commons in 1882 the simple statement from a Windsor telegram that "the Queen is not alarmed."[135] Nor was she, in an immediate sense, having neither heard nor seen the shots fired by Roderick Maclean.[136] Several months before, however, she had confided to Harcourt "a physical dread to going about in London."[137]

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[128] "Attempt to Assassinate the King," *Morning Chronicle*, 16 May 1800; *Star*, 17 May 1800; *Times*, 17 May 1800.

[129] *Sun*, 4 June 1800.

[130] Herbert Croft, *Hints for History, Respecting the Attempt on the King's Life* (London, 1800).

[131] See, for example, the divergent witness accounts in "Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty and Prince Albert," *Morning Chronicle*, 11 June 1840.

[132] "Additional Particulars. Emotion of Her Majesty," *Blackburn Standard*, 17 June 1840.

[133] "Outrage on the Queen, 29 February 1872," *Parliamentary Debates*, Lord and Commons, 3rd series, vol. 209 (1872) cols. 1134, 1164.

[134] A. C. Benson and G. E. Buckle, eds., *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 9 vols. (London, 1907–32), 6:197; *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 61, 29 February 1872, 61–63.

[135] "Attempt upon the Life of Her Majesty," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 266 (1882) col. 2042.

This psychodrama was invariably completed by the dutiful reporting of the royal's reappearance in public, unruffled and ready to affirm the right relationship between crown and people. There were of course differences in the composition of the political nation with which the monarch reconvened: George III was reported back at his levées and council room in 1800, Victoria taking her customary recreation in the park in 1840.[138] The swift public reappearance always happened and was nearly always presented as an affirmation of royalty's safe place in the hearts of the people. This theme was constant, even though royal security measures changed over the longer term and in response to individual events.[139] As Hoffman has pointed out for nineteenth-century monarchs as a whole, assassination attempts irrevocably altered the relationship between crown and people. In Britain, the carefully cultivated myth of accessibility was increasingly managed to ensure spectacle and ostentatious openness while reducing individual contact and enhancing security around the sovereign.[140] By the end of the century, the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police, formed in 1883,[141] embodied this tension; sweeping processional routes and royal trains, Special Branch members quietly and tactfully maintained the important fiction that royalty could move freely among its loyal subjects, albeit with "the unostentatious accompaniment of burly men in grey suits."[142]

Even more important than the actions of the royal person in lending these fraught moments symbolic weight were the wider responses of the British people. All assassination attempts prompted the full repertoire of loyalist display—thanksgivings and prayers, loyal addresses, and poetry of wildly varying quality. It might be useful to interrogate, as historians have done for loyalist display from the 1790s onward, how far these loyalist outbursts were manufactured and how far they were spontaneous (as they always claimed to be). Newspaper editorials predictably expressed confidence that initial loyal addresses from the Houses of Parliament would be followed by similar addresses from other public bodies. These columns functioned as exhortations to conform as much as statements of fact. Similarly, there was much to justify the Chartist skepticism of the "trading in loyalty" that inevitably accompanied attempted assassinations: that the desire to sell, or civic one-upmanship, or the currying of personal favor might underpin the activities reported.[143] Few cases of self-interest were as egregious as that of the sheriff of Camarthenshire, whose county's loyal address was sent in 1800 to the Home Office along with a request for a knighthood.[144]

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[136] *Queen Victoria's Journals*, vol. 76, 2 March 1882, 63–66.

[137] Jackson, *Loulou*, 31.

[138] *Times*, 17 May 1800; *Times* 22 May 1800.

[139] Hoffman, "Age of Assassination," 129–30.

[140] Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, 177.

[141] Bernard Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State: The London Metropolitan Police Special Branch before the First World War* (London, 1987).

[142] Fitch, *Traitors Within*, 19. For other examples, see Melville Macnaghten, *Days of My Years* (London, 1915), 77–85, 159–63; Herbert T. Fitch, *Memoirs of a Royal Detective* (London, 1935), 17–22; Harold Brust, *I Guarded Kings: Memoirs of a Political Police Officer* (London, 1935), 13–14, 43–74.

[143] Editorial, *Southern Star*, 21 June 1840.

[144] *St. James Chronicle*, 14–17 June 1800; Duke of Portland to the King, 1 July 1800, in Aspinall, *Later Correspondence of George III*, 3:369.

Responses and how they were narrated do, however, provide insight into how the press and groups of Britons conceptualized the role of monarchy across this period. This article focuses on the ways in which the press and published responses (for example, loyal addresses) articulated this relationship, but in addition to further exploring the motivations for such actions, historians could, of course, also question the universality of the loyal responses which were carefully relayed in the press. Home Office correspondence in 1800 provides ample evidence of the projected and confected nature of the loyal consensus in the press and of the continuing readiness of many to connect Hadfield's actions to wider imagined conspiracies. George III was pursued, hissed, and hooted by a mob on leaving the Drury Lane theater, while Richard Morgan of Gosport was examined for responding to someone selling the form of the thanksgiving for George III's escape, "Damn and bugger the King and Constitution . . . I wish his bloody block was off."[145] While such divergent voices were drowned out by the loyalty play surrounding assassination attempts, this is not to say that there was no variation in the popular responses to them.

Those responses certainly point to changing emotional registers within public politics. One common prompt for discussion of public emotions across the century was the moment of the attempted assassination. These recollections pinpointed an almost unrestrained anger among witnesses as they sought to deliver some kind of summary justice, frequently catching up innocent bystanders. Accounts thus provided exempla of appropriate forms of manly behavior in contrast to the cowardly and unmanly actions of the would-be assassin. The musicians and audience at Drury Lane could barely be restrained in 1800 as they shouted for Hadfield's apprehenders to "shew the villain"; a spectacle-maker, his nephew, and a loyal crowd apprehended Oxford in 1840; Eton schoolboys belabored Maclean with their umbrellas in 1882; a heroic stationmaster in Brussels accosted Sipido while bystanders violently assaulted a student they had mistaken for the would-be assassin.[146]

Editorials, correspondence, and loyal addresses provide similar insights. In 1800, loyal addresses and newspaper editorials nearly always hit some of the conventional high notes of praising a patriot king ruling in line with the constitution, frequently coupled with a paternal image of "the Father of his People."[147] At the same time, however, addresses involved much more emotionally troubled language, perhaps closer in tone to private correspondence. For example, the address sent from Maidstone in Kent lamented, "To express our feelings on the late occasion is morally impossible. To dwell on the subject is painful in the highest degree."[148] This trope of emotions so strong as not to be easily reducible to words marked the parliamentary response as well. Lord Grenville, introducing the loyal address to the House of Lords remarked, "Their common feelings respecting such an event, he knew the difficulty of finding adequate and appropriate words to express."[149]

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[145] *Times*, 17 May 1800; [copy] Information of Elizabeth Bendall of Gosport, 31 May 1800, TNA, Home Office Correspondence HO 42/50, fol. 145.

[146] *Evening Mail*, 16 May 1800; "Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty and Prince Albert," *Morning Chronicle*, 11 June 1840; "Attempt to Shoot the Queen: Seizure of Roderick Maclean," *Illustrated London News*, 11 March 1882; "Attempt to Shoot the Prince of Wales: Arrest of His Assailant," *Times*, 5 April 1900.

[147] Address of the Tivy Side Volunteers, 27 May 1800, TNA, Home Office Correspondence, HO42/50, fol. 142.

[148] Address from Maidstone, [n.d.], TNA, Home Office Correspondence, HO42/50, fol. 135.

There are echoes of this fraught emotional response in 1840. Peel helped to set the tone of inexpressible emotions, saying, "[I]t is impossible not to feel that language is a very imperfect medium for conveying the sentiments to which events give rise," and numerous newspapers including *John Bull* followed this lead: "These are sensations too big for words."[150] Similar statements were more obvious in the Conservative press, the *Blackburn Standard*, for example, representing the initial news as having "caused an anxiety, almost amounting to agony. . . after an event which has struck terror to the heart of millions of Britons."[151] There was, however, a subsequent public effort to temper these emotions. A week later, the same newspaper offered "a *sobered down*" account, a "more cool and dispassionate review of the whole circumstances of the case than our excited feelings and the clumsy loyalty of the London penny-a-liners would permit us to enter into last week."[152] While the idea that the mid-nineteenth century saw the "domestication of the emotions" and their confinement to the private sphere is certainly overstated, there was ongoing discussion about what public emotions were appropriate and desirable.[153] Such was especially the case at a time of Chartist danger, when popular politics were being represented as a dangerous and emotional social pathology.[154]

With later attempts, reports of public responses and the content of addresses reflect a less rich emotional register. Any initial accounts of unrestrained fury or thrills of terror were absent or quickly transformed into the morally acceptable form of anger, indignation, which went on to characterize subsequent discussion and addresses. The partial exception was the shooting and wounding of Prince Alfred in Australia in 1868. In that context, extremely wide and long-lasting newspaper discussion and the proliferation of formal and discursive "indignation meetings" bore more of the hallmarks of the kind of cultural trauma that Eyerman discusses.[155] The scale and duration of the responses provided a platform and a space in which thousands of colonists articulated and contested visions of the social and political present and future of Australia. They foregrounded and sometimes challenged an essentially liberal vision of Australia, not blaming all Catholics or all Irishmen for the actions of the would-be assassin and arguing for the maintenance of a political culture distinguished by civil and religious freedom. These discussions foreshadowed some of the debate about the relationship between colonies and the crown that would later surround efforts at federation.[156]

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[149] *Parliamentary Register*, 16 May 1800.

[150] "Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty," *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 54 (1840) col. 1048; "Treasonable and Atrocious Attempt on the Lives of Her Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Albert," *John Bull*, 14 June 1840, 283.

[151] "First Public Appearance of Her Majesty since the Attempted Assassination," *Blackburn Standard*, 17 June 1840.

[152] "The Pot-Boy and the Whigs," *Blackburn Standard*, 24 June 1840.

[153] See Rachel Abelow, "Introduction: Victorian Emotions," *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2008): 375–77; Michael Freeden, "Liberal Passions: Reason and Emotion in Late- and Post-Victorian Liberal Thought," in *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew*, ed. Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goldman (Oxford, 2006), 136–49; Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, chaps. 10–12.

[154] Christian Bailey, "Social Emotions," in *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling*, ed. Ute Frevert et al. (Oxford, 2014), 201–29; Robert Saunders, "Chartism from Above: British Elites and the Interpretation of Chartism," *Historical Research* 81, no. 213 (2008): 463–84.

[155] Eyerman, *Cultural Sociology of Political Assassination*, 12–15.

Even then, the Australian response shared much in common with responses to assassination attempts in Britain, not least in the repetitive nature of many of the editorials and addresses. Overall, narration of public responses to attacks on the queen and her family came to have a scripted, formulaic air. Newspapers offered much broader catalogues, presenting the universality of demonstrations of loyalty, sympathy, and affection—nationally, within the wider British world, and internationally—rather than detailing individual responses. Some members of the print media, from the 1840s onward, accepted the complicity of the press in creating the conditions for attacks on royals and used this recognition to explain leaner, less sensational reports of such event and the public responses: "Nothing is more notorious than the fact that the excessive publicity given to all the details of such a crime as that which was committed last night tends directly to its multiplication."[157]

Attacks were still symbolic moments for reaffirming the relationship between monarchy and the people, but the temperature and the variability of reports and responses to events decreased over the second half of the century. For parliamentarians, press, and the public from the 1850s, a well-rehearsed script was in place by which to navigate these potentially disruptive events. In tandem with the increasing professionalization of grand royal ceremony, charted most famously by David Cannadine and William Kuhn, responses to attempts on the lives of the queen and her family had come to have a formalized, even ritualistic quality.[158]

## CONCLUSIONS

In the mid-nineteenth century, in the context of an emerging mass media and significant shifts in the role of monarchy in the British world, something distinctive emerged. Ministers, political elites, and the press developed a script for navigating and ascribing meaning to attempts on the lives of royalty. Such scripts ensured that only in rare circumstances could these efforts become political in any way that challenged constituted authority. At the start of the century, political fears could emerge around an assassination attempt by a quite clearly deranged individual. By century's end, however, a quite clearly political act was quickly rebadged as the actions of a moody, unbalanced youth, and located within discussions around "the social question," the pernicious effects of certain kinds of literature, and emerging discussions of madness.

The set pieces in the scripts that were developed—the nature of the assassin, the responses of monarch and subjects—provided a useful means of articulating cherished myths about the relationship between crown and people in Great Britain and registered important changes in that relationship. Successful assassinations in other polities had dynamic and disruptive effects. The 1881 murder in Russia of Alexander

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[156] Pentland, "Indignant Nation."

[157] "The Queen's Escape," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1882.

[158] David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,' c.1820–1977," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), 101–64; Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism*.

II, for example, manifested the political possibilities of regicide and prompted a dramatic break with the imperial styles of previous regimes.[159] But failed assassination attempts and the responses to them could also have dynamic effects. In nineteenth-century Britain, they both shaped and underlined some of the key tensions within the modern monarchy. In particular, the monarchy's cultivation of a myth of accessibility, closer relationships with the proliferating press, and role as an exemplar of domesticity prompted attempts at personal intrusion and attack. These in turn necessitated legislation and security measures to protect the royal person, and what Poole has called a "rescripting of 'ordinariness,'" which ensured that royal interaction with the people at large was a tightly constrained and carefully mediated spectacle.[160] Attacks on sovereigns and their families were not, of course, the only source of this development, but they were nonetheless a key ingredient in the making of modern monarchy.

Not least, the rescripting provided a ready means of contrasting British life with assassination cultures of other regimes. The last attempt on the German Emperor Wilhelm I's life, by a disgruntled academic, Dr. Karl Nobiling, in 1878 could have been narrated in the British press as the deranged act of an individual desperate for notoriety. However, apart from a few remarks on mental-health issues within his family, the press in Britain presented Nobiling as a socialist and political fanatic, an embodiment of aberrant philosophy that made "the German mind" susceptible to "systems of fundamental belief" and his actions as a misdirected protest against German militarism.[161] The last shots fired at Queen Victoria less than four years later were quickly and unquestionably labeled the acts of a morbid mind. While Russian tsars, French and German emperors, or American presidents might face assassins spawned in part by an excess of autocracy or an excess of democracy or the greater propensity of their peoples to "fanaticism," attempts on the British royal family were only explicable as the products of individual derangement or of malign foreign influences.[162]

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[159] Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, 2006), chaps. 12–13; Daniel Beer, "'To a Dog, a Dog's Death!' Naïve Monarchism and Regicide in Imperial Russia, 1878–1884," *Slavic Review* 80, no. 1 (2021): 112–32.

[160] Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, 3.

[161] "The Attempted Assassination," *Times*, 5 June 1878; see also "Nobiling, the Assassin," *Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1878; "The Attempt to Assassinate the Emperor of Germany," *Economist*, 8 June 1878; "Attempted Assassination of the Emperor of Germany," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 9 June 1878.

[162] Bailey, "Social Emotions," 118–19.