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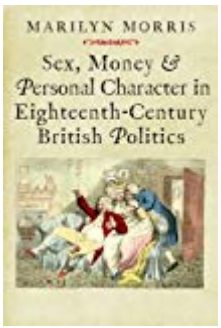

Marilyn Morris. *Sex, Money and Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. 272 pp. $85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-20845-0.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

This book investigates the deep roots of public interest in the personal lives of the political elite, tracing them back to the eighteenth century. The process is presented as essentially beginning in the age of Robert Walpole and culminating under the reign of George III. The chapters revolve around comparing George II's era with that of George III. Morris convincingly argues that these two periods provide a strong parallel because both had strong ministries. Both Walpole's and William Pitt's governments suffered from the difficulties of funding war, and from accusations that they were corrupt and encroaching upon monarchial authority. H-War subscribers will find that war was not prominent in the personal politics of the eighteenth century. It was always a source of royal woe in its demands on state coffers, but in the 1790s, it also inspired the prince to wear military dress. Anxieties about Britain's ability to vanquish revolutionary France caused the press to "snipe" at the Prince of Wales's thinning hair in 1797 (p. 160). As the frivolity of these latter examples indicates, military concerns factored very little in the personal politics of the eighteenth century.

Chapters 2 and 3 compare the early and later decades of the century through the lens of individual tensions played out in the press. Men such as Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Richard Steele, John Hervey, William Pulteney, and Philip Stanhope Chesterfield waged battles in print, alleging corruption, betrayal, and sexual intrigue. Classical influences and allusions to sodomy were stronger in the earlier period. By the 1790s, sexual liaisons remained significant, but sodomy had declined as a metaphor for the usurpation of power. Personal politics were rife with contradictions, not the least of which being the fact that domestic bliss and conjugal fidelity were valorized alongside "clubability"—a man's prowess at gaming and womanizing. While principles pushed many to align themselves against Charles James Fox, their clear regard for his clubability demonstrates the strong pull of personal relationships in Hanoverian politics.

These insights are developed further by exploring press coverage of the ceremonial and domestic lives in the courts of George II and his grandson. The latter era saw much more intimate news coverage, which humanized royalty. A similar shift occurred in caricature, which took on a much less formal aura under George III, who welcomed it as a sign of peoples' affection and comfort with their monarch. This could also have come about, Morris notes, because the Crown was more secure after weathering the Jacobite threats. Increasingly, royals attracted attention by what they wore. Though ostentatious display might demand great outlays of tax revenue, the public did not always condemn it. Costly royal spectacle was acceptable when it served to show Britain's importance on the international stage, Morris observes, or when it helped to promote local industry.

Morris demonstrates the significance of women in the political life of the period throughout the book, but especially in the penultimate chapter. Though they might have been relegated to the periphery, women such as Henrietta Ponsonby and Mary Wortley Montagu both engaged in the personal politics of the Hanoverian age. Where Ponsonby's charms induced the Prince of Wales to offer to make George Canning prime minister, Montagu spurned the possibility of using her sexuality to gain political influence. Instead, she voiced her views anonymously in print, and through direct communication in the intellectual circles through which she moved. In both cases, however, Morris underscores the intimate and personal knowledge of kings and statesmen that informed political opinion and influenced the governing process.

Implicit in the book is a sense that modern US politics has key similarities with Britain in the eighteenth century. While compelling, this notion elides some important features that make the personal politics of the eighteenth century a different character from today's United States. Most significantly, the community consuming print was much smaller in the Hanoverian age. One might even go so far as to suggest that politics was personal in part because many of the readers of political print were themselves personally—albeit often distantly—connected to the social spheres around Parliament and court. Though she alludes several times to popular demonstrations that hint at broader public engagement with personal politics, Morris has not probed this in any depth and remains focused on the evidence surrounding elite participants. Ultimately, however, Morris argues that the royal court, in personalizing politics, created an enduring legacy. This argument remains convincing despite the book's lack of insight into the consumption of this message beyond the highest social levels.

The book's strength is its incredible command of the primary and secondary literature of eighteenth-century court life. Marilyn Morris combines analysis of key biographies with all of the relevant political and social histories of this period to great effect. Not only has she marshaled a very large body of historiography in this investigation, Morris also demonstrates intimate knowledge of an enormous cast of characters from the political scene in the early and late decades of the eighteenth century. She uses a vast array of primary sources that includes not only newspapers and other print literature, but also letters, diaries, and caricatures. She reads the latter with the expertise of an insider, despite her twenty-first-century vantage point. ***Sex, Money and Personal Character*** is valuable reading for anyone interested in the world of high politics in eighteenth-century Britain. It offers a front-row seat alongside genteel participants at the theater, gaming tables, coffee houses, royal court, and houses of Parliament, while simultaneously allowing a glimpse into their most private spaces and thoughts.

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