



ROBERT CRUIKSHANK

A SCENE IN THE NEW FARCE OF THE LADY AND THE DEVIL, JUNE 1820

William Anthony Hay

ROBERT CRUIKSHANK'S PRINT *A Scene in the New Farce of the Lady and the Devil* shows a messenger dramatically announcing Queen Caroline's arrival in England to an alarmed George IV and his advisors deliberating on plans for securing the king a divorce. Lord Liverpool, the prime minister, echoes the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Manners Sutton, appealing for divine mercy as the king screams "the Devil" at the news with his crown falling off. A spilled bottle of curaçao liqueur at George IV's feet nods to his reputation for drunkenness while marking surprise at the news. Lord Castlereagh, the foreign secretary with one hand resting on "plans for divorce" with an inkwell falling to the floor sits beside Lord Liverpool. Lord Sidmouth, home secretary and former prime minister, is across the table from them in the foreground. With his wig and an uneasy look, Lord Eldon, the Lord Chancellor and keeper of the king's conscience, occupies the end of the table closest to George IV.

Cruikshank's title comes from a play by William Dimond (c. 1784-1834) first performed at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane on May 3, 1820. *The Lady and the Devil, A Musical Drama in Two Acts* was a farce taken from the older Spanish comedy *The Phantom Lady* (*La Dama Duenda*) by Pedro Calderon de

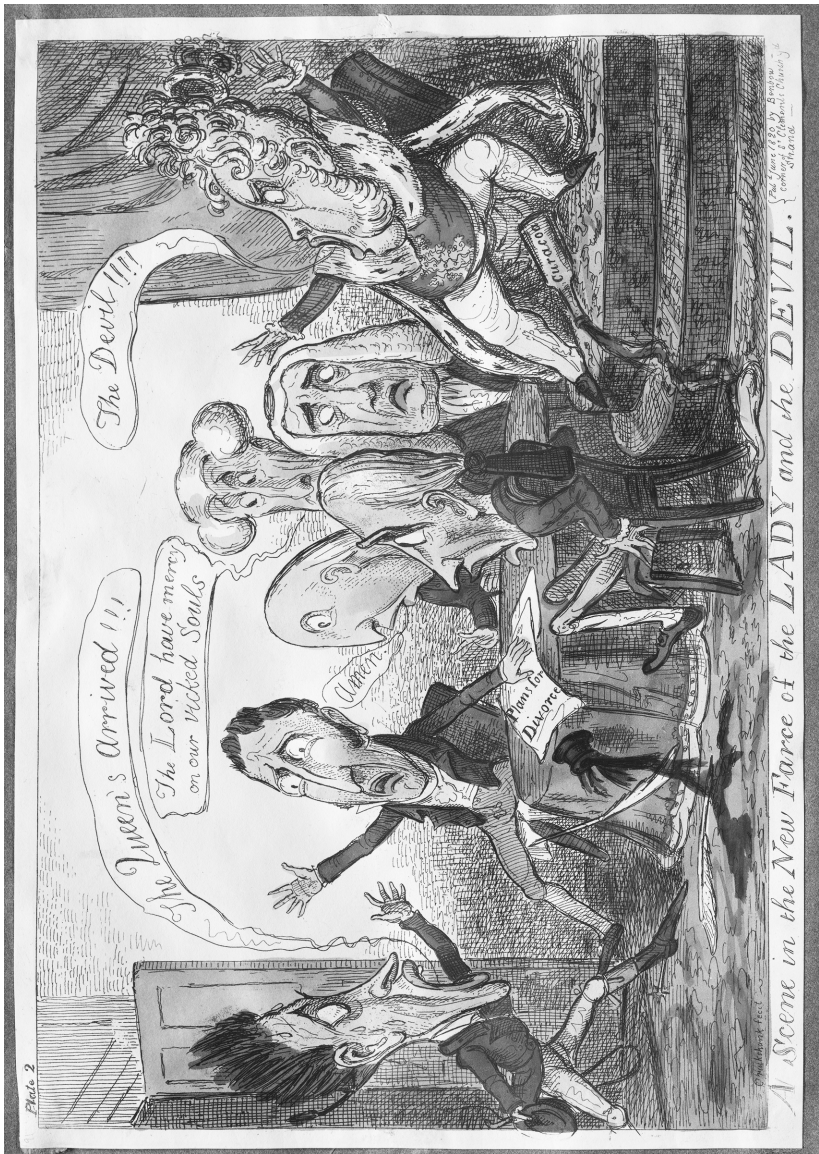
William Anthony Hay is professor of history at Mississippi State University and the author of Lord Liverpool: A Political Life (2018), and The Whig Revival, 1808-1830 (2004). Copyright 2020 William Anthony Hay.

la Barca in 1629. Dimond's play adapted to comedy his own period's melodramatic style with its focus on love and relationships in the story of a young Italian widow trying to win the heart of an English officer and exaggerated characters and scenes of surprise played for emotional impact. Cruikshank burlesques figures in this print with goggling eyes and long faces that uses a style different from his more exact representation of subjects' features in other prints. His father Isaac Cruikshank's *Long Heads Upon Change, or the Return of Lord Lauderdale* (October 1806) similarly exaggerates facial expression and physical form to amplify emotions. The burlesque style of *A New Scene in the Farce of the Lady and the Devil* captures the mix of horrified alarm and dread with which George IV and his advisors greet Queen Caroline's arrival.

Caroline's return to England after a prolonged sojourn abroad detonated a political crisis that gave king and ministers ample grounds for alarm. Their estranged marriage had curdled into bitter personal resentment that from 1816 had prompted the then-Prince Regent to press for a divorce. An inquiry into her behavior known as the Milan Commission that sought incriminating evidence of adulterous misconduct to force a formal separation aroused Caroline's suspicions in 1819. When George III's death in January 1820 forced the question of a divorce by bringing his son to the throne with her as presumptive queen consort, Lord Liverpool sought to achieve the king's aim with minimal controversy by negotiating a settlement with Caroline's lawyer, Henry Brougham. Those talks in London stalled until the prime minister warned Brougham in mid-April that her arrival in England would make parliamentary proceedings against her inevitable. Brougham met Caroline in France at St. Omer near Calais where she rejected the terms offered and crossed the English Channel to land at Dover on June 5 to a cheering crowd.

Matthew Wood, a radical London alderman newly elected to parliament who had joined her circle, played to Caroline's resentments in hopes she would provide a rallying point for popular opposition to Lord Liverpool's administration. Earlier in February, the publicist William Cobbett's daughter Anne had noted the beginning of a party forming behind the queen as her situation drew public notice.¹ The development marked an ominous sign as

¹ Jane Robbins, *The Trial of Queen Caroline: The Scandalous Affair that Nearly Ended a Monarchy* (London: Free Press, 2006), 106-7, 93.



A Scene in the New Farce of the Lady and the Devil. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University Library.

the cultural weight of royalism legitimized agitation and gave it subversive power. Thomas Hodgskin, a young associate of the London radical Francis Place, found “something poetical and chivalrous and at the same time loyal in contending for a Queen and a woman.” Agitation for Caroline politicized the hitherto apathetic. Moral questions raised by her appeal as a scorned woman reinforced standing charges of corruption against the wider political system.²

The queen’s case also had implications for parliamentary politics, especially when differences between king and cabinet over the divorce made the former consider recruiting a new administration which could deliver the separation he wanted. Opposition politicians had often looked to an heir at odds with the reigning monarch as a vehicle for their own ambitions. Frederick, Prince of Wales, the future George IV and, to a lesser degree, the latter’s daughter Princess Charlotte had shown the pattern at work. Caroline now threatened to employ these established ways of exploiting differences within the royal family and a new round of popular agitation that would extend the struggle beyond the metropolitan elite. Insiders knew enough of the king and queen to see fault on both sides, but the wider public read her plight as the suffering of a woman scorned by a debauched husband. No wonder Liverpool sought to settle matters by negotiation before the situation brought a larger crisis.

Unfortunately, Caroline’s arrival in England sparked the crisis Liverpool had tried to avoid. The London crowd that cheered her entry to the city soon turned violent by demanding houses display lights in her honor and then breaking windows of dwellings that did not comply. By likening her arrival to the landings of William the Conqueror, Henry VII, and William of Orange, albeit armed with only native courage and “conscious innocence,” *The Times* newspaper, which had ties with Brougham, posed an implicit challenge three nights of rioting underlined.³ Even if, as Lord Eldon suggested, few among the middling or upper classes sided with Caroline besides the

² Jonathan Fulcher, “The Loyalist Response to the Queen Caroline Agitations,” *Journal of British Studies* 34 (October 1995), 484-486; Thomas Lacquer, “The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics and Art in the Reign of George IV,” *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982), 458; Tamara Hunt, “Morality and Modernity in the Queen Caroline Affair,” *Albion* 23 (1991), 697-722.

³ *The Times*, June 6, 1820.

profligate, or those who are “endeavoring to acquire power through mischief,” they provided material enough for a queen’s party, especially if popular radicals used her as a figurehead or the Whig opposition played for office. The painter Sir Thomas Lawrence, who thought Caroline aimed at revolution, feared “what strumpet audacity may be able to do supported by a headstrong mob.”⁴ Others likened her to Catherine II of Russia, or the Duke of Orleans who had undermined Louis XVI as France slipped into revolution.

Exaggerated as such parallels seemed, they showed the growing unease when Cruikshank’s print appeared. Discipline among guards regiments in London faltered as soldiers protested against extra duty keeping order. Liverpool sent the Duke of Wellington a report in late June that agitators in public houses zealously preached the Spanish army’s example of recently aiding a coup against their king. Events in Europe where soldiers in Naples recently had joined a successful uprising and the heir to the French throne had been assassinated in January made 1820 seem increasingly like a year of revolution. Although the army in England had been reliable during violent unrest in 1816 and 1819, even guardsmen now toasted the queen’s health. Disaffection among soldiers liable to be influenced by popular sentiment unless kept under tight discipline and apart from civilians threatened to remove a brake on the mob. As the diarist and society wit Charles Greville quipped, the extinguisher seemed to have caught fire.⁵ Not surprisingly parliament, like the prime minister, wanted the controversy ended without the further controversy of a public inquiry.

Cruikshank’s satire of George IV and his key advisors responding to the news of Caroline’s arrival deftly captures the moment of June 1820. The dramatic reaction his burlesque of the scene depicts downplayed, if anything, the real fears among the men it depicts. Dorothy George’s *Catalog of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* attributes the work to John Marshall, junior and publisher William McCreary of Nassau Street in Dublin, Ireland. That print at the

⁴ Horace Twiss, *The Public and Private Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon with Selections from his Correspondence* 3 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1844), II:372; *The Farington Diary*, James Grieg, ed. 8 vols. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1923-8), VIII:252-3.

⁵ *The Greville Memoirs*, Roger Fulford and Lytton Strachey, eds. 8 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1938), I:100.

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British Museum, however, is an unlicensed copy of Robert Cruikshank's original published in London by William Benbow held at the Lewis Walpole Library as part of George Humphrey's shop catalog from 1820.

