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The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV*

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Seldom has there been so much commotion over what appears to be so little as in the Queen Caroline affair, the agitation on behalf of a not-very-virtuous queen whose still less virtuous husband, George IV, wanted desperately to divorce her. During much of 1820 the “queen’s business” captivated the nation. “It was the only question I have ever known,” wrote the radical critic William Hazlitt, “that excited a thorough popular feeling. It struck its roots into the heart of the nation; it took possession of every house or cottage in the kingdom. . . .” In obscure Welsh coastal villages, in rural southwest Hampshire, in hamlets hundreds of miles from London where the people knew “as little of radicalism as they do of necromancy,” Caroline found fervid support. Her cause, as William Cobbett said, “let loose for a time every tongue and pen in England.”¹

The uproar was, of course, about more than a royal domestic quarrel. King George’s efforts to divorce and degrade the queen he had hated so long assumed symbolic weight far in excess of its manifest political or constitutional importance. This article is in part an account of this infusion of significance, of how a divorce action became a great radical as well as a women’s cause.

But it is also a study in the function of the trivial. The Queen Caroline agitations raise the question of what it is about certain political systems, considered both institutionally and culturally, that allows them to mask the serious behind the silly, to sustain level upon level of com-

* This paper began three years ago as a collaborative effort with Craig Calhoun of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. I am grateful to him for early discussions of the subject and for his comments on later drafts. I also want to thank members of the Shelby Cullum Davis seminar at Princeton and my colleagues on the editorial board of *Representations* at Berkeley as well as Peter Brown, Joe Butwin, Herrick Chapman, Geoff Grossick, Natalie Davis, Stephen Greenblatt, R. M. Hartwell, Lynn A. Hunt, Michael Ignatieff, William Irvine, Tom Metcalf, Sheldon Rothblatt, Irv Scheiner, Randy Starn, Lawrence Stone, Dorothy Thompson, Judith Walkowitz, and Reginald Zelnik for their comments and discussion on various versions of this essay.

¹ William Hazlitt, “Commonplaces” no. 73 (Nov. 15, 1823), in *The Complete Works*, ed. P. Howe (Toronto and London: J. W. Dent, 1934), 20: 136.

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plicated innocuous stories, dramatic but ultimately trivial narratives, which overwhelm potentially more dangerous discourse. Thus, if the first parts of this essay examine the making of Caroline as a radical cause, later sections are concerned with how that cause was rendered harmless by being transformed into melodrama, farce, and romance.

Finally, this article is about silence. William Hazlitt, some three years after the event, understood exactly what had happened.

It [the Queen's cause] spread like wildfire over the kingdom; the public mind was electrical. So it should be on the other occasions; it was only so on this. An individual may be oppressed, a nation may be trampled upon, mankind may be threatened with annihilation of their rights, and the threat enforced; and not a finger is raised, not a heart sinks, not a pulse beats quicker . . . a momentary burst of vain indignation is heard, dies away, and is forgotten. Truth has no echo, but folly and imposture have a thousand reverberations in the hollowness of the human heart. At the very time when all England was mad about the poor Queen, a man named Bruce was sent to Botany Bay for having spoken to another man who was convicted of sedition; and no notice was taken.²

How, if not why, “folly and imposture have a thousand reverberations” is perhaps the central question of this essay.

Caroline of Brunswick seems ludicrously ill suited for the role of radical heroine. Her arranged marriage in 1795 to the future George IV was a disaster, a melancholy joke, from the very start. As informed rumor had it, “the morning that dawned on the consummation [of the marriage] witnessed its virtual dissolution.” The Princess Charlotte whose memory was to figure so powerfully in the 1820 agitations “was born precisely at the moment prescribed by nature,” nine months later, and the royal couple very soon thereafter gave up all pretense of a life together.³

George nevertheless continued to harass Caroline. With his encouragement she was, in 1807, accused—though ultimately found innocent by the so-called “Delicate Investigation”—of bearing a bastard child. By 1814, many widely publicized quarrels later, Caroline was finally persuaded to quit England in return for £35,000 per annum, payable as long as she stayed away (see figure 1). And, for six years she did. Pre-

² Ibid.

³ The best of the many modern biographies of Caroline is Thea Holme, *Caroline* (Hamish Hamilton, 1979); Robert Huish's *Memoirs of Caroline, Queen Consort of England* (Vol. 1, 1820; Vol. 2, 1821) is immensely informative and, though pro-Caroline, generally fair; for the rumor in question see John Wilson Croker, *A Letter From The King* (1820), p. 6, a pamphlet which appeared in at least twenty-eight editions.

THE EMBARKATION.



“ The scarfed barks put from her native bay,
“ Hugged and embraced by the strumpet wind.”
SHAKSPEARE.

Figure 1.

cise details of her sojourn on the Continent remain obscure, although the main outlines are all too clear. She early on acquired an Italian courier named Bergami, promoted him to *major domo* of her household, and soon moved with him and his entire family into the Villa d'Este on Lake Como. Whether “adulterous intercourse” actually took place, as was charged in 1820, will never be known for sure, but everyone at the time in a position to know or care, from her lawyer's brother to Lord Byron, was certain that the pair were lovers; they lived together as man and wife.⁴

⁴ Already in 1813–14 the “woman wronged” motif, assiduously cultivated by Caroline's lawyer, Henry Brougham, was good press. The *News's* circulation rose 27 percent in four weeks when it took up the cause under this banner and the *Times's* circulation similarly increased; see A. Aspinall, *Politics and the*

Had Caroline remained in Italy, history and the radicals could have happily forgotten her. But she did not. In 1820 when her husband became king she prepared to return to England to assume her duties as queen consort. Negotiations to keep her away foundered on the issue of the liturgy. She demanded inclusion by name in the Anglican prayers for the royal family; George, willing to introduce her to European courts, was adamant in refusing to introduce her to God. Furious at the insult, she came home and he made good his threat of seeking a divorce. Against the advice of his ministers he demanded that a "Bill of Pains and Penalties" be brought in the House of Lords which would condemn the behavior of the queen, deprive her of her station, and grant him his freedom. (George notoriously lacked the "clean hands" to proceed in Ecclesiastical Court.) The debate on this bill constituted the "Trial of Queen Caroline," which was the centerpiece for the agitations in her name, and its withdrawal, after passing narrowly, constituted her acquittal.⁵

The queen's subsequent career in England was short and increasingly sad. After a triumphal Thanksgiving procession to St. Paul's in late November and a spate of marches in early January she was increasingly alone. The Whigs in the House of Commons gave up her cause after a series of defeats between January 26 and February 26, 1821; in July the crowd hissed her as she tried to make her way into George's coronation, her way blocked by twenty enormous prizefighters dressed as royal pages. It was not until August 1821, when she died of a bowel

Press 1780–1850 (Home and Van Thal, 1949), p. 307; James Brougham/Henry Brougham, March 11, 1819, in A. Aspinall, *The Letters of King George IV, 1812–1830* (Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 281; and *Letters and Journals of George, Lord Byron*, ed. L. A. Marchand (Harvard University Press, 1976) 5: 155. Both James Brougham and Byron were generally sympathetic to Caroline and were thus not writing out of the malice which informed most commentaries on the queen's morals.

⁵ For an account of the negotiations sympathetic to Brougham see Chester New, *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1820* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 228–247; for one which views him as acting duplicitously in his own interest see A. Aspinall, *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party* (Manchester University Press, 1939), pp. 103–113; the definitive account from the Ministry's perspective is J. E. Cookson, *Lord Liverpool's Administration: The Crucial Years, 1815–1832* (Edinburgh: Scottish University Press, 1975), pp. 200–228. While the ministry's disagreements with the king were not generally known, the main documents of the negotiation were embarrassingly public; see, for example, Cobbett's *Political Register* for June 10, June 17, and June 24, 1820; for the text of the Bill see *Journals of the House of Lords*, July 5, 1820, 53: 253; for the parliamentary history of the proceedings see Cookson, *ibid.*, pp. 228–300.

obstruction, that the people rallied to her again. Then, two men were shot dead in the riots which successfully forced her funeral cortege through the City against the government's wishes. A plaque reading "Caroline of Brunswick, Injured Queen of England" was mysteriously ripped from her coffin during the night as it lay awaiting the morning tide at Harwich and she departed England unmarked.⁶

Silly as this story might seem, the Caroline agitations were, as I. Prothero has recently argued, a central event in the history of popular politics. The queen gave the London radicals a cause which allowed them back on the streets with a dazzling display of pro-queen, anti-king political theater. She provided a shield behind which to defy and confront authority in relative safety; at the height of post-Napoleonic repression, censorship was helpless against so massive a mobilization, one which, in any case, asked only that the rights of the king's consort be recognized. Moreover, Prothero suggests that the campaign for the queen's rights showed the limitations of the radical movement in the 1820s. Its success depended, he argues, on the support of the political class so that when the Whigs in the House of Commons dropped the queen, the radicals were powerless to revive her cause: their theater could be played only on a stage erected by others.⁷

All of this is true. Nevertheless, when Prothero suggests that the Caroline agitations were largely the production of a politically and theatrically skilled metropolitan leadership, he recognizes only part of

⁶ See Austin Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition 1815–1830* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), pp. 156–57; see Huish, *Memoirs* 2: 725–817, for a detailed account of her funeral, the riot, and her departure from England. The map in I. Prothero's excellent account of the Caroline agitations, in *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London* (Dawson, 1979), pp. 134–35 makes Huish's account more comprehensible. See also Anon., *Funeral of Queen Caroline* (Penzance: J. Thomas, 1821); "An Account of the Funeral Procession of her Late Majesty . . ." (Newcastle on Tyne: Marshall, 1821); and Joseph Nightingale, *The Last Days of Queen Caroline* (1822).

⁷ Prothero, pp. 132–159. His is the most perceptive modern account of the agitations. E. P. Thompson dismissed them in less than one page as but the occasion for "Hone and Cruickshank to produce some of their most glorious lampoons," but more recently has supported Prothero's revisionist position. See *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; New York: Vintage ed., 1966), pp. 708–09 and *New Society*, May 3, 1979, pp. 275–277. The most useful general account is in Elie Halevy, *The Liberal Awakening 1815–1830* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966) pp. 80–106, although his argument that the popular movement on Caroline's behalf was simply a byproduct of high politics, of Whig-Tory parliamentary skirmishes, is no longer supportable. In fact, popular support for the queen antedated Whig commitment to her cause by months; the politicians followed the people. See Mitchell, pp. 142–146.

their significance. Caroline stirred men and women not only in the City and Westminster but out in the countryside, in Nettlebed and Three Mile Cross. She tapped deep cultural reserves of popular theater and collective action. Thus the problem remains: how did Caroline's cause, as espoused by men like William Cobbett, Thomas Wooler, or Mathew Wood in London, come to be the cause of the nation? And, how did the radical significance of the agitations in the end succumb, as they did, to those conservative elements of romantic farce with which they had been in tension from the beginning?

I. THE RADICAL CAROLINE

To contemporaries it was not clear that the agitations would end without catastrophe. Again and again, from all sides of the political spectrum came expressions of fear and uncertainty. Castlereagh as early as February 1820 wrote that the Ministry was desperate to avoid "volunteering, on the part of the King, the scandal and the dangers of a public trial in these factious times." "One cannot calculate on anything less than subversion of all government and authority, if this goes on; and how it is to end, no one can foresee," a colleague told the Duke of Buckingham. Numerous radical papers "now circulating most extensively . . . are dangerous beyond anything I can describe," he continued. Even in country neighborhoods, "the public mind is inflamed. . . ." Lord Colchester got a note from one of his informants that the procedures to dispose of a queen might well lead to disturbances "to which I cannot foresee the termination."⁸

Back and forth went the expressions of anguish and concern. Lady Jerningham confessed to her diary, "This country is I fear nearer disaster than it has been since the days of Charles I . . . I am not usually a Croaker and I hope I am now mistaken, but the spirit of the present time is most alarming." Or from members of Canning's circle: "I won't venture on any predictions, but the alarm is general, lest the mob should overpower the Civil force and the troops refuse to act against the mob—and what can then be done. . . ." Lord Tierney, one of the Whig chieftains, thought "everything was worse and worse out of doors." His ally William Lamb, the future Lord Melbourne, wrote Wilberforce "that there appears to be a great danger of serious popular tumult and insurrection." Wellington's brother, Wellesley-Pole, was

⁸ *Correspondence, Dispatches and Other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh*, ed. Charles W. Vane (1853; 3rd ser.), 4: 210; W. H. Fremantle/Buckingham, Aug. 30, 1820 in Buckingham, *Memoirs*, 1: 68; *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester* (3 vols., 1861; H. Legge/Colchester, July 10, 1820), 3: 246.

near despair: "Everything was very bad. . . . Insolence and insubordination out of doors, weakness and wickedness within."⁹

This sense of gloom was heightened by a realization that the power of the judicial process worked not only to repress sedition but also to give it voice and to display plainly the weakness of authority. Queen Caroline's case came at the end of a long series of political prosecutions. And, as a radical paper ominously noted, not since 1688, when the trial of the seven bishops produced a revolution, had the country been so riveted by what happened in the courts of law.¹⁰

From the beginning of 1820, scarcely a week went by without the report of another legal drama. The trial of Orator Hunt for his role in the reform meeting which led to the Peterloo massacre filled entire issues of the provincial and metropolitan press, as did the trials of the Cato Street conspirators. Moreover, though the authorities had outwitted these would-be revolutionaries and foiled their plans to blow up the Cabinet, their executions could have brought England's rulers little comfort.

The audience to the hangings began to gather at four in the morning; thousands paid from 2s. 6d. to 3 guineas to view the scene from rooftops and balconies; the crowds on the ground were "incalculably large." Banners, should they be needed, had been prepared by the authorities saying "The Riot Act has been read." Arthur Thistlewood mounted the scaffold and told the crowd that he hoped the world would consider him a man sincere in his endeavors. Tidd ran up the ladder and met the cheers of the crowd with cheers of his own and bows to the far corners of the square. James Ing, wearing an old butcher's coat so that the executioner would not get his good clothes, was met with huzzas. He responded by singing "Give me Liberty or Give me Death" and bowing to the cheers of the crowd. Brunt used the presence of soldiers to preach against the military government which he said ran the country. Throughout the grisly drama the crowd shouted "murder" at the executioner and "God bless" to the prisoners. When the severed heads of the hanged men were held up, tens of thousands booed and hissed. In short, the theater of judicial terror had completely broken down. Though the state had claimed its victims, its

⁹ *The Jerningham Letters (1780–1843)*, ed. Egerton Castle (1896), 2: 168; *George Canning and his Friends*, ed. Josceline Bagot (1909), 2: 98; Lord Tierney quoted in Edmund Phipps, ed., *Memoirs of the Political and Literary Life of Robert Plumer Ward* (1820), 2: 61; *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, ed. by Robert, Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce (1840), 2: 435; Wellesley-Pole's remarks are in Ward, 2: 71.

¹⁰ *The Champion*, March 19, 1820, no. 376, p. 178.

power had been mocked and its claims to legitimacy ridiculed.¹¹ Caroline provided the occasion for yet more sustained mockery and ridicule of constituted authority.

George IV's proclamation as king in January was greeted with cries of "Queen, Queen, Long Live the Queen" in a number of cities. He was booed even at Ascot, while Alderman Wood, the queen's great supporter, was pulled triumphantly through the streets of the metropolis to a chorus of "Long Live the Queen." Slogans like "The Queen Forever, the King in the River" were chalked on London's walls.¹²

There were scores of accounts circulated in the public press and by Home Office spies of small rebellions in the queen's name. How many times must this conversation, overheard by a Home Office informant on Cleve Hill near Cheltenham, have been repeated in the fields and towns of England? "God bless the queen," said one man. "God damn the king," said a second. "Amen," said a third. Such outbursts appeared all the more dangerous in the military whose loyalty was considered crucial. A soldier in the Third Regiment Foot was charged with sedition when he accosted his sergeant with "the queen forever" and violent epithets against the king. He got off with a 5s. fine, claiming drunkenness. Another soldier arrested for drunkenness in Birmingham called to the crowd of 300 who had come to rescue him that his only offense had been drinking to the health of the queen.¹³

During the summer and fall of 1820 there were almost daily confrontations between the mob and Caroline's aristocratic opponents, small rituals through which the people asserted their claims against the embodiments of authority. The Marquis of Anglesea was regularly beset by the crowds, booed and taunted with jokes about his own divorce and cries of "Queen, Queen." Castlereagh and Sidmouth had trouble keeping the windows of their mansions intact. A large crowd in Aylesbury stopped the Duke of Buckingham's carriage, pulled his postboys off their horses, threw sheep's heads at the chariot, and only then allowed the duke a narrow escape to his seat at Stow. The Earl of

¹¹ I have taken the account of the execution from *The Times* (May 2, 1820) and the *Manchester Observer* (May 6, 1820); there is little variation between these and other metropolitan or provincial reports.

¹² See, for example, the report from Huddersfield, *Leeds Mercury*, Feb. 12, p. 3; Liverpool *Mercury*, Feb. 11, 1820, p. 259, citing Cobbett's *Evening Post*; Princess de Lievan, *The Private Letters to Prince Metternich*, ed. Peter Quinnell (John Murray, 1948), p. 77.

¹³ HO 40/14, Wood/Hobhouse, Aug. 4, 1820; *Courier*, Oct. 7, p. 3; HO 40/14, Spry/Hobhouse, Aug. 25, 1820.

Bridgewater was pelted with sheep's entrails on his way through Watford.¹⁴

Lesser magistrates suffered similar abuse or worse. One in Somerset who opposed the queen had his ricks and barn burnt; another in Loughborough found himself stoned by day and his house attacked at night. The mob broke the windows of the Mayor of Canterbury when he refused them permission to burn effigies of the queen's enemies. They apparently tried to force the doors of his house and were partially dispersed only when the Riot Act was read and a troop of dragoons appeared on the scene. In Lincoln the local magisterial villain was paraded through the town in effigy and then burnt.¹⁵

Caroline also inspired what appeared to be a concerted attack on the Church of England. In fact, Lord Holland believed that not since the Puritan revolution had the people been so dangerously alienated from the Anglican establishment. At the very least, as Wilberforce argued, the omission of the queen's name from the liturgy was a "most unhappy circumstance" which each Sunday tended to bring the ecclesiastical establishment into discredit. Moreover, the dissenters, who generally continued to pray for the queen, gained amongst the religious middle classes because of the Anglicans' refusal to do so.¹⁶

Whether the Church was genuinely hurt by its stand on Caroline is questionable, but there is no doubt that scores of anticlerical attacks were mounted in her name. They ranged from hanging a thirty-foot effigy of a bishop by his heels from a Thames boat mast, to stoning the Bishop of Llandaff, to breaking a country vicarage's windows. Although the Church's increasingly strong identification with Tory op-

¹⁴ Even the king's mistresses suffered, though strangely the Lady Hertford's windows were smashed to pieces while the Lady Conyngnam's survived (*The Greville Memoirs*, ed. Lytton Strachey and Roger Fulford [Macmillan, 1938], 1: 96); for Anglesey, see *Courier*, Aug. 24, p. 4; for Wellington see *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, ed. Francis Bamford (Macmillan, 1950), p. 36; *New Times*, Nov. 8, 1820, p. 3; Lievan, *Letters*, p. 69; for Castlereagh and Sidmouth see *New Times*, Nov. 9, 1820, p. 3, and George Pellew, ed. *The Life and Correspondence of First Viscount Sidmouth* (1847) 3: 330–31; Cobbett's *Political Register*, Nov. 18, 1820, cols. 1250, 1235–37, and the *London Chronicle*, Nov. 15, 1820, p. 3, and Nov. 18, p. 3.

¹⁵ For Wincanton, Somerset, see HO 40/15 [illegible]/Sidmouth, December 4, 1820, pp. 232–34; for Loughborough see HO 40/15 Hardy/Sidmouth, Nov. 21, 1820; for Lincoln, see *Stamford News*, Nov. 24, 1820, p. 2. The Norwich magistracy received threatening anonymous letters over their refusal to countenance an illumination; see HO 40/15, Nov. 21, 1820, pp. 179–280.

¹⁶ Henry Richard Vassall, 3rd Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807–1821*, ed. Lord Stavordale (Dutton, 1905) p. 288; *The Life of William Wilberforce* (5 vols; 1838), 5: 85–86.

pression lay behind much of this hostility against the clergy, a local vicar's immediate offense was most likely to be his refusal to allow a peal of bells in honor of Caroline. The story of the Reverend Charles Jarvis of Cheltenham is typical. He declined late in the night of September 14 to allow "his" church's bells to be rung to welcome Thomas Denman, the queen's Solicitor General, who had come to the spa hoping to recuperate from jaundice and the fatigue of the trial. Instead, poor Denman found himself at a political rally initiated by townspeople who met him a mile out of town, removed the horses from his coach, and pulled him into the city. The crowd broke open the belfry, the key having been denied them, rang the bells, and then proceeded over the next three hours to break every window in the Reverend Jarvis's house. The near riot was dispersed only after Denman went among the people asking them to go home.¹⁷

Some clergymen were less lucky. In Chatteris, Cambridgeshire, the crowd similarly broke open the belfry after the vicar had refused to give them the keys, but then proceeded in charivari fashion with drums and horns to his house where they played music, groaned, and hissed until four in the morning. With no authorities coming to dispel them, they broke all his windows and remained to jeer as he rode off for help at dawn. Likewise in Devizes, Bath, and Newberry, Seaton, Farringdon, Berkshire, Kingston-upon-Thames, and Flixton, Lancashire, clergymen who refused to show some sign of honor for the queen found their windows, gates, or belfries smashed, their pews abandoned, or their churches draped in her colors. In such small ways common people in scores of places vented their anger, under Caroline's banner, against an overweening clergy.¹⁸

¹⁷ H. Maxwell, ed. *The Creevy Papers* (Dutton, 1905) 1: 341; *London Examiner*, Nov. 19, 1820, p. 749; and *Political Register*, Nov. 18, 1820, col. 1238ff.; *Memoirs of Thomas, first Lord Denman*, ed. Joseph Arnould (1873), 1: 129–130, and HO 40/14 Jervis/Hobhouse, Sept. 16, 1820.

¹⁸ For Chatteris, *Stamford News*, Nov. 17, 1820, p. 3; for Devizes, HO 40/15, Salmon/Hobhouse; for Bath, *New Times*, Nov. 21; for Newberry, see *Liverpool Mercury*, Dec. 29, 1820, p. 210; for Farringdon, *London Chronicle*, Nov. 17, 1820, p. 3, and Cobbett's *Political Register*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 1227; for Kingston, *Times*, Nov. 22, 1820, p. 3; for Seaton, *Stamford News*, Nov. 17, 1820, p. 3; for Flixton, *Manchester Observer*, Dec. 20, 1820, p. 1265; see *London Examiner*, Dec. 17, 1820, pp. 787–89 for condemnation of the clergy in their role in the agitations. Action against the clergy was, however, clearly constrained by custom. The rector of East Barnett tells a remarkable story. Bands of twenty men, he says, went around the principal houses of the town asking for beer money to celebrate the queen's acquittal. Refused at the manor house, they swore to "mark it for tomorrow" and then broke the bell at the gate. At the vicarage they made similar demands but when told by a servant that there

These kinds of protest were, of course, not new and might have appeared in all their eighteenth-century innocuousness had they not been embedded in a massive political network which extended far beyond the old borders of radicalism. For, from a conservative perspective, it was the power of public opinion and the entry of new groups into the political arena which constituted the real threat in the “queen’s business.” It was, as the future Lord Melbourne rightly noted, the self-consciousness of the people in feeling their power that was truly dangerous about the situation and it was precisely this consciousness of engaging in political action which was loudly proclaimed.¹⁹

The breadth of Caroline’s support was widely acknowledged. Creevy, admittedly a partisan, thought that the entire “middle orders” were against the Bill of Pains and Penalties. The Princess Lievan, writing to Metternich, could only explain the fact that the “solid middle class who have made England” thought the queen innocent by adducing the support she had received from the venerated George III. An informant in Hull wrote the Home Office that he knew little of what the lower orders felt regarding Caroline but that he was shocked to hear the respectable part of the inhabitants speak ill of the king and his ministers: “nine tenths of the people of this town are Enemies of his Majesty.” “The people all favour the Queen, including the respectable middle ranks,” thought Lady Palmerston.²⁰

More important, it was clear that the queen’s cause, identified by both its enemies and proponents as part of the radical movement, had taken deep root in articulate artisanal circles all over England. The cause of the Peterloo “insurgents” and the Cato Street conspirators—“to overturn altar and throne”—appeared ensconced not only in the metropolis but in every village. In London the braziers and leatherworkers and butchers and glassworkers and paperhangers and indeed almost every organized craft sent addresses, presented gifts, and marched on Caroline’s behalf. In the provinces, the lacemakers of Loughborough made what was described as a “splendid dress” for the queen at the joint expense of masters and men; women straw plait weavers of the midlands gave her a specially made bonnet; the rug weavers of Kidder-

was a sick lady in the house and asked to not make a disturbance they went quietly away (Gamow/Hobhouse 110 40/15, the Monday after Caroline’s acquittal).

¹⁹ (Lamb/Wilberforce, Aug. 2, 1820) in Wilberforce, *Correspondence*, 2: 434–435.

²⁰ *The Creevy Papers*, Sept. 6, p. 316; Lievan, *Letters*, Aug. 27, p. 66; R. H./Sidmouth, Sept. 20, 1820, 110 40/14, pp. 297–98; Lady Palmerston, *Letters*, p. 41, ed. Tresham Lever (John Murray, 1957), p. 41.

minster gave her a carpet; Sheffield artisans clubbed together to buy her a piece of local plateware; the “tradesmen and artificers of Northampton” sent an address signed by 1600 men. Oddfellows’ lodges and friendly and benevolent societies in scores of towns sent petitions and marched in celebration of the queen’s eventual triumph.²¹

Ironically, in seeking to discredit Caroline’s supporters in the eyes of the middle class and minimize the significance of their demonstrations, the ministerialist press did just the opposite. More power to radical printers, booksellers, and publicans if it were true that the Ilchester address was “of true radical manufacture” seconded by “a radical baker” and a “radical carpenter”; that the Sunderland address lay at the “shop of a notorious Radical Son of Crispin of the lowest repute” or the Whitehaven address in a radical bookseller’s shop; or that the Horsham address was gotten together by thirty men who clubbed together at a public house “for the most radical papers”; or that the High Wycombe, Southampton, and Lichfield addresses were all collected at radical “pot houses.” It is attacks like these that made the publican in Mary Russell Mitford’s greatly popular *Our Village* a recognizable figure to its bourgeois audience years later. He was a man of “independence and idleness” who “talks politics, reads newspapers, hates the minister and cries out reform. He introduced into our peaceful vicinage the rebellious innovation of an illumination on the Queen’s acquittal.”²²

Responses to attacks on the legitimacy of Caroline’s cause only lent it still more weight. The reply to an accusation that Bath’s “Male Address” originated with the rabble was that “Four thousand men take pride to espouse the cause of an injured woman—that woman a Queen.” To the claim that the subscription for the queen’s new plate in Ellesmere, Salop, represented only a small coterie, her defenders pointed out that 200 to 300 people had contributed their pennies to make up the village’s eleven-pound collection. Accused of submitting a petition

²¹ Hundreds, if not thousands, of artisanal, trade, and benevolent groups petitioned the queen, marched in her favor or sent gifts. I simply cite examples. *London Examiner*, Sept. 17, 1820, p. 606; *Manchester Gazette*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 3; *London Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 2; *Liverpool Mercury*, September 29, p. 99; *London Times*, Aug. 31, 1820, p. 3.

²² See the *Courier*, July 31, p. 3; Aug. 3, pp. 2–3; Aug. 8, p. 2; Aug. 17, p. 3; Aug. 31, p. 2; Oct. 3, p. 3; *John Bull*, Dec. 31. The debate over the meaning of popular support for Caroline was resumed with the report of each town’s address. See further for other towns *New Times*, Aug. 16, p. 3; Aug. 27, pp. 3–4; Sept. 8, p. 3; Sept. 12, p. 3; Sept. 22, p. 3; and Nov. 9, p. 3; Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village* (Boston, 1853 ed.) 1: 3. I owe the Mitford reference to Dorothy Thompson.

signed largely by the village poor, the pro-Caroline curate of Kingston and Gartely admitted, "many of those who derive their support from the parish book were anxious to subscribe their signatures," not because the curate forced them to sign but because the queen was so popular. Indeed, he claimed that he had refused the signatures of many people anxious to sign because they were not residents in his parishes.²³

This discourse about the meaning of various manifestations of support for Caroline was in fact a discourse about the power of the press and the legitimacy of a greatly expanded public opinion. The queen's cause could be, in a literal sense, popular as no previous political movement had been. While there were some seventy-five newspapers and periodicals published in England around the time of the Excise Crisis in 1734 and just over one hundred during the Wilkesite movement of the 1760s, there were more than 260 published in 1800. Their numbers continued to grow rapidly. On one Sunday in 1820 Wilberforce bought nineteen different metropolitan newspapers to follow the early stages of the queen's case. Most of the 800 or so petitions offered to the queen and most of her answers, in many cases anonymously written by William Cobbett, Samuel Parr, Robert Fellowes, or Mathew Wood, were printed in all of the ministerialist, opposition, and radical press. Week after week, the *Courier* or the *New Times*, staunchly reactionary though they were, carried the queen's assurances that she would "overthrow the power of faction and deliver the people from oppression." Even the most conservative of papers printed her claims to be what the *Loyalist* called "the French Revolutionary Leader."²⁴

The sheer volume of propaganda was staggering. Cobbett said that Hone's *Peek at the Peers*, exposing the corruption of the House of Lords and dedicated to the queen, sold 100,000 copies at 2d. each. He claimed that two million copies of the queen's *Answer to the King*, in which she retold her tale of domestic woe and pointedly warned of the political dangers arising from the "present unconstitutional, illegal and hitherto unheard-of proceedings," were published in England alone. Another half million, he thought, were published in America. There were over 500 cartoons on the queen's case published in 1820 and sev-

²³ *Times*, Sept. 16, p. 2; Sept. 22, p. 3; Sept. 23, p. 3; Sept. 25, p. 2; Dec. 20, p. 2; *London Chronicle*, Sept. 23, p. 2.

²⁴ *A Census of British Newspapers and Periodicals*, ed. R. S. Crane and F. B. Keye (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1927); Wilberforce, *Life*, 5: 66; I have noted this number of petitions from a wide variety of press sources, from Huish, *Caroline, passim*, and from J. H. Adolphus, *Memoirs of Caroline* (1821), vol. 2, which lists over 400 submitted to Caroline or on her behalf to Parliament after her acquittal; *The Loyalist*, no. 2, p. 18.

eral hundred pamphlets, not to speak of placards, banners, and uncountable column inches of newsprint. Moreover, this propaganda saturated the countryside as well as the cities; in no other instance were the radical and the reform networks so effective.²⁵

Some of this great body of print of course came from London. Cobbett, for example, advertised that any gentleman going into the country should apply at a given address for free literature; men were sent to areas within a fifty-mile radius of the capital to disseminate placards and other material. Much, however, came from Norwich, Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester, and a score of other provincial centers, and from there made its way into the countryside. Alarmed reports came into the Home Office from all quarters. Hobhouse wrote to a correspondent in Stockton, North Riding, to thank him for informing the secretary of the "atrocious handbills" that were being distributed there. The Home Office asked its man in Newbury, Berkshire, to arrest those distributing Caroline tracts and in Loughborough, Leicestershire, to suggest that offending placards simply be ripped down. From Wisbech near Norwich in East Anglia came the report that one John Mellows, a weaver, had been arrested with a large quantity of "inflammatory Paper" which he had intended to vend on his way home to Nottingham. And from Weston, on the other side of the country, came an alarmed letter that every village in its vicinity was being explored by hawkers selling tracts which were so popular as to have replaced the common tales and ballads which they resembled. Few below the rank of gentleman, this report laments, had escaped infatuation with the cause of the queen. The country was, in short, blanketed by Caroline propaganda, with radical booksellers and printers providing the firm organizational infrastructure through which petitions were circulated and political energies channeled.²⁶

Caroline's cause became self-consciously the cause of "outdoor politics," of "public opinion" against the coterie politics of court and par-

²⁵ Cobbett, *History*, vol. 2, para. 441; *Political Register*, Aug. 19, 1820, cols. 313-314; The cartoons are given in M. Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires . . . in the British Museum* (1952), vol. 10; there is no single source for the number of pamphlets. I have collected over two hundred titles; see the *Loyalist*, no. 1, p. 17, regarding "the walls of the metropolis covered with radical addresses and treasonable placards."

²⁶ Cobbett's *Political Register*, July 5, 1820, col. 1247; HO 41/8, Clive/Rudd, Sept. 19, 1820, p. 299; HO 41/6, Clive/Caulfield, Sept. 20, 1820, p. 300; HO 41/6, Hobhouse/Hardy, Aug. 23, 1820, p. 281; HO 40/15, Nicholls/Hobhouse, July 22, 1820, p. 63; HO 40/14, Weston/Hobhouse, Sept. 17, 1820. Even respectable shopkeepers were tempted to sell "libels and caricatures against the King and for the Queen" because such a business brought high profits (*New Times*, July 13, 1820, p. 3).

liament. Nothing could be clearer and more dangerous: "Every other [power] must finally bend to its [public opinion's] decrees." As one tract summarized the argument, it made "no difference what a tribunal universally regarded as incompetent" might decide; "public opinion, that great ultimate arbiter of human merit," had already pronounced her majesty innocent. Or, to take another example, the queen, in rejecting the House of Common's efforts to avoid a trial, was thought to have demonstrated that she "estimated the people of England as superior to so wicked, so base a compromise." "The public voice," the venerable reformer Major Cartwright felt, "would save the Queen," would save him from prosecution for sedition, and would save the "Constitution itself."²⁷

All shades of the political spectrum recognized that "the public" was both created and represented by the press. The ministerialist *New Times* noted that it "tends to give unity to public sentiment to a degree that has never existed before in any country in the world." Caroline delighted in the observation that "the metropolis and the extremities vibrate to each others' sentiments," through newspapers. Even a defender of the king thought that they created a potentially cordial "constant communication" between the monarch and the people though in the current situation public opinion was being forced "into extremes by the goadings of a portion of the daily press." Peel was more fearful; at a time when the power of public opinion was unprecedentedly great, its demands for still greater power showed no bounds. Wilberforce was almost apoplectic on the subject. He was convinced that the country population would become "Cobbett and Wooler men—requiring the constant diet of newspapers to gratify their morbid appetite for politics." Elsewhere he inveighed against "the seditious abusers of the liberty of the press to poison and irritate" the minds of Englishmen. A conservative bishop had it right: the press was probably the most important cause of "an impatience of all lawful control, a thirst for untried, undefined, and undefinable change" among the common people.²⁸

²⁷ Charles Maclean, *The Triumph of Public Opinion* (London, 1820), following p. viii; Address of St. Leonard's Shoreditch, *Political Register*, Aug. 19, 1820, cols. 343–347; F. D. Cartwright, ed. *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (1826), 2: 197.

²⁸ *New Times*, Nov. 12, p. 4; J. W. Croker, *A Letter From The King* (1820) p. 2; Bernard Poll, ed., *The Croker Papers, 1808–1857* (Batsford, 1967 ed.), p. 52; Wilberforce, *Life*, 5: 47, and *Correspondence*, 2: 443; and H. Phillpotts, *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Earl Grey on Certain Charges Advanced . . . against the clergy of the County of Durham* (1821), p. 21, and see also p. vii.

To the radicals, however, the press was also an instrument of almost magical powers which served Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and truth, as well as Liberty. It was a shield and a sword against corruption (see figure 2). Thus, in the childhood of popular politics, people could still believe that truth, if proclaimed loudly enough, could triumph against all adversity. Contra Hazlitt, it had an echo.²⁹

The whole case was poignantly put in an address, signed by 1335 London printers, presented in the first instance to the queen, but more generally to posterity:

In future times, should the pages of History record the present era as one in which overwhelming power combined with senatorial venality to crush an unprotected female we trust it will also preserve the gratifying remembrance that the base conspiracy was defeated by the irresistible force of Public Opinion, directed and displayed through the powerful medium of a FREE, UNCORRUPTED AND INCORRUPTABLE BRITISH PRESS.³⁰

On the other hand, the corrupt, that is the ministerial, press was given its due by Caroline's supporters. The *Macclesfield Courier*, the *Stamford Mercury*, Harrop's *Manchester Journal*, and of course the anti-Caroline London papers, were torched in dozens of places. The editor of the *Chester Courier* was burnt in effigy with "the lying edition pinned to his chest." After hanging for a while, he was lowered into the flames as boys and girls danced around a nearby maypole. In Oxford, a much-hated and reactionary printer's house was attacked, while in London, neither the *Courier* nor the *New Times* windows survived the illumination which commemorated the queen's arrival in the metropolis or those which celebrated her acquittal.³¹

All of this, however, was incidental to the real purpose of radical involvement in a royal divorce action: the making of a symbol for the corrupt and fundamentally illegitimate political system and of a sign for its imminent downfall. Richard Carlile had convinced himself that the manifest stupidity of the quarrel between king and queen would

²⁹ On representations of the power of the press see the frontispiece of the enormously popular *The Man in the Moon* (William Hone, 1820; 51st ed., 1821) and the conservative counterblast *The Loyal Man in the Moon* (C. Chapple, 1820) (George, *Catalogue*, nos. 13508 and 13648); see also specifically relating to the press and Caroline no. 13801 and no. 13808 in which she basks in the light of the press, etc.

³⁰ George, *Catalogue*, no. 13947.

³¹ These incidents were reported in almost all the newspapers consulted. For Chester see *Liverpool Mercury*, Dec. 1, p. 184; for Oxford see HO 40/15, Ashurst/Earl of Macclesfield, Nov. 7, 1820.



THE TRANSPARENCY, of which this is a copy, was exhibited by WILLIAM HONE during the ILLUMINATION commencing on the 11th, and ending on the 15th of November, 1820, in connection with the HISTORY obtained by THE PRESS for the LIBERTIES OF THE PEOPLE, which had been assailed in the Person of *The Queen*; the words "TRIUMPH OF THE PRESS" being written on the cart, and the words "KNOWLEDGE IS POWER," displayed in the manner.—The Transparency was painted by MR. GEORGE CRUICKSHANK.

Figure 2.

create a nation of republicans and insure that George's coronation would be England's last. So absurd was the prosecution of Caroline, Francis Place argued, that it would surely destroy "the delusion, [the] charm which had come from past ages in favor of the English aristocracy," and thus hasten the coming of democracy. It was to be the *reductio ad absurdum* of the "old corruption," the joke that would expose and destroy its ministerial perpetrators.³²

The radical press mischievously argued that the ministry was making a grave error in these troubled times to insist that moral conduct was a prerequisite of sovereignty. If the queen was wanting, much more so was the king. Canning, on the other side, saw exactly the same dangers.

The State complains of the Queen's misconduct, which makes her unfit, &c. &c. 'Eh bien,' will the Jacobins say; 'the State complains of the King's misconduct, which makes him unfit,' &c. And can the Government which prosecuted the Queen grapple successfully with this argument.³³

The radicals' answer was of course, No. The whole point of the agitations was to universalize the injustice perpetrated against Caroline, to make it stand for the increasingly evident breakdown of consensus between the governed and their governors. The murder of eleven peaceful demonstrators in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, had shown the "old corruption" red in tooth and claw; there were still some 11,000 troops stationed in the "disturbed districts" without whose loyalty, many felt, society might come asunder. Increasingly, it appeared, the Government had to rely on spies, *agents provocateurs*, extraordinary repressive legislation, and political prosecutions to maintain itself. Moreover, it resorted to the same unsavory tactics to compromise the queen as it had used against its political opponents. Thus, the drama of Caroline's case could be viewed as a parable on the political iniquity. She had, in short, fallen prey to all those forces of injustice and oppression to which less highly placed opponents of the ministry had also succumbed.

"The honor of the Queen," it was generally held, "is closely connected with the constitutional rights of the people," a connection nurtured in Caroline's, or more accurately, her writers' "answers" to the hundreds of addresses she received. To that of St. Pancras she noted that "those who degrade the Queen have never manifested any repug-

³² *Republican*, June 30, 1820, p. 335; Place, *A Narrative of Political Events in England, 1830-35*, vol. 1; BM Add. Mss. 27789, pp. 123-24.

³³ Augustus Granville Stapleton, ed. *George Canning and His Times* (1859), p. 307; Peel expressed similar views for which see Louis J. Jennings, ed., *The Correspondence and Diaries of John Wilson Croker* (New York, 1885), 1: 162.

JACK AND THE QUEEN KILLERS.



LONDON:
SOLD BY T. DOLBY, 200, STRAND; J. FAIRBURN,
BROADWAY, LUDGATE-HILL;
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.
Printed by J. Swan, 76, Fleet Street.
1820.

Figure 3.

nance in abridging the liberties of the people.” “My loss of rank,” she proclaimed to the ladies of Truro, “would have been their loss of liberties.” Each attack on the queen—each irregularity in her trial and treatment—was translated simultaneously into an attack on the liberties of the people. Moreover, numerous cartoons played on the mutual protection afforded each other by the queen and the people. Pictures showed her as the “invulnerable shield to the violence, the ferocity, and the malice of the Ministry.” She guarded the people and they guarded her³⁴ (see figure 3).

Much of the rhetoric of the Caroline agitation rested on the Commonwealth notion that the people’s claim to political participation arose out of their virtue and, conversely, that the ministry’s moral de-

³⁴ Cartwright, *Life*, 2: 199; for St. Pancras see *Political Register*, Oct. 21, 1820, cols. 975–976; for Truro, *ibid.*, 959–60; see generally *The Queen that Jack Found* (9th ed., 1820), esp. “These are her subjects . . .”; *Black Dwarf* 4: 23, June 14, 1820, pp. 818–819, and 5: 3, July 19, p. 8081; *The Republican* 3: 8, June 16, 1820, pp. 254–55.

filement was evidence for the illegitimacy of the entire political system. "The uncontaminated mass of the people only can be looked to for the fearless discharge of our public duties," wrote the *Manchester Observer* early in her trial. Caroline characterized her supporters as "those above the line of dependence, and below the confines of corruption." They were those of "great virtue and bright talents" among the lowest ranks who gave promise of an end to the "age of delusion." They said of themselves that they were the "unhired, unpaid portion of the community." They were, in short, not the "mob." But most revealing is what Caroline said of herself. She postured as the politically transparent citizen of a Rousseauesque republic: "I am what I am, and I seem what I am." Caroline was the dove of light, the Star of Brunswick, the unblemished, the radiant.³⁵

Everything about the ministry, on the other hand, stank of corruption. They had engaged the Hanoverian ambassador to Rome—the very office reeked of secrecy—to hire informants to spy on the queen's most intimate daily life and burglars to purloin papers from her locked private cabinet. This ill-gotten evidence was presented to a Secret Committee of the House of Lords in a green bag which became the symbol of all that was rotten about the whole case. Like the boot and the petticoat in early Wilkite processions, the bag was used with great virtuosity in demonstrations and in print. Cartoons showed cabinet ministers scooping up John Bull's excrement from the field for the "green bag"; the bag was labelled "foul cloths" or "foul lies" in scores of popular prints; imps and devils and putrid vapors escaped from it and fluttered around the government's council. It was shown immersed in urinals with Italian witnesses popping out, or as bags of rotten grain with the witnesses inside and ministers as rats gnawing at the tatters (see figure 4). Liverpool and his colleagues were frequently portrayed as night soilmen and scavengers while their witnesses in the case drank out of chamberpots and slept on dung heaps. Scatology pervaded Caroline propaganda; excrement and the stench of corrupt politics were clearly linked.³⁶

Finally, the queen's cause was the subtext for the propaganda of parliamentary reform. As a sophisticated correspondent to the *Manchester*

³⁵ *Observer*, Sept. 2, 1820, p. 1153, "Answer to the Address of the Ladies of Camberwell," *Political Register*, Oct 21, cols. 980–81; "Address from the loyal inhabitants of Ilchester," *ibid*, Aug. 5, cols. 193–96; "Answer to the Middlesex Address," *ibid*, August 5, cols. 341–42. George, *Catalogue*, nos. 13885, 13983, 13693, and 13702.

³⁶ See, for example, the poster "Scavengers, Nightmen and Others. . .," BM 1852.b.9. (1820), and George, *Catalogue*, nos. 13675, 13749, 13756, 13828, and 13857, among scores of others.

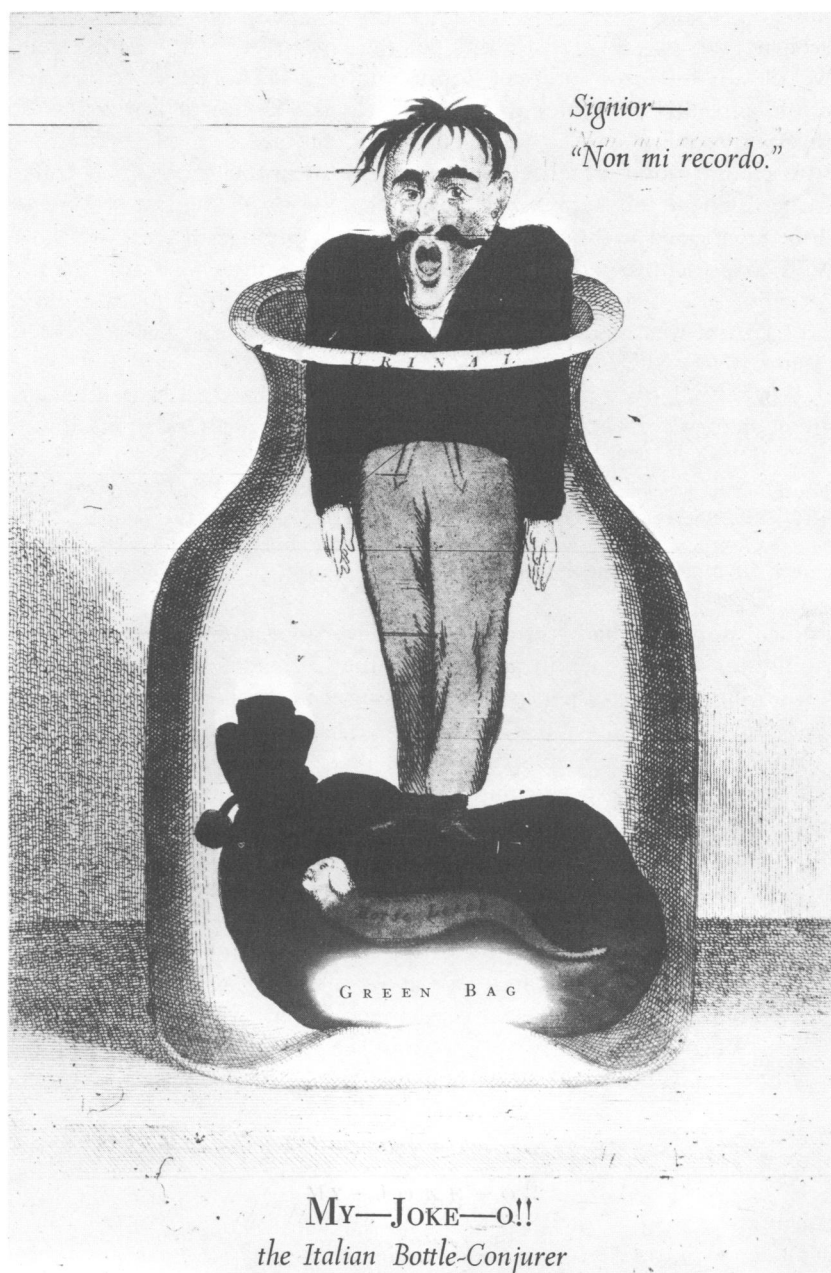


Figure 4.

Observer noted, the outcome of Caroline's trial or even a change of ministry would mean very little. "I am satisfied," he wrote, "that no security can possibly exist either for the Queen or for the people, until we obtain a House of real Representatives." The effort to create a crime and affix a penalty retroactively, as the House of Lords was doing in the queen's case, was seen as but another example of "the absurd claim to omnipotence" by those who sit in the seats which "ought to be filled by the Representatives of the Nation." The Lords were seldom mentioned without reference to boroughmongering; the refusal of MPs to present a petition to the queen was enough to brand them as servants, not of the people, but of corrupt aristocrats. Thus, Caroline's prosecution was made to bear witness yet again to the necessity of reform.³⁷

When on November 11 the queen was acquitted, it was seen as a great victory for the people. As the *Manchester Observer* put it:

The Queen owes her deliverance . . . solely to the INTERPOSITION OF THE PEOPLE. She remains Queen of England by the choice of the people . . . the *people have overawed the parliament*, and have preserved the rights of the Queen inviolate by the menace of their vengeance.

Radical populism had triumphed and Liverpool admitted as much. He would not, he said, send the bill on to the Commons because "it would have been perilous to persevere in passing it in the present state of public feelings."³⁸

And yet for the people, it was an illusory victory. The disenfranchisement of one spectacularly corrupt borough in 1821 may have owed something to the momentum given the Whigs by the Caroline agitations and perhaps the process hastened their becoming the party of reform. Still, the Tories remained in power for another decade. The aristocracy saw little erosion of its power and prestige: perhaps, as Lord John Russell argued, the people's attachment to the Whigs was even enhanced. George's coronation was not the last, nor did people come to see monarchy as a ridiculous system. Victoria belied such hopes. When tens of thousands were in the streets of the city firing pistols and smashing windows, when bonfires and fireworks illuminated

³⁷ *Observer*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 1244; for example, *Political Register*, Aug. 5, 1820, cols. 203–208, and *Black Dwarf*, 4: 24, 817–825.

³⁸ Nov. 18, p. 1243; the quote is from Cobbett's account, *Political Register*, Nov. 18, 1820; for a slightly different version, not so openly capitulating to public opinion, see *Report of the Proceedings in the House of Lords on the Bill of Pains and Penalties Against the Queen* (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1820), 3: 479.

St. Giles and Seven Dials, when gunfire disturbed Peterborough and Wolverhampton, when the Riot Act was read in more than a dozen towns and scores of churches were forcibly entered and their clergy insulted, the occasion was not a republican revolution, but a celebration for the acquittal of a queen who had triumphed over the wicked ministers of a king.³⁹

II. THE AESTHETICIZATION OF THE RADICAL CAUSE

The radical parable was deluged by royalist melodrama and romance—a queen saved from the evil ministers of the king, a woman's honor restored. The underlying issue of monarchy's legitimacy was swept away in a tidal wave of gossip and bathos. The question is why and how this happened.

At one level, the failure of radicalism in 1820 was an aesthetic failure. The trials and tribulations of Caroline took on the attributes now of melodrama, now of romance, now of antiquarian theater of royalty. Her cause became a work of art which held an almost hypnotic attraction for Englishmen and women. As a story of sex in high places, domestic tragedy, good princesses, and kind queens—it proved enormously appealing. But these representations of Caroline's cause were not simply intrinsically more interesting and thus more successful than the radical versions. Rather, this essay makes the stronger claim that aesthetic forms themselves acted as constraints on the development of universalized, secular radical interpretations. Politics in the Queen Caroline episode *became* melodrama, ironic comedy in which it is difficult to take either virtue or vice seriously, or to take it seriously for very long. More generally, the conservative triumph with which the extraordinary popular mobilization of the Caroline agitations ended is evidence of the power of the political system to generate melodrama, domestic romance, or spectacle; to generate, in short, alternative stories to those which might threaten its power and legitimacy.⁴⁰

The compelling quality of popular theater or thriller was not lost at the time. Cobbett, with only the slightest amount of self-consciousness,

³⁹ *Life of Lord John Russell*, p. 122. Cobbett thought that 50,000 guns were fired in celebration the night of Nov. 11; see *Political Register*, Nov. 18, col. 1214.

⁴⁰ For the formal properties of melodrama which, I argue, politics assumed in this instance, see Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 47, 186–187, and more generally, essay 3. I have also been influenced to see the Caroline agitations as art by Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," in *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn 1980): 150–51 and *passim*.

threw himself into “this affair of the Queen [which] was so interesting, such an irresistible bait to curiosity.” Ironically he, more than almost anyone else, produced that avalanche of words—of subplots and minor intrigues—which destroyed a radical interpretation of the affair. From the very beginning, Caroline’s radical defenders sensed the tension between their program of exposing the “old corruption” and the intrinsically trivial issues of the case. Yet they seemed almost trapped by the queen’s tale of woes.⁴¹

Carlile claimed to be “as careless about the whole system of monarchy as it was possible for a man to be,” yet admitted that he “shed a secret tear” for the queen. He avidly supported her right to her plate, to a place in the liturgy, to a coronation, and so on. *The Black Dwarf*, the most satirically brilliant of radical journals, considered the manifest issue of the agitations utter nonsense. “Democritus would have killed himself laughing at the earnestness with which all parties enter the affray,” it said self-mockingly. “All the nation’s business [is] suspended because a man and a woman cannot agree”; the politically sophisticated brush aside one’s warning about encroaching military despotism “with astonishment that you should mention such trifling matters, while it remains unknown whether the Queen will be permitted to live at home or abroad.” Yet the *Dwarf* confessed to its oriental “correspondent,” the “Yellow Bonze,” that its editor had been so long among the English as to have been caught up in their seemingly incomprehensible affairs. Indeed he was, and the relatively minor inequities of the king’s prosecution of his queen became the central text for Wooler’s political commentaries during much of 1820.⁴²

Contemporaries understood, again more or less self-consciously, that Caroline’s cause had become artifact, that they had helped make it so, and that the public as audience was being caught up in it as in a play or novel. Wooler was quite explicit. In 1817, after the death of Princess Charlotte, he published a piece called “State Theatricals—The Divorce” in which he pointed out that “a recent melancholy tragedy [had] fixed the attention of the public *spectators* at these houses for the last five or six weeks.” The gloom was now lifting and it was thought advisable to end court mourning with “a new farcical melodrama called the DIVORCE.” “Lord C.... promises to write the preface to reassure the audience that the play is not about Johnny Bull and his Irish sister.” The theatricalization of politics continues: “The machinery is to be supplied

⁴¹ Cobbett, vol. 2, para 421.

⁴² *The Republican* 3: 10 (June 30, 1820): 335–6, and 3: 8 (June 17, 1820): 260; *Black Dwarf*, 4: 25 (July 1, 1820): 893–94, and 5: 9 (Aug. 30, 1820): 300.

from the bank and the mint. One of the principal actors, it is said, will be engaged from Italy. . . . The first act consists of a plagiarism of the best scenes in 'The Wedding Day' . . . 'She would and she would not' and 'The Imaginary Cuckold.' " Three years before the Bill of Pains and Penalties, the case of Queen Caroline was already being transformed, albeit satirically, into art.⁴³

In 1820, literary and theatrical images abounded in talk about the case. The queen herself acknowledged the concern of the ladies of Bristol by owning that the adversities of sovereigns were indeed "the interesting theme of dramatic representation." Lord Colchester, referring to the prosecutions of Burdett and Cartwright for sedition, wrote to Henry Banks that he was pleased that the "Treason and Sedition Tragedies" seem to have been more or less successfully completed. Banks wrote back that he had been one of "the principal performers" with Wilberforce in an early scene of the Caroline drama. Another of Colchester's correspondents complained of the Queen's case as having "exhibited to the world such a scene of profligacy and vice as were ever detailed in any novel. . . ." If not a novel, then a "crim con" pamphlet. Leigh Hunt wrote Shelley during the early stages of the proceedings against Caroline in the Lords that he might "look upon the British public as constantly occupied in reading trials for adultery."⁴⁴

To Bell's *Weekly Messenger* the trial was "the present grand scene," the "spectacle" of which the paper promised to render a "faithful record for the future historian, both of the facts and the feelings of our own day." To others it was farce: "a sad farce," a "sorry, disgusting, and dangerous" farce, a "popular farce which had all the charm of private theatricals." In short, it assumed the quality of a much-awaited, somewhat scandalous theatrical event. "We are all, and of all classes, all opinions, all ages, and all parties absolutely *absorbed* by the expectation of Thursday," wrote Madame d'Arblay two days before the curtain went up at Westminster.⁴⁵

When the curtain did go up, it was of course on a royal divorce trial, on a play about marriage, about women, home, and family. Caroline

⁴³ *Black Dwarf*, December, 1817, which was actually part of a series, "State Theatricals at St. Stephens," referring to the meeting place of Parliament; see also the playbill for *The Queen of Hearts vs. The King of Knaves or the Trappers Trapped*, *ibid.*, pp. 269–77, 1820.

⁴⁴ Bristol Female Address is reprinted in *Political Register*, Oct. 7, col. 830; Colchester, *Diary*, 3: 143 and 145; Hatsell/Colchester, Sept. 9, p. 162 and see also pp. 131 and 135; *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt* (1862) 1: 157.

⁴⁵ *Weekly Messenger*, Aug. 20, p. 269; Lievan, *Letters*, Aug. 19, p. 62; Holland, *Further Memoirs*, p. 291; Hazlitt, *Works*, 20: 137; and Madame D'Arblay, *Diaries and Letters* (1846) 6: 386.

was being sued by a husband so debauched that he had no standing in an ecclesiastical court; she had been denied his bed and board; denied access to her daughter; denied even the use of her household goods. Her home in exile had been violated by spies and her honor as a woman had been publicly impugned. Consequently, whereas for male radicals Caroline's prosecution had become a metaphor for the evils and illegitimacy of the "old corruption," for women, radical and not, she came to represent the fragility of marriage, and the inequality of men and women before the law. Moreover, bizarre as it may seem, she herself came to stand for the virtues of home, hearth, and fidelity. Caroline thus became a woman's cause.

Indeed, hers was perhaps the first of those nineteenth-century political causes—opposition to the bastardy clauses of the New Poor Law was another—in which women acted as defenders of familial values and communal morality. But her cause was also among the first to display the tensions inherent in this kind of women's politics. Sentimental sensationalism and domestic melodrama, never far from the surface, threatened constantly to overwhelm more central issues.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the mere involvement of tens of thousands of women in so public and sustained an agitation as the defense of the queen constituted a major departure from earlier popular politics. There were at least seventeen explicitly "female" addresses to the queen. Some, with a few hundred signatures, came from small cities like St. Ives, Truro, or Beverley, which had not had female reform societies. Others, like that from Nottingham with 7,800 signatures and the largest, that from the "married ladies of the metropolis" with 17,652 signatures, presented by Alderman Mathew Wood's wife, the wife of the radical journalist John Thewell, and one hundred other ladies dressed in white linen, came from established centers of radicalism.⁴⁷

A few "female petitions" attempted to forge links with a broader political movement. The women of Manchester identified themselves as sufferers of the Peterloo Massacre and at their meeting, reported in the *Observer*, expressed the hope that the advocates of the "Rights of Man" would also advocate—"laughter"—the "Rights of Women." The women of Ashton-On-Lyme alluded to the imprisonment of Henry Hunt, with whose interests the queen's were associated.⁴⁸ More general-

⁴⁶ For women as defenders of communal morality see Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension," in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Harmondsworth, 1976) pp. 121–22.

⁴⁷ Female petitions were regularly printed in the establishment and radical press.

⁴⁸ Manchester *Observer*, Nov. 25, p. 1253.

ly, however, the rhetoric of women's petitions, Caroline's answers, and related literature focused attention on the queen's vulnerability as the injured, maligned wife of a faithless husband and as the bereaved mother of the beloved, lamented Princess Charlotte. The "Ladies of the Metropolis" "adored" the "womanly feeling" which gave Caroline the courage to defend her honor; they and their children promised to ask God's blessing on her cause. The ladies of Nottingham offered their sympathy to the queen on the loss of her protectors—her father, her brother, George III—and for the loss of "the chief solace of your cares, your amiable daughter." The identity of interests of the queen and of all women regarding divorce is made quite explicit in her answer to the Bristol Women's Address: "If an adultery can be established by remote inference, pleas for divorce will be indefinitely multiplied"; jealousy and their ill feeling will not know restraint.⁴⁹

Women's lack of legal authority over their children was symbolized by the story of Caroline losing control of her daughter. Much had been made already in 1817 of the fact that she had not been duly informed of Charlotte's death nor invited to the funeral: "When animosities should, at least for the moment, cease and the mother invited to the grave of her only child—she is *slighted and forgotten*." Courtly sycophants and an unfeeling husband were to blame. This mother-child theme was elaborated throughout 1820. "In solitude," a congregation was told, "she hears the funeral knell announcing her daughter's unexpected dissolution; imagine the mother's anguish—describe it I cannot." A London minister argued that the "unrivalled purity and excellence" of her late daughter was evidence of Caroline's own great virtue and of her right to be venerated as "our civil mother." Much was also made of Caroline's having been denied access to the princess in 1813 and of George's monopoly over her education.⁵⁰

And Caroline was not only "Every woman" and "Every wife"; she came to be seen as the perfect lady, kind and generous. The women of Malmsbury were exhorted to model themselves on the queen. "She

⁴⁹ *Political Register*, Aug. 5, 1820, cols. 188–92; Aug. 19, cols. 333–334; Oct. 7, col. 830.

⁵⁰ *Examiner*, Nov. 16, 1817, p. 727, and also Nov. 23, p. 742; *Political Register*, April 25, 1818, cols. 503–04; John Evans, *A Sermon Preached at the Independent Chapel, Malmsbury . . . Occasioned by the Death of her Late Majesty Queen Caroline* (London, 1821), p. 7; Alexander Fletcher, *A Sermon on the Death of Her Late Majesty . . . Delivered at the Albion Chapel, Moorgate, Aug. 19, 1821* (London, 1821), p. 11; John Hartwell, *A Eulogy on the Grave . . . Delivered in Salem Chapel, Ipswich* (Ipswich, 1821) (on Job 3: 17, 18), p. 10; see also William Gadsby, *A Sermon [on Matt. 5: 32] Showing the Nature and Design of the Marriage Union . . .* (Manchester, 1820), pp. 20–22.

protected her domestics, visited them when they were ill: . . . [c]hildren, like Pharaoh's daughter, she nurtured, protected, instructed, and provided for." Her charities to the poor in Greece and in the Holy Lands, her gifts to schools and orphan children in England were all lovingly chronicled.⁵¹

Whether because they felt an identity of interests with the queen—Cobbett thought there was unique corporate feeling among women: "touch one woman and you touch them all"—or because they hated the immorality of the king, or for other reasons, women not only petitioned the queen, but demonstrated their support in the streets. Women in carriages greeted her when she arrived at Gravesend during her triumphal return to the capital. Everyone agreed that women predominated in the crowds which lined her route the first day of her trial, some clinging to her chariot shouting "Queen, Queen." The Home Office's primary informant in London thought that it was female encouragement which caused the Queenite mutiny among the 3rd Regiment Foot, while the *Courier* reported that women would walk up to soldiers at the king's residence, embrace them, and say "Queen Forever." Women led the assault on the Italian witnesses against the queen when they landed in Dover.⁵²

When the queen was acquitted, her female supporters often had their own celebrations. The ladies of Tenterten, for example, contributed a female figure dressed in white satin and ornamented with white ribbons to the queen's victory parade. The female villagers of Padfield, Derbyshire, held a celebratory tea party and marched, carrying before them a figure of the queen overarched with laurels of ribbons. Those who helped finance the festivities felt the women had a special, feminine interest in Caroline's case and special events were planned accordingly. In Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, women were given their own tea and cakes party and were "to have the exclusive satisfaction of burning Dumont [the leading female witness against the queen] as a disgrace to her sex." The men here, as in hundreds of other towns and villages, burnt her male companion, Majocchi. The married women of Billingham held their own tea the week after the village's general celebration; in Market Deeping three barrels of beer were distributed for the

⁵¹ Evans, *Sermon*, p. 17.

⁵² Cobbett's *Political Register*, July 29, 1820, p. 90; see also *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, July 11, 1820, p. 290, for similar sentiments. Huish, *Memoirs*, 2: 533; and *Times*, *London Chronicle*, and *London Observer*, for June 6, 1820. *Times*, Aug. 17, 1820, p. 8; *New Times*, Aug. 17, 1820, p. 3; *Courier*, Aug. 17, p. 3; J. S./Hobhouse, HO 40/15, June 21, 1820.

general illumination on Saturday and Monday while tea and cakes were provided for the women on Tuesday.⁵³

Because of this massive participation of women in all aspects of the queen's cause, the politics of gender became a major and deeply felt aspect of the agitations. First, there was the question of the use or abuse of women's power as arbiters of social standing. Antagonists drew different conclusions from Caroline's visitors' list, so that a call on the queen by her lawyers' wives was an act of political support; her increasing popularity with the Whig ladies after her acquittal was taken as a sign of her virtue by supporters and of the corruption of her visitors by the ministerial press. *John Bull* went so far as to publish a weekly digest of who had visited the queen and what was wrong with each one's character. The *Christian Observer* pointed out the hypocrisy of the queen's defenders, encouraging others but being loath to introduce their "own female relatives" to the queen."⁵⁴

The main point, however, is that women, in supporting the queen in her battle against a divorce action, were striking at the very heart of sexual inequality and the double standard. "Men still demand licenses for themselves, which they do not allow women," proclaimed the *Examiner* indignantly in an article subsequently reprinted in the provinces. "Upon all these unequal assumptions of one sex . . . is built a system of sexual morality, under which thousands of women become mercenary prostitutes whom virtuous women shun while virtuous men retain the privilege of frequenting these women." "It was," the *Black Dwarf* noted with some delight, "rebellion against the lord of creation, *Man!* for a woman to be thus borne in triumph past the threshold to which she had sworn obedience," referring to Caroline's being escorted by the crowd past the king's gates. Perhaps a women's group, with Mrs. Fitzherbert in the chair, ought to investigate George, the *Dwarf* suggested elsewhere. Those of a loyalist persuasion also sensed the sexual politics inherent in the case. Fanny Burney, albeit with a touch of irony, remarked that she knew "not what sort of conjugal rule will be looked for by the hitherto Lords and Masters of the World" if the "open war" by Caroline against the king is abetted by them in the form of an acquittal.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Times*, Nov. 20, p. 3; *Manchester Observer*, Dec. 9, p. 1238, and Nov. 14, p. 1234. Drakard's *Stamford News*, Nov. 17, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁴ Denman, *Memoirs*, 1: 149, 183; *John Bull*, Dec. 17, p. 6ff.; *Christian Observer* quoted in the *Courier*, Oct. 2, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *London Examiner*, Aug. 17, 1820, pp. 531-32; *Black Dwarf* 4: 23 (June 14, 1820): 801; Madame D'Arbley, *Letters*, 6: 387; see also the highly dramatic Charles Phillips, *The Queens Case Stated; Dedicated to the Martyred Consort of*

The forces of reaction took this to heart. They supported the king's position precisely because it reflected a double standard. Even if the king were as guilty as the queen, charges should not be brought against him because adultery was more wicked in women than in men. Through them the blood of the husband's family could be polluted, in some cases even without his knowledge. Untainted succession must be preserved at all costs. In any case, whatever the king might have done, he was perfectly justified in divorcing so outrageously immoral a woman as Caroline.⁵⁶

The queen's opponents, however, were more upset by the mere fact of women's participation in politics than by their substantive claims. Through mockery, ridicule, pious precept, and slander, they attacked the very legitimacy of women's presence in politics. Women's marches were a great, though uncomfortable, joke among the king's circle; even George, who found little to laugh at during 1820, laughed at the "ladies' " petitions and parades. Conservative cartoonists delighted in showing big-bosomed women dressed up in ill-fitting rental clothes paying their respects to the queen.⁵⁷

Patria Fides told women that "while your husbands might have nothing better to do than listen to radicals, you do," and pointed out that those who signed petitions were adored only by revolutionaries, whereas "amiable and accomplished Englishwomen are the admiration of Europe." The narrator of another pamphlet, purporting to speak for "Englishwomen," admitted that although "our [women's] proper station is retirement," and that she heartily disapproved of female involvement in politics, she was nevertheless driven to protest the Lords' unwarranted dropping of charges against the overfamiliar and wild Caroline. George III's wife, Queen Charlotte, she added, would not have received addresses from a mob of fisherwomen. An article signed by a "Widowed Wife" complained that while "A Woman's Cause" and oth-

Henry VIII (19th ed., 1820), pp. 12–13; Mrs. Fitzherbert was not simply another jilted mistress of George—her name had powerful resonances. She was a Roman Catholic widow whom the Prince of Wales had secretly and, under the Act of Succession, illegally married in 1785. Neither Caroline's lawyers nor the radical press pursued this well-known secret although Brougham claimed to have had irreproachable confirmation of a union which, if publicly proven, would have cost George his throne.

⁵⁶ See, for example, *The Loyalist*, no. 2, p. 105; Thomas Harral, *Henry the Eighth and George the Fourth, or the Case Fairly Stated* (1820), pp. 15–16; Eld, *Life*, 2: 387ff.; *Courier*, July 13, p. 2, and Aug. 31, p. 4.

⁵⁷ See, for example, W. P. Wards, *Diary*, 2: 58; Buckingham, *Memoirs*, 1: 83; *Courier*, Sept. 2, p. 3; Sept. 28, p. 4; and Oct. 3, p. 2.

er slogans assault the public, the whole case of the queen is really about "ADULTERY." There is no such thing as a woman's cause, she continued, since "politics are seldom or never fit subjects for woman's discussion." As for her own involvement, the good widow blamed the queen.⁵⁸

The most virulent attack on women's participation in the Caroline agitations came as an attack on their virtue. One anonymous author of what bordered on political pornography addressed Caroline's supporters as though they were harlots. "Go on ladies, proceed in your mad careers. Lead a life of dissipation and pleasure." But, he cautioned, "when you find yourself despised and foresaken and rejected, thank your gracious Queen . . . the pure, the innocent, the persecuted. Remember that you addressed an Adulteress; that you stand identified with infidelity." Women who addressed the queen were portrayed as little better than prostitutes. Anti-Caroline forces, for example, published a satirical answer to a mock female petition, that of "The United Sisterhood of Fleet St. and Drury Lane" [i.e., whores], in which the queen is said to sympathize with their plight, to agree that "an overbearing faction has too long operated like a cankerworm upon the noble trunk of female autocracy," and that she hoped that they would as soon be free of the Bridewell and the tyranny of magistrates as she of the Bill of Pains and Penalties. In Wakefield a placard was published asking all females who wished to imitate the queen's behavior to show themselves at their windows so that interested men might know who their "friends" were.⁵⁹

But the politics of gender—the demand for an end to the double standard and for a more equitable family law—like the more general radical politics which Caroline represented were no match for the titillating semipornography of the trial and the theater which it generated. Provincial newspapers might feign relief at the queen's acquittal because they then were no longer "soiled" by reports of the trial. Respectable folk might be pleased that their daughters were no longer exposed to salacious romance posing as news reports. But, while the show was on, the public loved the dramatic action, the give and take of judicial combat that was recounted throughout the land.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See *The Letters of Patria Fides* (1820); Anon., *An Address to the Peers of England by an Englishwoman* (1820), pp. 2, 5; *Two Letters to the Queen and an Address to the Females of Britain by a Widowed Wife* (Maidenhead, 1820, 9th ed.), pp. 22–23, and the "Letter from a Widowed Wife" in *New Times*, Nov. 10, 1820, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Anon., *Gynecocracy, with an Essay on Fornication, Adultery and Incest* (J. J. Stockdale, 1821), p. 369; *New Times*, Nov. 21, 1820, p. 4.

⁶⁰ For example, Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, Nov. 16, 1820, p. 3 (editorial).

Did Barbara Kress, the Karlsruhe chambermaid, really find evidence of sexual intercourse in the bed she made in Bergami's room? Did she see the queen half naked in his arms? Was it true that Bergami helped Caroline undress for a costume ball in Naples? Why did the queen exclaim "Theodore, *No No No*"—a phrase which soon made its way onto ministerial placards—when a former Italian servant was escorted to the witness box? Was it because she knew what compromising evidence he was about to present?⁶¹

But the queen need not have worried. Poor, poor Theodore Majocchi. He was demolished in cross-examination by Henry Brougham and his pathetic answer to question after question, "*Non mi ricordo*" (I don't remember), became the most prominent of the Caroline slogans. Other witnesses, especially the queen's former maid Louise Dumont, fared almost as poorly under the stinging cross-examination of Caroline's lawyers. One suspects that only an Englishman's difficulty in pronouncing "Je ne me rapelle pas" saved Louise from being the crowd's favorite villain.⁶²

Both sides, however, could play the game and the queen's witnesses, not to speak of her lawyers, suffered. Lieutenant Howman fainted after having to admit that Bergami and the queen shared a tent for weeks on end during a Mediterranean crossing. Denman, after a wonderful closing speech in which George was portrayed as Nero and Caroline as Octavia, uttered the famous phrase, "If no accuser can come forward to condemn thee, neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." This unfortunate lapse, which poor Denman rued to the end of his life, soon made its way onto the streets as:

Most Gracious Queen, we thee implore
Go away, and sin no more.
But if the effort prove too great
Go away at any rate.⁶³

Thus the trial, with its revelations, thrusts, and counterthrusts took on an aesthetic life of its own, overshadowing the substantial political issues represented by Caroline's cause. People spoke of it as if it were

⁶¹ *Black Dwarf*, 5: 8, Aug. 23, p. 263, reports on the streets being plastered with the Queen's indiscretion but argued that it proved her innocence; for a contrary view see Lady Theresa Lewis, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* (1865) 3: 253–54.

⁶² Every representation of a pro-Caroline march which shows any placards has at least one of "non mi ricordo," always in the Italian.

⁶³ For Howman see *Trial*, 2: 255–267; for the closing see vol. 3, p. 86; Denman, *Memoirs*, 1: 171–73; and Croker, *Correspondence*, 1: 165.

theater. Newspapers published diagrams of the House of Lords, making it look like a proscenium stage and giving the location of key players. The *Liverpool Mercury* satirized it as *The Green Bag*, a “*melo-dramatico-serio-comico, pantimimico-tragico, more yes-than-no farsico Burleschetto*” in four scenes which they said had been playing “with, unbounded applause, for six years on the Continent and upwards of twenty nights running in London.” It began in “Splendid Hall in Milan,” and ended in the ante-chamber and finally the great hall of the “H-se of L-ds.”⁶⁴

Important bits of testimony were easily recast into “scenes,” most notoriously the “Polacre Scene,” during which Bergami and Caroline either did or did not have intercourse on the deck of a three-masted merchant ship of this class. The “scene” was explained in diagrams and depicted in cartoons. It was the subject of endless debate in the press of all persuasions. Cobbett wrote four pages concerning the implausibility of the queen’s actually having intercourse on deck, given the exposure such an act would have; she would, he argued, have gone below had immorality, rather than simply sleeping in the fresh air, been her purpose. Others argued that if the queen did sleep with Bergami beneath the deck tent, it was so that he could protect her from pirates. Ministerial publications, of course, saw the sleeping arrangements as clear evidence of illicit sex. In short, the scene was discussed as one episode in a new play—does it work, how does it fit with the rest of the play, what does it reveal of the characters? Caroline’s case had become art.⁶⁵

When the trial did not generate “scenes” it generated sexual jokes at the expense of the protagonists. The personal virtues and vices of royalty, not their political actions, were the subject of public attention. The king for his part was mercilessly attacked. At best, he was a bumbling cuckold, the butt of a national charivari. Wooler suggested founding an “order of the golden horns” for the well-placed husbands of the king’s mistresses. One widely distributed poster offered a reward for the return home of “an infirm old gentleman” who “just after dreadfully ill-using his wife about *Half* a Crown, and trying to beat her

⁶⁴ Sept. 29, p. 102; see also *Leeds Mercury*, Oct. 28, pp. 1, 3.

⁶⁵ See *Political Register*, Oct. 21, “On the Tent Scene,” cols. 913–922, *Times* Nov. 1, p. 3; for theatrical representations of the case see, for example, George, *Catalogue*, no. 13852, “Brandenburg House Theatricals, or a Wood Scene in a new Fare,”; or no. 13825 showing Majocchi with the green bag in the ghost scene from *Hamlet*; or ministers as the witches in *Macbeth*, no. 13786; for the Polacre see nos. 13856, 13818, 13926, or a variation, “the bedroom scene,” no. 13822, among many others.

... was last seen walking swiftly towards the Horn Without a Crown.” Much was made of the king’s being no cuckold during the queen’s victory celebrations. In Stockport, one poor fool carried a sign “The King is not a cucold but i ham [*sic*].” In other places “Britons” were called upon to rejoice for the same reason. Dozens of different cartoons of the king and others wearing horns were also distributed⁶⁶ (see figure 5).

At worst, the king was portrayed as the voluptuary he undoubtedly was. Cartoons traced his progress through mistress after mistress, often shown with their skirts in disarray, seated on George’s ample lap. Servants and scullery maids too were portrayed as objects of the king’s lust. But, there were inherent dangers in this sort of propaganda; two could play the same game.⁶⁷

Caroline was not without skeletons in her closet, and, while modest in comparison with the king, she was all too vulnerable to attack. Needless to say, the ministerial press made much of her foibles. Tracts were issued making fun of her hypocritically sanctimonious relationship with Bergami. Cartoons showing her in a bathtub naked to Bergami’s leering gaze, or lying with her lover in a canopied bed, or straining her short, buxom figure upward to kiss her mustachioed Italian paramour, or revealing her seminude as the muse of history quickly made the rounds. Undoubtedly, the propagandists for the queen were far more brilliant and far more successful than those for the king in discrediting their opponent, but the discourse was less than politically edifying⁶⁸ (see figure 6).

The trial generated dozens of domestic melodramas, all elaborations on the “virtuous woman wronged” theme. There were fanciful accounts of her being thrust from the king’s door, infant daughter in arms (not unlike the expulsion scene of D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance*). There

⁶⁶ *Black Dwarf*, 5: 8, Aug. 22; poster “Reward: Strayed or Missing . . .” (Newbury: J. Morris, 1820) in HO 10/14 f 282; HO 40/15 Lloyd/Hobhouse, Dec. 9, 1820; *Manchester Gazette*, No. 25, 1820; for representations of the king as cuckold see among many George, *Catalogue*, nos. 13769, 13850, 13892, and 14027.

⁶⁷ George, *Catalogue*; some examples from among scores: nos. 13854, 13897, and 14014.

⁶⁸ The *Loyalist*, no. 3, p. 233 and no. 1, p. v., portrays the whole affair as a battle of pamphleteers and cartoonists pitting Hone, Benbow, Dolby, and Fairburne against Wright, Asperne, Chappell, and Marshall. See also *John Bull*, Dec. 17, 1820, on this theme. For a typical assault on Caroline’s virtue see *Extracts from the Pilgrimage of St. Caroline* (W. Wright, 1820) where it is pointed out inter alia that if the radicals feel that Caroline’s virtue is like snow, they must mean “forty summers ago,” now “long melted away.”

THE BATH.



“ ————— The wide sea

“ Hath drops too few to wash her clean.”

SHAKSPEARE.

Figure 6.

were scenes of her mourning Charlotte and scenes of her tearful exile. None of these bore any resemblance to Caroline's real relationship to her daughter, which was cool and distant, nor to the real circumstances of her departure from England. Yet Caroline the queen as symbol of purity easily outshone Caroline as symbol of radical values. Her colors were white. White cockades and white dresses and white ribbons on horses and white sashes marked her side. Nowhere did the green of the levellers or of the parliamentary radicals make an appearance, except perhaps as the laurel wreath which crowned effigies of the queen.

Of all the stories generated by the trial, however, none was more important in depoliticizing the Caroline agitations than that of the Italian witnesses against the queen. Not the king, nor the ministry, nor the

“old corruption,” but the Italians became the real villains of the piece. Expressions of Englishness in 1820 and 1821 were far more prominent than expressions of class solidarity or republican virtues. Majocchi and Rastelli and Dumont and the rest of the dirty, haggard, Catholic, French, German, and Italian-speaking rabble aroused extraordinary waves of xenophobia. When the witnesses landed in Dover on July 7, the crowd, and most especially the women, “fell upon them” throwing stones, blows, and curses. The poor wretches barely escaped the customs shed alive. Only after a harrowing coach ride through town did they arrive safely in London, where a gunboat guarded their residence. A coach in Canterbury had been mobbed and its driver roughed up on the mistaken impression that the Italians were on board. One local observer justified the affray by pointing out that, according to rumor, a Catholic priest was among the witnesses to absolve them immediately from false swearing.⁶⁹

“In every village,” Cobbett reports, “people were on the lookout for Italians” and, through their overzealousness, posed a real threat to foreign nationals of all sorts. The French were afraid to land in Dover because of anti-foreign feeling and, as a consequence, the Harwich tourist business picked up. In Liverpool the townspeople were gently cautioned not to attack Italian organ grinders since they were not themselves enemies of the queen. The landlord of the Coach and Horses in Turnham Green, along with twelve companions, attacked three Italian hawkers on the mistaken premise that they were some of the witnesses. He was hauled into Bow Street for his enthusiasm. Xenophobia reached such heights in the countryside that Denham, when he was in Cheltenham on a visit, had to issue a certificate to a German maid and her husband stating that they were not Majocchi and his wife. They had lost their jobs and house under the misapprehension of the townspeople that they were the foreign villains.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Regarding the Dover Landing of the witness see Huish, *Memoirs*, 2: 385–6; *Times*, July 10, 1820, p. 3, and July 13, p. 2; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, July 9, 1820, p. 217; *Courier*, July 10, p. 3 and July 12, p. 4, as well as the rest of the London press. The Home Office thought the situation in Dover sufficiently volatile to order troops to the city. See Hobhouse/Shipton, HO 41/6/241, July 12, 1820; Hobhouse/Taylor, HO 41/6/246, July 17, 1820; Hobhouse/Mayor of Dover, HO 41/6/247, July 19, 1820; see *Black Dwarf*, vol. 2, July 12, p. 42; regarding the priest see *Times*, July 14, 1820, “letter to the editor” and Cobbett’s anti-Catholic tirade in *Political Register*, July 8, col. 1246.

⁷⁰ Cobbett, *History*, col. 442; *Gentleman's Magazine* 90: 20 (July 1820): 78; *Liverpool Mercury*, Sept. 1, p. 72; *Courier*, Sept. 13, p. 2; Denman, *Memoirs*, 1: 130.

In the illuminations that followed Caroline's "acquittal," the crowd's anger was directed most often at "Non mi Ricordo" Majocchi, then at Rastelli, the witness who was spirited away before he could be cross-examined properly, and finally, at the chambermaid Dumont, who presented potentially damaging dirty-linen evidence. Majocchi was burnt in effigy even before the "acquittal" as a stand-in for the Guy on November 5. During the week following November 11 he was honored with remarkable ingenuity. In Southport his effigy was mounted on an ass and paraded through town, preceded by six butchers with bright axes. Near Oldham he was beheaded by a man named John Bull before being consigned to flames. In Warwick an elaborate rough music was prepared for the occasion:

. . . an enormous green bag, with the seals of office affixed, and the effigies of those two perjured wretches Majocchi and Dumont, were suspended from a gallows, and carried through the different streets, accompanied by a great concourse of people, some with old tin pots, kettles, trumpets, fifes, and c., playing the 'Rogue's March' . . . they were taken [after three hours] to an enormous pile, upwards of 25 feet high, in front of our castle-gates, over which the effigies and green bag were suspended and there burnt to atoms; the green bag blowing up with all its horrid contents into the air, amidst the applauding acclamations of thousands of spectators.

In more or less elaborate rituals in towns and villages from Penzance to Newcastle effigies were thus paraded, burnt, beheaded, or in some other way destroyed.⁷¹

Clearly these celebrations were, at least in some measure, politically charged. The "green bag," the most potent symbol of ministerial spying and dishonesty, was burnt or loaded with firecrackers and exploded almost as often as Majocchi was hanged. But the Italians were at the center of most popular celebrations as if they, rather than the king or his hard-pressed ministers, were responsible for gathering the bag's contents. Only in two cases did the press report connections being drawn explicitly between burning of the bag or the effigies on the one hand and radical politics on the other. In one, villagers apparently noted the irony of burning an Italian in effigy on the very spot in which Tom Paine had been ritually immolated some twenty years earlier. In another, one of two bags was labeled "Oliver's bag," alluding to the

⁷¹ *Northampton Mercury*, Nov. 18, p. 2. All newspapers report extensively on the celebrations throughout November and early December; for these instances see *Manchester Observer*, Dec. 9, 1820, p. 1237, which also discusses an effigy of Majocchi being ground up by millstones in Warrington; *Stamford News*, Dec. 8, 1820, pp. 2-3; and *London Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 3.

hated government informer by that name; the second was marked “Milan Commission” for the ministerial agents who had accumulated evidence on Caroline’s life in exile. Both were burnt. Yet, the overwhelming impression is that hatred was focused, at the moment of joy for the queen’s acquittal, on foreigners. English virtue and community had triumphed over continental corruption. The radical editor of the *Stamford News* spoke for many when he argued that the great parade and celebration in Louth, Lincolnshire, like those throughout the land, attested to

her Majesty’s abhorrence and contempt of Germanic and other continental principles and continental politics, and, [that] her reliance upon her best friends and supporters, the British people, British freedom and British justice are her only crimes.⁷²

The celebrations and other activities after Caroline’s acquittal also make clear how personalized the antiaristocratic politics of the period could still be. The trial generated “good lords” who defended the queen and “bad lords” who did not; the former were exalted and the latter attacked. The people of Tarporley, Cheshire, for example, learned that Earl Grosvenor would pass through on his way to Eaton House. They marched with a band about a mile out of town, stopped his lordship’s carriage, unhitched its horses, and pulled it, following the band, into the village. There he gave a short address, and, noting that two sheep were being roasted in the village square, ordered that two barrels of beer be distributed among the merrymakers. But this wasn’t all for the good earl. In Chester, 3,000 people greeted him with band, banners, and flags and, as in Tarpoley, pulled his carriage through the town. The same thing happened to the Duke of Gloucester in Wellingborough and to Lord Landsdowne on his way to Bowood and to Grey in Darlington. In Shrewsbury, a huge transparency was displayed showing the queen in a chariot drawn by lions under a banner reading “Honour the noble lord proprietors who opposed the Bill of Pains and Penalties—Lords Tankerville, Bradford, Berwick, Kenyon, Denbigh, and c.” And indeed they, along with Cowper, Erskine, Essex, Dacre, Fitzwilliam, Milton, Jersey, etc., were honored throughout the land.⁷³

⁷² For two allusions to Paine see *Manchester Observer* regarding Ashton U. Lyne, Nov. 25, 1820, p. 1220, and regarding Glossop Dale, *ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1820, p. 1238; *Stamford News*, Nov. 24, p. 4.

⁷³ *Manchester Chronicle*, Dec. 2, p. 4; Grosvenor was given a note of thanks by sixteen of the seventeen friendly societies in Chester; *Manchester Observer*, Dec. 9, 1820, p. 1239 for the Duke of Gloucester. For Landsdowne see *London Chronicle*, Nov. 18, p. 2, and for Grey *ibid.*, Nov. 13, p. 2; the *Examiner*, Dec.

Of course they and other men of property responded appropriately in the old paternalist fashion. The trial of Queen Caroline ended as carnival, a “second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community freedom, equality and abundance,” as Bakhtin has characterized these occasions. Creevy describes how he and a friend arrived at Felix Hall, near Kelvedon, Essex, and illuminated the house to draw attention to themselves. They dispatched orders to four nearby pubs “to open the campaign with ale for the people at the Squire’s expense.” In twenty minutes they heard the clatter of voices, shouts, and bells emanating from what Creevy thought was the entire village marching with a green bag to the bonfire that the Squire had provided at the highest point of his estate. In Wakefield, an ox

with gilded horns [was] led around the town, all gaily bedecked with flowers while on its back was conspicuously painted a device surrounded by the words *Caroline Rex* [sic]. . . . [T]he animal was finally roasted whole in the bull-ring, bonfires and public illuminations concluding the feast.

In place after place strong ale, and oxen, and musicians, and ringers, and all the other makings of a feast were provided by the “natural leaders” of the community.⁷⁴

Even manufacturers adopted the role of landed proprietors. In Heckmondwick, West Riding, they marched at the head of their workmen in honor of the queen and then provided everyone with roast beef, potatoes, and ale. One of their number even funded a special dinner for the widows of the area. The factory owners of Congleton, Knutsford, and Nottingham also treated their workers, while the Witney blanket manufacturers arranged a parade for their people.⁷⁵

These celebrations suggest that, though there is considerable evidence by 1820 of the “lower order’s” resentment and rejection of aristocratic or bourgeois oppression, their conception of their oppressors remained highly personalized and was still expressed through the rituals of the

3, p. 780, and the *Times*, Nov. 20, p. 3, also reported, quoting from the Shrewsbury paper, on demonstrations there.

⁷⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), p. 9; Gore, ed., Creevy, *Further Selections*, pp. 33–34; *The Letter Bag of Lady Elizabeth Spencer-Stanhope* (John Lane, 1908) 2: 352; for Otley and Leyburn and Cawood, see *Leeds Mercury*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 3; for Aldborough see *Newcastle Courant*, Nov. 18, 1820, p. 4.

⁷⁵ For Heckmondwick, see *Leeds Mercury*, *ibid.*; for Congleton, *Manchester Observer*, Dec. 16, 1820, p. 1245; for Whitney, *Times*, Nov. 21, 1820, p. 3; *The Date Book of Remarkable and Memorable Events Connected with Nottingham, 1750–1879* (Nottingham, 1880), p. 341.

old regime. The Earl Jersey was drawn through the streets of Aylesbury while the Duke of Buckingham was attacked in the same town a few hours later. The Bishop of Gloucester's carriage was pulled through Cheltenham, while the Bishop of Llandaff was pelted with stones in Ewelme, Oxfordshire. While Grosvenor was warmly greeted in Chester, Wellington was taunted in the same town. Grey was cheered at the Drury Lane theater, Castlereagh booed at Covent Garden.⁷⁶

Thus the trial of the queen was an elaborate and all-absorbing theater in its own right. It touched sensitive cultural nerves—xenophobia and a yearning for community, however temporary—which sparked yet other rituals, bits of social theater far removed from the radicals' script. The relationship between art and politics, however, is still more entangled.

At least some of the demonstrations for the queen appear to have been almost literal borrowings from contemporary melodrama. Consider for a moment the seaman's parade of September 11, 1820. It was noteworthy even by the extravagant standards of the day. "I have never seen anything like this before—nothing to approach it," said Creevy. Amidst tens of thousands of other demonstrators and hundreds of thousands of observers, the merchant seamen marched, each with a new silk or white satin cockade in his hat, five abreast behind the banner "Protection of the Innocent."⁷⁷

Could this be a form of the so-called "nautical melodrama" borrowed wholesale for politics? Beginning around 1812 and coming to maturity by the early 1820s this genre, in which a sailor saves a young woman from a horrible and undeserved fate, was immensely popular, playing to largely working-class and lower-middle-class audiences. The "brave sailor" protecting innocence was so popular, in fact, that he began to appear frequently in non-nautical domestic melodrama.⁷⁸

Here might be an instance of a quite specific identity of art—the nautical melodrama—and politics—the demonstration for Queen Caroline. Politics thus assumed, despite itself, the characteristics of the art:

⁷⁶ For Aylesbury see *Political Register*, Nov. 18, cols. 1250 and 1235–37; for Cheltenham see *Reading Mercury*, Nov. 22, p. 4; for Wellington, *New Times*, Nov. 8, p. 3, and for Castlereagh, Nov. 9, p. 3; for Grey see n. 73.

⁷⁷ For the Seaman's "address" see Creevy, *Papers*, Sept. 13, pp. 320–21; *Times*, Sept. 14, p. 3; *New Times*, Sept. 15, p. 3; *London Chronicle*, Sept. 15, p. 2; *Examiner*, Sept. 17, 1820, p. 600; Huish, *Memoirs*, 2: 590–91. It came after five days of public activity; Creevy, *Papers*, Sept. 8, p. 318, says 200,000 lined the Thames to see the Queen pass down the river to Woolwich.

⁷⁸ For melodrama see Robert W. Corrigan, "Melodrama and the Popular Tradition in Nineteenth Century British Theatre," in *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Corrigan (New York: Dell, 1967), pp. 7–24; M. R.

its ironic distance from deeper and more dangerous emotion, its exaggeration and distortion. What Hazlitt said of the English stage in 1818 might apply to the political drama of Caroline's trial:

[it] courts distress, affects horror, indulges in all the luxury of woe, and nurses languid thoughts and dainty sympathies, *to fill up the void of action* . . . the biting edge of true passion is blunted, sheathed, and lost amidst the flowers of poetry strewn over unreal, unfelt distress, and the flimsy topics of artificial humanity prepared beforehand for all occasions.⁷⁹

The Caroline agitations were transformed into other aesthetic forms as well, the novel for example, and entrapped their audience in the labyrinthine intricacies of that genre.⁸⁰ Radical and opposition papers wrote of the queen as if she were a fictional character; they wove a web of narrative about her, piled detail upon detail to create a harmless "emplotment" of her story in which political essentials were easily lost. Consider but two examples:

A Greek lady, the wife of Mr. Copeland, an English banker, about to settle in Paris, was introduced to her Majesty, who paid her some compliment on her interesting appearance: the lady answered her in Italian and wished her Majesty a pleasant voyage. . . . The Queen gave her an animated smile and in Italian returned her thanks for the warm wishes.

And here is Caroline at St. Omer:

She is not as fair as she then was [1814] nor is she so stout, but there is an air of melancholy languor about her manners which renders her very interesting. She lives almost entirely secluded.

In these and hundreds of similar passages, reinforced by cartoons and drawings, the audience of the Caroline agitations—which constituted, at the same time, its actors—was drawn into a universe, and into a genre, far removed from the one which the radicals who took up the queen's cause had hoped to create.⁸¹ It was the universe of romantic fiction.

More than anything else, however, the enormous cultural weight of royalism and its aesthetic most decisively destroyed the radicals' inter-

Booth, "The Social and Literary Context," in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. 6 (1975).

⁷⁹ William Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage* (1818), pp. 288–9.

⁸⁰ See David Miller's brilliant "The Novel and the Police," *Glyph* 8 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) pp. 127–47.

⁸¹ *Manchester Gazette*, June 10, 1820, and *Leeds Mercury*, June 3, p. 2.

pretation. Its continuing power is evident in three representative anecdotes. In Middleton, Lancashire, a band marched three times through the town as part of the celebration for “the glorious victory of [our] beloved Queen.” It was headed by one John Smethies, a cap of liberty on his head bearing the motto:

Let joy in each Englishman’s features be seen.
For Caroline triumphs, and still is our Queen.⁸²

The second illustration comes from Anne Cobbett’s letter to her brother James concerning their father:

... Papa has been to Court and kissed the Queen’s hand, and a very pretty little hand he says it is. We made the gentleman dress himself very smart, and powder his head, and I assure you he cut a very different appearance to what he used to do. ...

James must have been bewildered when a month later his brother John wrote that “This, in the first place, was almost a Revolution; for the Queen is a radical. . . .”⁸³

The third anecdote is longer and more elaborate. On October 30 the brass founders and braziers presented an address to the queen. Their views were in no way unusual and the queen’s answer thanked them in the usual way for this expression of “their tender sympathy.” She also noted, however, that monarchs who defended, as they should, the liberties of their people would naturally receive in return their “genuine unsophisticated homage.” Homage is a key word. The braziers came, several thousands of them carrying candlesticks, coal scuttles, pestles and mortars, or other emblems of their trade to Brandenburg House. Bands and flags accompanied the march and all of this was not unlike the traditional craft procession. But more to the point, the brazier’s parade also bore a crown and was distinguished by three men dressed in complete armor—one in silver, two of lesser alloys—mounted on horses and each accompanied by four equerries in brass helmets and carrying staves. With some difficulty the “knights” dismounted and led their delegation into the audience hall. The chief knight then made his way slowly to the throne, knelt before the queen, and presented her with a brass baton decorated at one end with a crown. Inside the baton was the address; still kneeling he received an answer and slowly depart-

⁸² *Manchester Observer*, Dec. 2, pp. 1228.

⁸³ Cobbett, *Life and Letters*, 2: 169 and 177.

ed while the rest of his entourage passed one by one before the queen.⁸⁴

Each of these incidents is, of course, multivocal and might speak to many things other than, or in addition to, deep royalist sympathies. But each is suggestive of how spontaneous demonstrations, highly elaborated civic pageantry, and the individual actors were drawn into the sphere of royalist ritual. They are instances of an endemic popular discourse of royalism which, both during the movement in support of the queen and in later nineteenth-century political movements like Chartism, allowed little aesthetic space for the development of a language of secular republicanism.

Caroline's arrival in England, though almost a parody of an Elizabethan royal progress, nevertheless seems to have shared some of its theatrical power. It was extraordinarily dramatic. As early as February, 1820, men blowing horns went around the metropolis announcing the queen's imminent arrival. Emblems and banners were prepared. When she landed in Dover on June 5 she was greeted by the leading mer of the city with a welcoming address and by a crowd so immense and enthusiastic as to force Caroline to take temporary refuge in the York Hotel. They removed her coach horses so as to pull the carriage triumphantly through the city; several bands were on hand and appropriate banners had been prepared. During her progress to the capital, the queen was met at the entrance of Canterbury by 100 men carrying flambeaux and was again presented with a loyal address. Ten thousand people were in the streets and again her horses were removed so that she could be pulled through the town. At Gravesend the inhabitants pulled a rope across the road to prevent the queen's passage and then over Alderman Wood's objections again halted the procession to pull

⁸⁴ Cobbett's *Political Register*, Nov. 18, 1820, cols. 1264–65; Huish, *Memoirs*, 2: 613–615; Creevy, *Papers*, p. 334; *Times*, Nov. 1, 1820, p. 3; The Company of Braziers and Armourers had been providing at first two and then three knights in armor for the Lord Mayor's Procession since the early eighteenth century. The Caroline demonstration it staged on Jan. 12, 1821, with its eight knights wearing white plumes, was in fact the most elaborate in its history. See Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) pp. 68–69 and chap. 6 generally. But the point here is not that royalist pageantry among artisans was unique to or especially grand for the Caroline demonstrations but rather that it established a context—the drama of chivalry and medieval romance, of which the baton presentation was part, alien and fundamentally antithetical to the analysis of political wrongs and their amelioration shared by the radical party. See also 92 below.

the queen's carriage themselves. Flags were displayed from windows and handkerchiefs waved enthusiastically. In Chatham and Rochester and Dartford and Northfleet and on into the City, huge and well prepared crowds greeted her. At Sittingbourne, forty-five miles southeast of London, a group of clergy in full gowns and bands were on the road to greet her. She entered the city at the head of a procession of carriages, some driven by men wearing turbans, others by mustachioed Italians.⁸⁵

Once in London, Caroline became the focus of vibrant popular royalism, led by the radical establishment. When she was denied use of her plate, men like Place, Wooler, and Thewell organized a campaign to buy her a new set with no contributions to exceed 1s.; the same radical booksellers and newspaper publishers who printed and distributed massive quantities of pro-Caroline literature were the organizational backbone of the effort. Those who presented addresses to the queen were rewarded with medallions—one is reminded of coins given those touched for the king's evil—with the queen's likeness on one side and the scene of her landing in Dover to the acclaim of the populace on the other. Copies of these medallions were struck by William Parr of London and sold, again, mostly through bookshops and newspapers, for 1s.⁸⁶

The language of radicalism in 1820 was pure monarchical apologetic. Even if its proponents did not believe what they said—and clearly at some level they did not—the important fact is that they were, nonetheless, enmeshed in a royalist discourse. Papers like the *Black Dwarf* argued that as the lineal descendant of the line of Brunswick, Caroline had a right through blood to the throne and not just one through marriage, a point made in other radical papers. An “Ode to George and Caroline” was distributed by partisans of the queen asking George to

Remove the cloud from Brunswick Star

Disclose its Brilliant ray;

Be thou a greater king by far

Than all—long pass'd away.

⁸⁵ For the Elizabethan progress with its welcoming addresses and other civic ritual see David M. Bergeron, *English Civil Pageantry 1558–1642* (London: David Arnold, 1971), pp. 9–65, 125–140; for the queen's progress see HO 40/14, ff 6–8; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, June 11, 1820, pp. 190ff.; *New Times*, June 7, 1820, p. 3; *London Chronicle*, June 7, 1820, p. 3; *Times*, June 7, p. 3; and *Examiner*, June 11, 1820, p. 371.

⁸⁶ Drakard's *Stamford News*, Nov. 10, 1820, and regular advertisements in the *Manchester Observer*.

When Caroline died, scores of different funeral posters proclaimed her as the Star of Brunswick—"she's dead, great Caroline is dead. . . . The Rose of England is no more."⁸⁷

Caroline was portrayed as the "good queen," the queen above faction. Thus, while her supporters appeared to be attacking monarchy through their jaunts at George, they were in fact bringing into relief its most attractive features. One cannot help but believe that Caroline stood for all that people might want from a monarch. She was often likened to Elizabeth and even the sophisticated London printer, William Benbow, argued half-seriously that England should welcome her as regent since the country had always prospered under queens. Caroline was shown on penny tracts talking to workers in the fields; she is shown in other prints nodding graciously to a pleb on his knees before her.⁸⁸

Moreover, she and her advisors very self-consciously portrayed her as accessible to the people. Much to the disgust of the aristocratic ladies of London, her lawyers, and even Francis Place, she rode in an open carriage through the streets and allowed the people to see and even touch her. She personally received petitions and when some in her staff recommended an end to such audiences, there was a great outcry from radicals like Cobbett that she was abandoning her popular base for the intrigues of high politics. The king, on the other hand, was depicted by both his friends and his enemies as aloof and afraid to display himself publicly.⁸⁹

Caroline was criticized by those of her station for precisely what made her so popular—her unique amalgam of royal aplomb and easy familiarity. It was of course this familiarity—carried to excess, it seems, with some servants—which got her into trouble in the first place. But the point was often made that her only fault was being on more equal terms with her servants than was common in the England of her time. In Europe, Caroline's defenders pointed out, old-style condescension toward one's servants was still acceptable. Caroline saw herself, rather sadly, as more comfortable in their world than in elite English society.

⁸⁷ *Black Dwarf*, 5: 9, Aug. 30, pp. 288–289 and also 5: 5, Aug. 2, p. 149; see poster by J. Thomas (Penzance, 1820) signed "John Bull" in HO 40/14, f 86; see Hodgson's "They Have Destroyed Me" and Catnach's "An Elegy to the Queen" among many others in BL under "Caroline Posters."

⁸⁸ See his "Glorious Deeds of Women" and "Caroline Triumphant."

⁸⁹ Mrs. Arbuthnot, *Journal* (London July 2, 1820), p. 27; Denman, 1: 116–117; *Political Register*, Nov. 11, 1820, cols. 1134–1145, regarding the queen's new councillors "casting off" the people. Place, *History*, Add MSS 27789, f 125.

Bored at one of her own parties, she told Denham that after all the years away she was no longer fit for good company. She probably had never been up to the new standards of the day, but precisely in this failing lay her claim to old-style monarchy.⁹⁰

The king's faults on the other hand, when not attributed to his insatiable sexual drives, were attributed to the ministry. An "evil advisers" theory protected the honor and the name of the monarch; in the popular imagination the attack on Caroline was perpetrated by a conspiracy of wicked men. Addresses to George after the Bill was dropped even congratulated him on the vindication of his queen. The banner in St. John's Wapping parade went still further: "Take away the wicked from before the King and his throne shall be established in righteousness." Seldom was an evil advisers theory less plausible. Nevertheless, this old fiction was given new life during the Caroline agitations while the king as a political symbol, if not as a model husband, remained unscathed.⁹¹

Royalism, aristocracy, and the themes of domestic melodrama merge in one final aestheticization of Caroline—the queen as the fair damsel of a medieval romance. Imperceptibly, Caroline became a character in a gothic romance. The chivalric theme of the braziers' march was repeated in other contexts, but nowhere more elaborately than in Alford, a Lincolnshire market town. There, twelve men dragged a platform through town on which were depicted Caroline and her court. A band marched ahead of this portable stage followed by a man dressed as "the Queen's champion" and mounted on horseback. After the parade through town the "champion" went about waving a sword and challenging "anyone who would dispute Queen Caroline's rightful succession." Trivial and bizarre perhaps, but a man in London was actually arrested for carrying out this fantasy by proclaiming himself "the Queen's champion" and assaulting a gentleman who refused to shout "Queen Forever." The Nottingham Ladies' Address to Caroline called on "all in whom the spirit of the days of chivalry are not utterly extinct" to rally to the queen, who, like the magnanimous Queen Elizabeth, "trusted her defense to a brave people." Soldiers of the Leicester

⁹⁰ See, for example, the evidence of Lady Charlotte Lindsey, *Trial*, 2: 122; *Memoirs*, 1: 145.

⁹¹ See, for example, petitions from Ealing, *Times*, Nov. 27, p. 2: the petition in HO 40/14 f 241 is supposed to be a parody of a loyal petition but is indistinguishable from the real thing; from Peterborough, *Examiner*, Dec. 24, p. 829; for Wapping, Adolphus, *Life*, 2: 442. An "evil advisers" theory had long been part of the repertoire of oppositional politics in England, most articulately in the modern period in Bolingbroke's *The Patriot King*.

Militia were cast by the press in the role of her knights and protectors, as were Denman and Brougham.⁹²

These motifs seem particularly bizarre in the explicitly progressive context of some pro-Caroline occasions. At the meeting of the married ladies of St. Marylebone, while the men sat on the main floor, the women sat in the galleries waving their white handkerchiefs “with an animation which British females can act upon without overstepping the feminine character. [It] put us in mind of the brilliant spectacle of an ancient tournament, where ‘Beauty’s eyes rained influence and judged the prize.’ ”⁹³

“ ‘The age of chivalry’ was not gone; the ‘glory of Europe was [not] extinguished forever,’ ” radical propagandists for Caroline proclaimed. They were of course alluding, whether consciously or not, to another and more famous rendering of politics into art, Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution*. And at the same time, they were putting the benign farce of Queen Caroline into sharp contrast with the “sublime” drama of another queen in other circumstances. In 1789 crowds burst into Marie Antoinette’s bedchamber, blood flowed in the halls of the mirrored palace, and that queen, almost naked, was dragged by the mob in ignominious procession to Paris. With their constant refrain that “ ‘the age of chivalry’ was not gone” the radicals who supported Caroline implicitly renounced the kind of social drama Blake had welcomed and Burke had so feared.⁹⁴

III. CONCLUSION

I have argued that public efforts in defense of Queen Caroline and public celebrations at her acquittal constituted a massive, unprecedented

⁹² *Stamford News*, Nov. 24, p. 3; *Republican* 3: 15, p. 522; Huish, *Memoirs*, 2: 592–3. The connection between the motif of the “champion” and kingship is evident in the elaborate ceremonial invented for the mounted armored “knight” who figured prominently in George IV’s coronation. See Girouard, *Chivalry*, pp. 13–27 and plate 4. Thomas Carlyle associated the champion with the “Phantasm-Aristocracy”: “Does not this champion too know the world; that it is a huge Imposture, and bottomless Inanity, thatched over with bright cloth and ingenious tissues” (*Past and Present*, book 3, chap. 1).

⁹³ See “*An Authentic Account of the Whole Proceedings of the Saint Marylebone Meeting of the Married Ladies, and Inhabitant Householders . . .*” (London: G. Riebau, 1820).

⁹⁴ *Manchester Observer*, Sept. 2, p. 1153; *The Champion*, Mar. 5, p. 72; see Ronald Paulson, “Burke’s Sublime and the Representation of Revolution” in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. P. Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 241–70; François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp. 71–72, 87, 239, and 259 as cited in Lynn A. Hunt, review article in *History and Theory*, forthcoming.

political mobilization against an incumbent government, against the venality and corruption of an unreformed parliament, and against the character and honor of a reigning monarch. I then suggested that the narrative which radicals had hoped to construct around their version of the prosecution of Queen Caroline was overwhelmed by a more compelling, a more culturally complex, and politically safe version of the story as domestic melodrama and royalist fantasy.

My point is not, however, that the politics of 1820 were in the last analysis linguistic, that to paraphrase François Furet, the expected revolution of 1819–1820 failed to “speak itself.”⁹⁵ In the first place, the power of the aesthetic forms in large measure depends on specific structural and institutional characteristics of society. Attacks on the sexual morality of a king and an aristocracy might constitute profoundly dangerous political propaganda in a society like France with well over 150 censors and an elaborate system of intellectual court patronage, but not in one like England, with its minimal censorship and a prince regent who purchased for his collections all but one or two of the most scurrilous Gillray satires on his private and public life.⁹⁶ History and political theory also isolated the person of the king, who could be (and was) harshly and harmlessly satirized, from kingship which continued to be viewed as a pillar of the constitution.⁹⁷

Moreover, for reasons having to do with the relationship of both the landed and the commercial elite to the state and to society, the social structure of England was conducive to the maintenance of political stability. The English aristocracy of the early 1820s, for all its political intrigues, showed little propensity to desert the social and political order of the day. Nor did the progressive bourgeoisie. And ultimately, of course, the power of the state rested on its right and capacity to exercise capital sanctions over its citizenry. Raw force, economic or military, requiring little or no symbolic analysis may well have been the bedrock of political order.

But the striking characteristic of the English political system is how seldom the governors confronted the governed at this level. Rather the exercise of power and the limits of protest against it were defined by its

⁹⁵ Draper Hill, *Mr. Gillray, the Caricaturist* (Phaidon, 1965), p. 123; Robert Darnton, “The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France,” *Past and Present* 51 (1971): 94, 108–110, and *passim*.

⁹⁶ Ernest Kantorowicz in *The Kings Two Bodies* elaborates what I take to be the theoretical foundations for this view.

⁹⁷ Max Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (Fraser Leczare, 1952; Manchester University Press, 1954) and more generally *Custom and Conflict—Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

representations, its organizations, and rituals. Specifically, I want to suggest that the Caroline agitations made manifest the existence in early nineteenth-century England of a polity deeply grounded in civil society, one which in Tocqueville's sense binds the social to the political through layer upon layer of intermediate institutions. These in turn determine the kinds of narratives the society produces about itself. It was a monarchy, a parliament, a jury system, and adversarial judicial procedures which, using a vast cultural reservoir, generated the stories in which the radical representation of Caroline's plight became mired.

But, there was in all of this no sinister forces of social control which seduced the masses through humbug while real politics went on beneath. Nor was there a failure of radicalism to capitalize correctly on a political opportunity. Nor even was it the case that those who denied the legitimacy of the state were willy-nilly caught up in a "ritual of rebellion" which instead reaffirmed the soundness of the system, though this comes closer to the truth. Rather, Caroline and indeed the intense radical activity of the 1810s were in large measure structured by the very political system they sought to oppose. The failure of the queen's cause was thus another testament to the power of civil society and of political processes to maintain themselves through the generation of socially binding narratives.