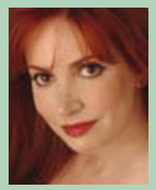


"JUDGE WHAT IT WAS TO HAVE A DRUNKEN HUSBAND ON ONE'S WEDDING DAY, AND ONE WHO PASSED THE GREATEST PART OF HIS BRIDAL NIGHT UNDER THE GRATE, WHERE HE FELL, AND WHERE I LEFT HIM."
LESLIE CARROLL EXAMINES THE MALODOROUS MÉSALLIANCE OF CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK AND KING GEORGE IV

Not so sweet Caroline

HARRIS, I AM NOT WELL, get me a glass of brandy," the Prince of Wales said curtly. James Harris, the Earl of Malmesbury, embarrassed for both Caroline and the Prince, diplomatically endeavoured to smooth things over. "Sir, had you not better have a glass of water?"

"No," the Prince replied, adding an oath presumably too crude for Malmesbury to record in his diary. "I will go directly to the Queen." George then turned on his heels and strode out of the room without another word.

The astonished 26-year-old Caroline of Brunswick, first cousin to the Prince of Wales, inquired of Malmesbury (in French): "My God! Is the Prince always like that? I find him very fat and nothing as handsome as his picture."

The royal match, made first in haste and then in Hanover, might just as well have begun in Hell. The Prince had not planned to take a wife – beyond the Catholic Maria Fitzherbert, whom he had clandestinely wed a decade earlier (see *JARW* No.39). It was only the sheer magnitude of his debts – which by 1794 had topped £600,000 – and his father's promise to pay them on his wedding day that spurred his decisions to assume the invalidity of his secret marriage and to find a suitable bride.

The pickings were slim; only Protestant princesses were deemed eligible, and most of them were to be found amid the tiny German duchies. "One damned German frau is as good as another," George insisted, informing his father "very abruptly" in August 1794 that he had "broken all connections with Mrs Fitzherbert" and was ready to begin "a more creditable line of life" by marrying the Princess of Brunswick.

That autumn the Earl of Malmesbury was dispatched to Brunswick, charged with escorting Caroline to England. His diary entry describes her "pretty face – not expressive of softness – her figure not graceful – fine eyes – tolerable teeth, but going – fair hair and light eyebrows, good bust – short, with what the French call épaules impertinentes [broad shoulders]… Vastly happy with her future expectations…"

However, Malmesbury quickly realised that Caroline was thoroughly unsuited to becoming Princess of Wales. Although her own father admitted that her high spirits (bordering on nymphomania) were ungovernable, her hoydenism was nothing compared to her hygiene. In an era when nearly everyone had bad teeth, hers were worse and Malmesbury had to introduce her to a brush and tooth powder as well as the joys of soap and water. Malmesbury also discovered that Caroline's undergarments – her "coarse petticoats and shifts and thread

Samuel Lane's portrait of Queen Caroline. From *Kings & Queens* by Richard Cavendish and Pip Leahy © David & Charles Ltd

Caroline's wedding to George,
from *George III: a life in caricature,*
by Kenneth Baker © Thames & Hudson

stockings" – were not only shabby, but were filthy and smelled rank, "never well washed or changed often enough".

On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1795, the future bride and groom met for the first time in the Duke of Cumberland's rooms at St James's Palace. In accordance with the protocol that she had struggled to absorb, Caroline, vulgarly dressed and overly rouged, thanks to the malevolent coaching of the Prince's mistress, Lady Jersey, curtseyed deeply to George, a florid faced, heavyset dandy with powdered ringlets. According to Malmesbury: "He raised her (gracefully enough) and embraced her, said barely one word, turned round [and] returned to a distant part of the apartment." This retreat was followed by the now famous request for brandy.

Was it Caroline's looks or her body odour that repulsed the Prince of Wales? Malmesbury had cautioned the princess to wash herself thoroughly all over.

As the wedding approached the King and Queen subtly offered their heir an "out". Her Majesty drew the Prince aside and told him: "You know, George, it is for you to say whether you can marry the Princess or not."

But the Prince was dreaming of a clean credit report; as distasteful as things were, he was not about to back out. Caroline, too, was ever the pugnacious Brunswicker. She knew that the prize was not George – it was queen of England.

George, who started drinking steadily three days earlier, and Caroline were married in the hot, stuffy and remarkably ill-illuminated Chapel Royal on the evening of April 8, 1795. Clad in silver tissue lace festooned with ribbons and bows and a robe of ermine-lined velvet, the dumpy flaxen-haired bride glittered with diamonds and grinned from ear to ear, almost bursting with happiness. In contrast, the podgy, drunk groom, who had made it down the aisle quite literally supported by two unmarried dukes, wept through the ceremony when he wasn't ogling Lady Jersey. At one point, the Prince rose to his feet in the middle of the service, looking as though he were about to bolt.

Potentially the most embarrassing moment came when the Archbishop set down the book after asking whether any person knew of "a lawful impediment why the couple should not be joined together in holy matrimony". The air was thick with tension. Would someone mention the Catholic Mrs Fitzherbert, to whom the Prince was illegally wed? The Archbishop looked long and hard from the Prince to the King and back again. The chapel remained silent and the ceremony continued.

On his wedding night, through a haze of brandy, the Prince must have gritted his teeth and thought of £600,000 (£46 million, or $74 million, in today's money), fantasising about the improvements that he could now make to his home, Carlton House.

Caroline was mortified, humiliated and disgusted by his behavior. She confided to Lady Charlotte Campbell: "Judge what it was to have a drunken husband on one's wedding day, and one who passed the greatest part of his bridal night under the grate, where he fell, and where I left him."

Miraculously, during one of George's three drunken and disappointing performances in the bedroom he successfully impregnated Caroline. No one was more surprised than she, given the brief and unhappy saga of their sex life.

On January 17, 1796, Caroline of

'Queen Caroline. Britain's best hope!! England's Sheet-Anchor!!!'
(19 October 1820)

Brunswick gave birth to "an immense girl", Princess Charlotte. The succession now secured, the kingdom rejoiced. So did the Prince of Wales. His duty done, he assured Malmesbury that "the child just born ... certainly will be the last as I declare I can never approach [Caroline] again, for she never washes or wipes any part of her body".

Indeed, the arrival of Charlotte did not reunite the Waleses in a lovefest of domestic harmony and marital bliss. In fact, George took great pains to avoid seeing his wife. Caroline was instructed to remain more or less secluded in London with a short list of socially appropriate visitors – including her Lady of the Bedchamber, none other than the Prince's mistress Lady Jersey. Known as the Carlton House System, it was George's way of keeping his wife "in order lest she should keep me so".

Caroline was utterly miserable. Lady Sheffield, who dined with the Princess in Brighton in late July 1796, noted that "her lively spirits which she brought over with her are all gone, and they say the melancholy and anxiety in her countenance is quite affecting".

The Waleses mutually agreed to separate in the spring of 1796, never again to sleep together and to remain man and wife in name only. The formal separation agreement was finalised in December and in the summer of 1798 Caroline took up residence in Montague House at the edge of Greenwich Park. The following year she was regularly entertaining several of the most prominent Cabinet ministers – including the Prime Minister himself, William Pitt. Indulging her flirtatious personality, she was rumored to be enjoying a series of lovers from her guest list. "I have a bedfellow as often as I like," she once boasted. "Nothing is more wholesome."

Towards the end of 1804 the air in London was thick with rumours about Caroline's indiscreet conduct. Behind the scenes, the Prince had been assiduously endeavoring to dig up as much dirt as possible. On May 29, 1806, after the then Prime Minister, Lord Grenville, had presented the evidence of Caroline's indiscretions, George III appointed a Secret Commission of Cabinet ministers to examine the witnesses who had provided it.

The proceedings, called "The Delicate Investigation", began on June 1, 1806. At issue was Caroline's alleged adulterous behavior and whether William Austin, a boy whom she had adopted as an infant in 1802, was in fact Caroline's illegitimate son.

After hospital records revealed that Willy Austin was the son of an unemployed dock worker and his wife, the Lord Commissioners ruled, on July 4, 1806, that the Prince had no grounds for a divorce because his wife had been cleared of committing any specific crime. Nevertheless, Caroline's indiscreet conduct resulted in the termination of all contact with her daughter, Princess Charlotte.

Caroline was in marital purgatory, in her words "a princess and no princess, a married woman and no husband – never was dere a poor devil in such a plight as I".

In 1814, after enduring nearly twenty years as a royal outcast, the Princess of Wales made the decision to leave England for the Continent. At the age of 46 she embarked, on August 9, attended by an assortment of English attendants and companions. In a desire to travel anonymously, she styled herself as the Countess of Wolfenbüttel, despite the large box that she always carried marked "Her Royal Highness, Princess of Wales, to be always with her". As her ship put out to sea, she was observed to be weeping.

In Italy Caroline began an affair with 32-year-old Bartolomeo Pergami, a tall, dark and handsome stud from an affluent Crema family. Pergami had been a quartermaster in the Austrian Viceregal army, serving in the Russian campaign of 1812, but had lost his commission allegedly for killing a higher-ranking officer in a duel. He was also conveniently separated from his wife.

Because she was travelling abroad, Caroline was not present at the wedding of her daughter, Princess Charlotte, and Prince Leopold, the third son of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, on May 2, 1816. Nor was she at her daughter's bedside when, after fifty hours of agonising labour, on November, 5, 1817, the Princess was delivered of a stillborn boy. Hours later, the 21-year-old princess herself was dead, most probably from either a post-partum haemorrhage or an infection

Depictions of the animosity between George and Caroline from *George IV: a life in caricature*, by Kenneth Baker © Thames & Hudson

that was not caught in time, and was then mistreated. Caroline, who was holidaying in Pesaro, on the east coast of Italy, fainted when she received the news of her daughter's death.

With their daughter gone, George no longer felt the need to continue his sham of a marriage. In 1818, casting himself as the most abused and tormented man ever to walk the face of the Earth, the Prince Regent dispatched a three-man commission to Milan "for the purposes of making enquiries into the conduct of Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales since she quitted England in the month of August 1814".

Although he was warned that Caroline could always raise the issue of his numerous extramarital liaisons, including his marriage to Maria Fitzherbert, and there remained a potential charge of bigamy against him, the Prince Regent stubbornly and hypocritically insisted on discrediting Caroline. However, after the Milan Commission presented its report, in July 1819, the Cabinet decided that it could not concur with its conclusions that the Princess of Wales and Bartolomeo Pergami were engaged in an adulterous affair.

Caroline was at Leghorn in 1820, when she received a letter from her lawyer, Henry Brougham, advising her of the death of George III on January 29 and urging her to return to England immediately; she was now Queen of Great Britain. Leaving her foreign entourage behind she landed at Dover on June 5, where she received an enthusiastic welcome. Caroline was cheered all the way to London with shouts of "God Save the Queen" and "no Queen, no King". She had become the people's symbol of an abusive, repressive and hypocritical monarchy. The press called her "the injured Queen".

After receiving such a warm welcome from her subjects, Caroline offered to live abroad forever in exchange for an allowance, but the King wanted a legal divorce. Taking the Milan Commission documents to both Houses of Parliament, he urged the Government to consider a Bill of Pains and Penalties that would punish Caroline for her alleged adultery with Pergami.

Introduced into the House of Lords on July 5, 1820, the Bill sought "to deprive Her Majesty Caroline Amelia Elizabeth of the title, prerogatives, rights, privileges, and exemptions of Queen Consort of this Realm, and to dissolve the marriage between His Majesty and the said [Queen] Caroline."

From the start, there were problems. The Whig peers were solidly against the Bill. Several Tories, including some of the King's closest friends, didn't think it prudent to proceed, fearing that His Majesty's numerous skeletons would be dragged from their closets by the defence. And many of the clerical Lords would only vote for the Bill if the divorce clause was removed.

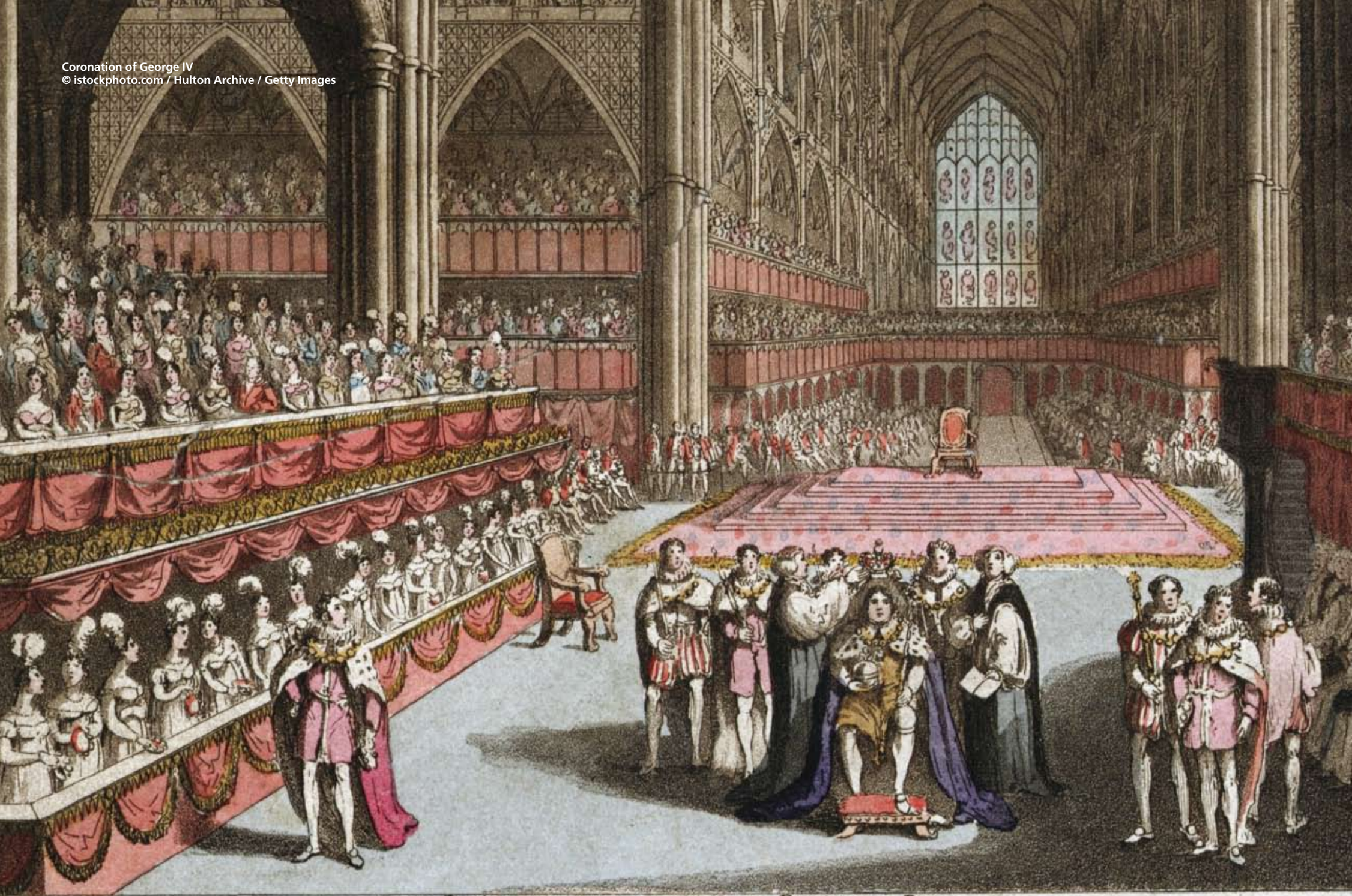
On August 17, the first day of her 'trial', Caroline rode in triumph to the House of Lords. Two of her former lovers were among the 258 peers charged with judging her conduct. At the end of the sixteenth day of testimony, much of it graphically prurient, the prosecution rested its case. Caroline's ambitious lawyer, Henry Brougham, defended the Queen's innocence by declaring that her so-called affair with Pergami had been nothing but a dumpy middle aged woman's one-sided attempt to appear beloved.

Lord Ellenborough spoke for his fellow peers when he conceded that "the Queen was the last woman any one would wish his own wife to resemble," yet he voted against the Bill on the acknowledgment that Caroline's husband was just as ill behaved and licentious, if not worse. In the words of Brougham: "All men, both in and out of Parliament… admit everything to be true which is alleged against the Queen, yet, after the treatment she had received since she first came to England, her husband had no right to the relief prayed by him or the punishment sought against her."

The Government withdrew the Bill of Pains and Penalties after the third reading when, at 108 to 99, only nine votes separated the ayes from the nays. The Crown uncomfortably conceded that if the outcome was this close in the Lords, the Bill would never pass in the Commons, where the King's numerous extramarital infidelities, as well as the unresolved issue of Mrs Fitzherbert, would surely sink his case. Fear of mob violence was another reason that the Government withdrew the Bill. The Lords had decided to punish the King for his hypocrisy rather than condemn the Queen for her adultery.

So the case was closed. And a popular satirical verse made the rounds of coffee houses:

Most gracious Queen we thee implore
To go away and sin no more,
Or, if that effort be too great,
To go away at any rate.



Coronation of George IV
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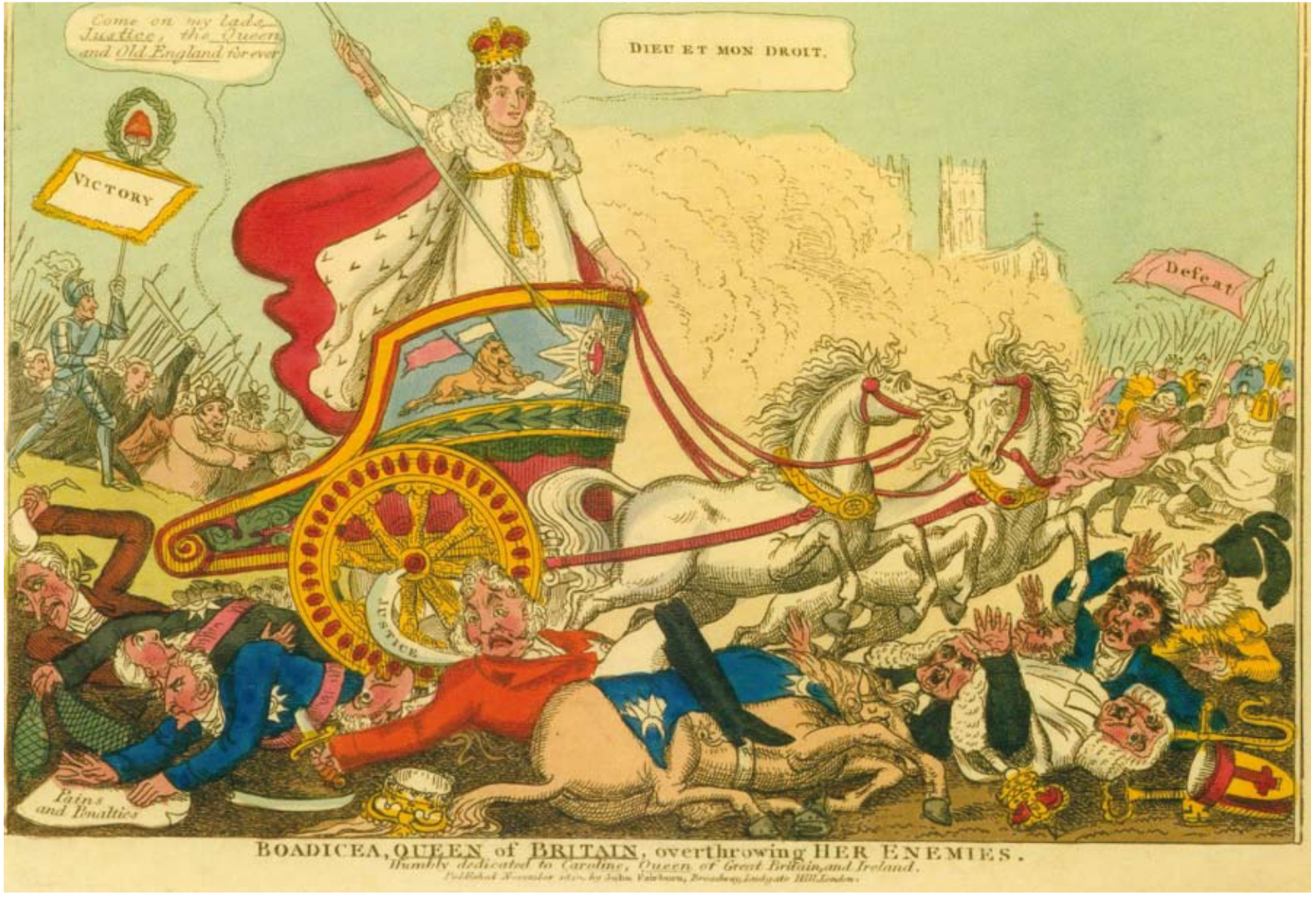
London Published Nov.1821 by Thos Kelly 17. Paternoster Row.

Coronation of George the Fourth in Westminster Abbey.



Caroline depicted as Boadicea, overthrowing her enemies. Eventually Caroline, like Boadicea, did not triumph. From *George III: a life in caricature*, by Kenneth Baker © Thames & Hudson

Now that her name and character had been formally cleared, Queen Caroline was eager to be crowned alongside her husband, but George took every precaution to prevent this unhappy event. He hired beefy prizefighters, captained by the champion pugilist Gentleman Jackson, to guard the doors to Westminster Abbey, the palace and the hall on Coronation Day, July 19, 1821. As the participants and invited guests assembled at 6am, Queen Caroline, dressed to the nines, arrived in Dean's Yard and was observed banging on the doors, demanding entry. A witness reported hearing her fuming and raging: "Let me pass; I am your Queen. I am Queen of Britain!" A page opened the door, admitting a sliver of light, just enough for Caroline to glimpse sentries with crossed bayonets standing just inside the door. The demoralised Caroline slunk away to jeers of "Shame!" "Go away!" and "Back to Pergami!"

That evening the uncrowned Queen hosted a dinner party and tried to mask her distress with a forced gaiety, but when her uproarious laughter suddenly turned to copious weeping, the guests realised how bitterly wounded she was, describing "tears of anguish so acute that she seemed to dread the usual approach of rest".

Within days of the King's coronation, Caroline suffered an obstruction and inflammation of the bowels. Her doctors realised that she could not be saved. On August 8, 1821, at 10.25pm, Caroline died. This Queen of England who never reigned, and was the only monarch in British history to have been subjected to a Bill of Pains and Penalties, was only 53 years old. She had asked to be buried in Brunswick with a simple epitaph on her coffin: Caroline of Brunswick, the injured Queen of England.

George IV was aboard the Royal Yacht when he received news of Caroline's death, retiring to his cabin for the remainder of the day. The Court was ordered to go into mourning for all of three weeks. The nation was not required officially to mourn its Queen at all.

The King survived his wife by nine years, dying on June 26, 1830 at the age of 67 as the result of a burst blood vessel in his abdomen. On July 16, 1830 *The Times* wrote in an editorial that "there was never an individual less regretted by his fellow creatures than this deceased king". As eccentric and often disliked as Caroline had been, her husband's popularity was even lower. For all his aesthetic sensibilities, throughout his life George IV – overweight, oversexed and overdressed – was a hypochondriac, a moral hypocrite, an emotional bully, a glutton, a drunkard, a womaniser and a bigamist.

The setting for Jane Austen's evergreen stories – the Regency – was an age of aesthetics, which nowadays is depicted as a kinder, gentler era where manners mattered. However, Jane was tangentially drawn into the royal marital dispute.

In 1815 a heavy hint, almost amounting to a command, from James Stanier Clarke, the royal librarian, that the Prince Regent would like Miss Austen's next novel dedicated to him left Jane with no choice but so to dedicate *Emma* – although Jane despised his shabby treatment of Caroline. "Poor woman," Jane wrote, "I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a Woman and because I hate her Husband… [If] I must give up the princess I am resolved at least always to think that she would have been respectable, if the Prince had behaved tolerably by her at first."

A multi-published novelist, Leslie Carroll (aka Amanda Elyot) is also the author of *Royal Affairs: A Lusty Romp through the Extramarital Adventures That Rocked the British Monarchy*. Her second nonfiction title, *Notorious Royal Marriages: A Juicy Journey through Nine Centuries of Dynasty, Destiny, and Desire*, will be published in January 2010