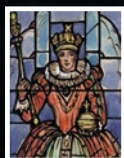




QUEENSHIP
AND POWER



Queen Caroline and Sir William Gell

A Study in Royal Patronage and
Classical Scholarship

Jason Thompson

palgrave
macmillan

Queenship and Power

Series Editors

Charles Beem

University of North Carolina

Pembroke, NC, USA

Carole Levin

University of Nebraska

Lincoln, NE, USA

This series focuses on works specializing in gender analysis, women's studies, literary interpretation, and cultural, political, constitutional, and diplomatic history. It aims to broaden our understanding of the strategies that queens—both consorts and regnants, as well as female regents—pursued in order to wield political power within the structures of male-dominant societies. The works describe queenship in Europe as well as many other parts of the world, including East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Islamic civilization.

More information about this series at
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14523>

Jason Thompson

Queen Caroline and Sir William Gell

A Study in Royal Patronage and Classical
Scholarship

palgrave
macmillan

Jason Thompson
Copper Hill, VA, USA

Queenship and Power

ISBN 978-3-319-98007-2

ISBN 978-3-319-98008-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98008-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018951578

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2019

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover credit: Peter Horree/Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*We live only de poor beings of de hour—and we ought always
to try to make us happy so long as we do live.*

—Caroline, as recorded by Lady Charlotte Campbell.

To the memory of Edith Clay, F.S.A.

PREFACE

I have some sixty or seventy letters of her most gracious Majesty, Queen Caroline: and, ‘Mein Gott!’ What curious things they are, and how rightly it would serve the royal family, supposing they had not quarreled with her[,] to publish their wife and cousin’s correspondence, as they have cheated me out of my pension!

—Sir William Gell to the Countess of Blessington, Naples, 2 June 1834.¹

Books often change their shapes and objectives between inception and publication. This one has probably undergone more metamorphoses than most. Because these affected form as well as function, some words about its evolution could be helpful.

The origin of the book lies some years in the past when I was studying the life and work of Sir Gardner Wilkinson, the founder of Egyptology in Britain. That led me to the classical scholar Sir William Gell. It was Gell who inspired Wilkinson to study ancient Egypt seriously and guided him in his early steps into the study of the Egyptian past. Miss Edith Clay, F.S.A. had published an edition of Gell’s letters to the Dilettanti Society with an Introduction that contained the most complete account of Gell to date. When she heard about my interest in Gell Miss Clay invited me to call on her at her flat near Westminster Cathedral with its view of the Houses of Parliament across the rooftops.

¹ R. R. Madden, *The Literary Life of the Countess of Blessington*, 3 vols. (London: T. C. Newby, 1855), 2: 84.

Long since retired, Miss Clay had led an adventurous life with employment at the House of Lords, the British School at Athens, service at Bletchley Park (which she would never discuss) during the Second World War, participation in the British Committee on the Preservation and Restitution of Works of Art, Archives and Other Material in Enemy Hands after the war, and extensive residence in the Mediterranean before settling in London during her later years. She was a well-known figure in classical and antiquarian societies in London.² Her publications included editions of the Countess of Blessington's Italian journals, Crauford Tait Ramage's travels in Italy, Richard Chandler's eighteenth-century journey in Asia Minor, and various articles in academic journals. In 1976, with the collaboration of Martin Frederickson, she published *Sir William Gell in Italy: Letters to the Society of Dilettanti*.³

As we discussed Sir William Gell, she told me how she had come across some "quite mad" letters from Caroline to Gell when she was consulting Gell's papers at the Gell family estate of Hopton Hall in Derbyshire. Struck by the letters' originality and by her belief that Caroline was a "woman wronged," she obtained a typescript copy of the letters and resolved to publish them one day. Unfortunately, Miss Clay was no longer well enough to embark on another book. She lent her copy of the letters to her friend the actress Thea Holme, who was preparing her biography of Caroline so that Holme was the first to make use of this unique source. There was a chance that Holme, who had also written a biography of Caroline's daughter, Princess Charlotte, might edit and publish the letters, but that was precluded by Holme's death the year after she published her *Caroline*. Miss Clay now asked me to undertake the task, and I left London that evening with the onionskin typescript in hand.

At first glance the the letters looked like a rambling hodge-podge of bad grammar and worse spelling, a mess of clumsy English heavily infected by bits of German and French; and it was not clear that Caroline was altogether proficient in any of those languages. Reading on, however, it soon became apparent that there was much more to the letters than incoherent nonsense. Caroline was *expressing* herself, and she

²I am grateful to Bernard Nurse, formerly the Librarian of the London Society of Antiquaries, for additional biographical information about Miss Clay.

³Edith Clay, *Sir William Gell in Italy: Letters to the Society of Dilettanti*. In collaboration with Martin Frederickson (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976).

was doing so with power and ingenuity in an idiom of her own devising, in spite of a pathetically inadequate education. She seemed to see everything with an almost kaleidoscopic vision that transformed old, familiar things into new, ever-changing shapes and colors, yet in practical, earthy ways. The letters also contained a large amount of material pertinent to different aspects of Regency history—gender, intellectual life, society, politics, cultural encounter, and more. Any lingering doubts about whether they deserved to be published soon vanished. I made a digital copy of the typescript.

Return trips to England and Scotland were essential to consult relevant archives. The original Caroline letters had recently been deposited at the Derbyshire County Record Office at Matlock after an inheritance crisis that resulted in the sale of the nearby Gell county seat of Hopton Hall and most of its contents. Caroline's letters had not yet been sorted; additional and highly pertinent material about Gell had also come to that archive. Caroline's handwriting was much more idiosyncratic and difficult than I had imagined. It immediately became apparent that the typescript of the letters from which I made my copy was saturated with errors, great and small, requiring careful collation and correction. That is important to note, because the typescript from Miss Clay and a duplicate in the Royal Archives at Windsor have been used for at least two biographies of Caroline, and they have occasionally been consulted by scholars for other purposes.⁴ On my initial visit to Matlock I worked through as much as possible and had the letters micro filmed.

Armed with microfilm of the letters, I corrected my copies and provided annotations that supplied the correct word or phrase where spelling or idiom was unclear and identified the many people and places she mentioned, often in passing, and often misspelled. I wrote a short introduction that provided basic background for both Caroline and Gell. Though concise, the introduction contained new material, for the background research required not only a survey of published sources but also a fair amount of archival research. Gell led me to a number of different places, for his papers were scattered among several collections in Britain, ranging from London to Edinburgh in Britain, and as far abroad as

⁴I should also note that that transcript, supplemented by another one in the Derbyshire County Record Office, has occasionally been helpful in my efforts to decipher Caroline's often difficult handwriting and idiomatic English. Other scholars with sharper eyes and different perspectives will inevitably identify shortcomings in my decipherment of her letters.

Athens and Los Angeles. Caroline also provided some archival surprises, making me more aware just how elusive she was as a biographical subject. Most of what I discovered, however, remained in my research files. The introduction was entirely ancillary to the letters, designed so as not to overwhelm them. The book manuscript at that point was an edited series of letters.

With passing time I found that the letters themselves were no longer my sole objective. There was much more to be said about both Caroline and Gell. Their relationship, most fully expressed in Caroline's letters, provided the unifying force to express it. Caroline and Gell, viewed in conjunction, took on new meaning as two individuals, gliding in single orbits but interacting with each other in meaningful ways that forever altered the trajectories of their lives, though Caroline's course was cut tragically short by her death soon after her final farewell to Gell. Much of the research material that I had reluctantly but ruthlessly omitted from my introduction to the letters because it served no strict introductory purpose now became essential to the text. What had been a concise introduction to the series of letters became Part I of a larger book.

Gell presented an open field. Apart from the perceptive but necessarily concise information provided by Edith Clay in her edition of his letters to the Dilettanti Society and a terse, deprecatory, and not altogether accurate entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he had attracted little scholarly notice.⁵ But Gell appeared frequently in the books, diaries, and letters of his contemporaries. Despite the lamentable loss of a great portion of his personal papers following his death, many items had settled in various libraries, archives, and personal collections. He also left a considerable body of published work. Gell amply repaid close study, and on many different levels, nearly all of which were underappreciated in the scholarly record. He was a fascinating person, a fixture of Regency society, and a significant figure in intellectual history. But opinions had varied about the caliber of his intellect, as well as his contributions to

⁵According to materials among the Gell papers in the Derbyshire County Record Office, at least two individuals expressed interest in writing biographies of Gell during the mid-twentieth century. L. A. Verity produced a short manuscript entitled "Queen's Knight: Life of Sir William Gell" that might have been interesting had it been published soon after its composition but that contains little that is not in Edith Clay's *Sir William Gell in Italy*. It is among the Gell papers in the Derbyshire County Record Office. Verity also published a short article about the letters from Caroline in the *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 21 June 1965. As will be seen below, Gell has drawn more scholarly attention in recent years.

scholarship, with the assessments tending to diminish over time. By the beginning of the twentieth century Gell still rated an entry in the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, but only just barely, and with the dismissive appraisal that “he was not a profound scholar,” an assessment that has since been corrected.

Gell performed some of the most important classical scholarship of his day. If it did not have more lasting impact, the fault lay at least as much with the limitations of succeeding generations of classical scholars as with Gell. His active function as an intermediary of ideas played a unique, dynamic role in advancing ground-breaking study in many different fields. His life also provided a perspective into Regency social life. Strategically placed neither too high nor too low, he knew and was known by almost everyone, and was widely though by no means universally admired by his contemporaries. But his pivotal personal contact, more crucial than even he probably ever realized, was with Caroline.

If Gell received less scholarly notice than he deserved, Caroline might seem to have attracted much more than she merited, especially for a minor German princess who spent most of her life as a rejected Princess of Wales and was a reigning—but never crowned—queen for just a year and a half. Yet a complete bibliography of works about Caroline runs to many pages and includes at least a dozen full-length biographies. The most recent and most comprehensive biography is Flora Fraser’s 1996 work, *The Unruly Queen: The Life of Queen Caroline*, which cites some of Caroline’s letters to Gell, though from the inaccurate typescript in Windsor Castle.⁶ Despite such attention, Caroline has defied definition. Her life appears deceptively simple at first glance, but closer examination quickly reveals complexities and ambiguities, made even more perplexing by her tactic of conveying deliberately false impressions of herself. That may be why one of the most perceptive biographies of her was written by an actress.⁷ Caroline’s personality was prismatic. Different people saw different things, depending on their perspectives, and so have her biographers, resulting in varying interpretations. The titles of her biographies range from *The Wanton Queen* to *An Injured Queen* to *The Unruly Queen*. Absurd stories about her have been accepted as historical fact,

⁶ Flora Fraser, *The Unruly Queen: The life of Queen Caroline* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

⁷ Thea Holme, *Caroline: A Biography of Caroline of Brunswick* (New York: Atheneum, 1980).

such as an assertion by Princess Lieven that when Caroline received a letter from her husband releasing her from marital constraints, she had sex with George Canning right then and there.⁸ At the other extreme, attempts to whitewash her reputation have never been convincing.

Much of the problem resulted from too narrow a focus on specious “did she” or “didn’t she” questions: Was she sexually promiscuous? Were the charges brought before the House of Lords therefore true? The importance of these questions is exaggerated, and they forestall other rewarding lines of inquiry into her character and experience. For example, her life contains important themes for feminist study: her restricted upbringing as a prospective diplomatic bride, the double standard that was applied to her, and the other limitations imposed upon her because of her gender—indeed, much of her behavior can be explained as rebelling against those limits. One also finds in her an unexpected interest in culture, despite disadvantages in education. Her role as patron of the arts has largely been ignored, despite her dealings with several artists, scholars, and writers, and her valuable contribution to Sir William Gell’s work in Italy.

Caroline’s relationship with Gell provides the perspective to view her multi-faceted personality. Although she had many relationships, the exact nature of which is debated, Caroline held Gell in particularly high esteem. Her admiration for him and genuine appreciation of his talents show clearly in her letters. His career might well have foundered but for her patronage. And despite his shrewish remarks about Caroline—made to others, never to her—he enriched her life in many ways, and in the end he helped save her royal title. For all his foibles, “Dear Ancharsis,” as Caroline addressed Gell, was a very useful friend indeed. Part I of this book contains early biographies of Caroline and Gell, the story of the years in which their lives were closely intertwined, and an account of Gell’s career after her death, when she was still very much a part of his life in memory.

Part II is Caroline’s letters to Gell. He wrote of having “sixty or seventy letters of her most gracious Majesty,” but a few must have been lost, because the extant total is slightly less. The letters begin in 1815, shortly after Caroline sailed from English shores to wander through Europe, the Near East, North Africa, and finally Italy, where she settled for several

⁸ Neville Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 36.

years of virtual though by no means unpleasant exile. They continue through her sensational trial in the House of Lords in 1821, the year of her death. The series therefore documents a little-known but highly controversial period. Although the title of this book refers to “Queen” Caroline, as she was at the end, most of the letters were written when she was Princess of Wales.

Because of her profound admiration for Gell, Caroline took special pains in her letters, filling them with detail. The historical importance of that detail is manifold, providing vivid glimpses of Regency characters, bold adventures, and the operations of her peculiar household and court. The letters also shed new light on her trial before the House of Lords in 1820. All the while, they sparkle with her lively intellect that perceives and expresses the world in extraordinary ways. As with children’s utterances, naïve and novel by turns, one can rarely predict what Caroline will say next.

To preserve Caroline’s unique view, I have been careful to retain her spelling and grammar. Her frequent misspellings resulted from applying foreign phonetics and orthography to an imperfect mastery of English. They may also echo her conversational speech, which Gell loved to mimic in his crueler moments. Editorial punctuation has been inserted, and then in brackets, only when absolutely essential for sense, and sometimes not even then if it impedes the flow of expression. Nor has any attempt been made to render Caroline’s spelling and grammar consistent with itself. The Pope may be referred to as his “Holiness” in one letter and his “Wholyness” in another.⁹ What might look like an error in transcription or typesetting, as in “erath” for “earth,”¹⁰ is actually the way Caroline wrote the word, and may have been the way she pronounced it—although in another letter she spelled “earth” correctly. Since that might sound deprecating it must be emphasized that Caroline’s idiosyncratic and inconsistent spelling was not merely or even necessarily a manifestation of ignorance. Sometimes she could spell relatively difficult words. In those instances, she may have had had someone at hand whom she could ask, or perhaps she consulted a pertinent book or letter. It is easy to forget, looking at Caroline’s letters and listening to her transcribed speech, that she was a well-read person. Her writing suggests that

⁹ Letters #6 and 16.

¹⁰ Letter #7.

she was an auditory speller who relied on hearing, not visual memory, to spell words. Auditory spellers make more mistakes than visual spellers; and if auditory spellers are multilingual, as Caroline was, the mistakes are compounded. She may also have been dyslexic.

My task was made even more arduous, and occasionally impossible, by Caroline's handwriting, which can be extremely difficult to read. Even Gell, who knew it well (and who wrote in a beautifully clear hand) found it so, once writing to his friend Lady Charlotte Campbell that he had "had the honour of receiving a letter written by her own royal hand; but *so* written, I could only decipher half of its contents, and was satisfied to guess the rest."¹¹ On one occasion, a banker's inability to read her handwriting caused "all sorts of difficulties."¹²

In the course of her letters Caroline throws off many passing references to people, places, and current events. Whenever possible, these are described in the footnotes or in the text of Part I. When Caroline's turn of phrase becomes excessively confusing, the meaning of her words is given in the notes. Occasionally, however, I have no idea what she is saying, and in those cases the text is best left alone. The odious interpolation *sic* has been avoided, otherwise it would riddle the text of the letters and overwhelm it.

Gell's collection of letters from Caroline contained some letters from others, several of which are included in this volume. These correspondents are people such as her champion Lord Brougham and his brother Henry, her bankers, and members of her household. Their letters are included because some of them are significant historical documents in themselves and because they illuminate the series of letters as a whole. So far I have seen none of Gell's letters to Caroline, but perhaps other researchers will discover at least some of them.

When the letters are cited in the notes, it is with the distinctive score sign and the number of the letter—i.e., #10—as it is presented in Part II. Since I first visited the archive in 1989, the conscientious staff of the Derbyshire County Record Office have catalogued some of the Gell and Caroline papers. Caroline's letters to Gell are D3287/4/5.

My goals have been to reproduce the manuscript letters as accurately as possible in type while explaining their background and suggesting

¹¹Lady Charlotte (Campbell) Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, A. Francis Steuart, ed., 2 vols. (London: John Lane, 1908), 2: 239.

¹²#32.

some of the many insights into Regency history that they provide. They are the single most important documentary source for Part I of this book. Through the letters emerge characteristics of a woman of courage and substance. Caroline rebelled against her situation and attempted to modify its intrinsic unfairness. Hindered by prejudice, exploitation, and undeniable defects in her own character, she fought against heavy odds almost until the end. Important principles were involved that should not be forgotten when considering her occasionally absurd, sometimes pathetic, but usually well-intentioned and invariably interesting life. Caroline was a peculiar person, to put it mildly, but she deserved better than she got.

Copper Hill, USA

Jason Thompson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Expressions of gratitude must begin with the late Edith Clay, F.S.A., who originated this project and furthered it in every way that she could. Anthony Gell provided much-appreciated encouragement during the early stages of the work. Angela T. Thompson and Margaret Ranger read the manuscript and offered many valuable suggestions and corrections. Charles Plouviez shared several important insights from his research about Caroline. The Derbyshire County Record Office, where Caroline's letters to Sir William Gell are held, and its former archivist, Dr. Margaret O'Sullivan, provided ready access to the Caroline and Gell papers and an excellent working environment. The Muniment Trustees of Colonel PVW Gell deceased graciously granted permission to publish from the Gell papers at Matlock. I spent many happy, productive hours in the British Library, the Bodleian Library, and the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle. I am grateful to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for permission to quote from manuscript materials in the Royal Archives and to the welcoming archival staff for the privilege of working in the Round Tower at Windsor.

The National Endowment for the Humanities provided funding for my first trip to the Derbyshire County Record Office to consult Caroline's letters and that archive's large collection of Gell papers. The Faculty Research Grant Program at Western Kentucky University enabled me to purchase supplementary research materials. The Department of History at WKU helped in numerous ways. An award from the

American Philosophical Society enabled me to return to the Derbyshire County Record Office for further work and helped support the final stages of research and composition of this book.

I also owe an immense debt, both personal and scholarly, to my wife Angela and my son Julian, who not only were patient and understanding of the time and effort I had to devote to this project, but also contributed to it substantially at every stage, from the initial research, during composition, and through the myriad tasks of moving toward publication.

CONTENTS

Part I A Princess and Her Chamberlain

1	Princess Caroline	3
2	Sir William Gell	17
3	A Princess and Her Chamberlain	31
4	Sir William Gell in Italy	51
5	Caroline's Adventures	65
6	The Trial of Queen Caroline	97
7	Sir William Gell's Later Years	119

Part II Queen Caroline's Letters to Sir William Gell

8	The Letters	155
1	<i>Caroline to Gell, Naples, 8 February 1815</i>	155
2	<i>John Jacob Sicard to Gell, Naples, 9 March 1815</i>	156
3	<i>Caroline to Gell, Naples, 9 March 1815</i>	157

4	<i>Caroline to Gell, Civitavecchia, 21 March 1815</i>	159
5	<i>Caroline to Gell, Genoa, 14 April 1815</i>	160
6	<i>Caroline to Gell, Genoa, 12 May 1815</i>	165
7	<i>Caroline to Gell, Milan, 22 June 1815</i>	167
8	<i>Caroline to Gell, undated [late June or early July 1815]</i>	173
9	<i>Caroline to Gell, 30 July 1815</i>	174
10	<i>Caroline to Gell, 20 October 1815</i>	177
11	<i>Lady Oxford to Caroline, 21 September 1815</i>	181
12	<i>Caroline to Gell, 28 November 1815</i>	182
13	<i>Caroline to Gell, Tunis, 21 April 1816</i>	186
14	<i>Caroline to Gell, Villa d'Este, 20 October 1816</i>	190
15	<i>Caroline to Gell, Villa d'Este, 20 November. [1816]</i>	193
16	<i>Caroline to Gell, Villa d'Este, 8 January 1817</i>	196
17	<i>Caroline to Gell, 19 February 1817</i>	199
18	<i>Caroline to Gell, 10 May 1817</i>	202
19	<i>Caroline to Gell, [May 1817?]</i>	203
20	<i>Caroline to Gell, Ancona, 25 May 1817</i>	203
21	<i>Caroline to Gell, [Rome c. June 1817]</i>	205
22	<i>Caroline to Gell, [Rome c. June 1817]</i>	206
23	<i>Caroline to Gell, 19 June [1817]</i>	206
24	<i>Caroline to Gell, 24 June 1817</i>	207
25	<i>J. P. Stracey to Gell, London, 24 July 1817</i>	208
26	<i>Caroline to Gell, Pesaro, 19 August [1817]</i>	210
27	<i>Caroline to Gell, 29 August [1817]</i>	211
28	<i>James Brougham to Gell, undated [1817]</i>	213
29	<i>James Brougham to Chevalier Tamassia, undated [1817]</i>	214
30	<i>Caroline to Gell, Pesaro, 6 September 1817</i>	215
31	<i>Henry Brougham to Gell, London, 15 July 1817</i>	216
32	<i>Henry Brougham to Gell, 29 October 1817</i>	218
33	<i>Caroline to Gell, Pesaro, 29 October 1817</i>	219
34	<i>Joseph Hownam to Gell, Pesaro, 20 November 1817</i>	221
35	<i>L. Chevalier to Gell, Rome, 25 November 1817</i>	222
36	<i>Joseph Hownam to Gell, 4 December 1817</i>	223
37	<i>Joseph Hownam to Gell, Pesaro, 11 December 1817</i>	224
38	<i>Caroline to Gell, Pesaro, 25 February 1818</i>	226
39	<i>Caroline to Gell, Villa Victoria, 24 December 1818</i>	227
40	<i>Caroline to Gell, 8 March 1819</i>	229
41	<i>Caroline to Gell, 28 March 1819</i>	230

42	<i>Caroline to Gell, Villa Victoria, 10 May 1819</i>	231
43	<i>Caroline to Gell, 19 July 1819</i>	232
44	<i>Caroline to Gell, 12 August 1819</i>	233
45	<i>Caroline to Gell, Castel Canato, 15 September 1819</i>	234
46	<i>Caroline to Gell, Marseilles, 18 December 1819</i>	237
47	<i>Caroline's memoir of 20 December 1819, about the history of her financial arrangements with the British government, enclosed with her letter of 18 December 1819</i>	239
48	<i>Caroline to Gell, Rome, 3 March 1820</i>	240
49	<i>Caroline to Gell, Parma, 19 March 1820</i>	242
50	<i>Caroline to Gell, Pesaro, 13 April 1820</i>	244
51	<i>Caroline to Gell, Geneva, 8 May 1820</i>	247
52	<i>Caroline to Gell, 12 September [1820]</i>	248
53	<i>Caroline to Gell, undated [October 1820]</i>	249
54	<i>Caroline to Gell, 2 November [1820]</i>	250
55	<i>Caroline to Gell, 27 January 1821</i>	251
56	<i>Caroline to Gell, Brandenburg House, 11 February 1821</i>	253
57	<i>Caroline to Gell, 12 June [1821]</i>	255
58	<i>Caroline to Gell, undated [1821]</i>	256
 Appendix: "List of the Queen's Household at the Time of Her Death"		 257
 Index		 259

PART I

A Princess and Her Chamberlain



CHAPTER 1

Princess Caroline

Caroline was the daughter of Prince Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, and his wife Princess Augusta, the elder sister of George III of England. That union was, of course, a diplomatic one, something the duke always regretted. “Only private persons are happy in the married state,” he once said. “The reason is because they are free to choose. One of my class must marry according to certain conveniences, which is a most unhappy thing. The heart has nothing to do with these marriages, and the result is not only to embitter life, but also to bring the most disastrous experience on those who come after”¹—words that prophesied the fate of more than one of his children. The duke spent his time with his mistress, Mlle de Hertzfeldt, who lived in great style in the ducal palace. The duchess maintained her palace and court some miles away where she and her ladies passed their days at needlework.

One of the functions of a diplomatic marriage was to produce children, and the Duke and Duchess did their duty. There were six in all. The third child, Caroline Amelia Elizabeth, was born on 17 May 1768. Her father’s attachment to Mlle de Hertzfeldt, whom Caroline described as “the beautifullest creature, and the cleverest,” did not make things easy for her because “though my father continued to pay my mother all possible respect, my poor moder could not suffer this attachment; de consequence was, I did not know what to do between them; when I was

¹Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick: An Historical Study, 1735–1806* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), 17.

civil to the one, I was scolded by the other, and was very tired of being shuttlecock between them.” But her father was her favorite. “I loved my father dearly,” she declared, “better nor any oder person.”² She always remembered him with admiration. After her marriage, she said, “My father was a hero. They married me to a zero.”³ And Caroline was much closer to Mlle Hertzfeldt than to her own mother.

Caroline was a bright, even precocious child, but her talents went undeveloped. Her letters show her educational deficiencies all too well: she never learned capitalization, spelling, or grammar, and most certainly not good handwriting; yet she had a profound desire to express herself, as her letters also show, and she somehow acquired an abiding love of the literature. While her brother, Friedrich Wilhelm, who someday would become duke,⁴ received a passable education, Caroline was fobbed off on indifferent teachers and governesses who could never keep up with her. Easily outwitting them, she often turned their own lessons back on them with skillful repartee. She was undoubtedly a willful, difficult student, but her preceptors were dissolute, titled mediocrities, poor teachers, and worse role models. She was even denied religious training so there would be no impediment to marriage to either a Protestant or a Catholic prince, for dynastic marriages were the intended purpose for princesses of her line.⁵ That could be a grim fate, as Caroline knew well. Her elder sister Augusta was abandoned by her husband, Frederick, the Hereditary Prince of Württemberg, and ended her days in a Russian prison on the Baltic where she was probably murdered.

As Caroline grew into womanhood, observers noticed that she was extremely headstrong, and that she could be cruel when she impaled people with her sharp wit. Worse, rumors—never founded, but ever persistent—ran that her morals were loose. Even her parents became alarmed and had her watched closely. Eligible husbands shied away or were warned away because of her reputation. She was still a spinster at 26. It must have been a great surprise when an offer of marriage came from her first cousin, George, Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne.

²Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, 1: 15–16.

³Fitzmaurice, *Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick*, 16, n.

⁴Two of the three elder brothers were mentally impaired; the other was blind.

⁵For Caroline’s mature views on religion, see #16.

The Prince of Wales was eager to marry, not for love but money. By 1794, his debts had soared to the immense sum of £550,000 and had become a matter of state business. Parliament took a dim view of paying for his excesses. George III offered to rescue his prodigal son and put him on a sounder financial foundation, but on condition that he marry and settle down. The prince agreed to marry, but showed astonishingly little selectivity. There were other German princesses who would have been thought better matches, but he chose to marry Caroline, perhaps out of perversity; or perhaps his current mistress, the Countess of Jersey, decided that Caroline posed the least threat to her own position.⁶

There was an impediment to the union, however, for the Prince of Wales was already married. Some years before, he became enamored with Maria Fitzherbert. But Mrs. Fitzherbert (she was a widow) was a devout Roman Catholic who steadfastly resisted his extravagant attentions, refusing to succumb to him under any terms other than matrimony. Accordingly, he married her in a secret ceremony, after which they lived together for years as man and wife. The reason for secrecy was the Act of Settlement, one of the foundations of the modern British monarchy, which stipulated that the heir apparent would forfeit his right to the crown if he married a Roman Catholic. But another law, the Royal Marriages Act of 1772, provided that the heir's marriage could be valid only with the King's consent, and that had never been given. So, by a bit of sophistry, Prince George could reason that he was not legally married, at least not in England, and therefore free to marry Caroline. Mrs. Fitzherbert chose not to stand in the way. Caroline knew at least something about all that, as did many. She was later heard to say that her only real sin was committing adultery with Mrs. Fitzherbert's husband. Even so, the marriage proposal seemed like a great stroke of good fortune, more than Caroline could reasonably have expected, because it carried the prospect of becoming Queen of England.

The Earl of Malmesbury, a senior diplomat, was sent to fetch Caroline from Brunswick. He immediately realized that there were problems. Caroline's father raised them himself. "She is not stupid," he told Malmesbury, "but she lacks judgement; she has been brought up strictly—and it has been necessary."⁷ He urged Malmesbury to admonish

⁶For his choice of Caroline, see Christopher Hibbert, *George IV, Prince of Wales* (London: Longmans, 1972), 153.

⁷Holme, *Caroline*, 11.

her to be discreet in speech. Mlle Hertzfeldt spoke even more pointedly to the earl:

I conjure you to induce the Prince, from the very commencement, to make the Princess lead a retired life. She has always been kept in much constraint and narrowly watched, and not without cause. If she suddenly finds herself in the world, unchecked by any restraint, she will not walk steadily. She has not a depraved heart—has never done anything wrong, but her words are ever preceding her thoughts. She gives herself up unreservedly to whomever she happens to be speaking with; and thence it follows, even in this little court, that a meaning and an intention are given to her words which never belonged to them. How then will it be in England, where she will be surrounded, it is said, by cunning and intriguing women ...⁸

Caroline indeed had a distressing way of saying whatever came to mind, however outlandish it might be, suggesting that she may have suffered from the pressure of speech, symptomatic of Bipolar II Disorder, a condition that can explain some of her other eccentricities. Right up until her marriage, family and advisers begged her to think before she spoke, always in vain.

After a difficult voyage that tried Malmesbury's diplomatic patience and talents to their utmost, Caroline was presented to her husband-to-be on 5 April 1795. For George, it was loathing at first sight. He was so overcome that he had to leave the room, calling for a glass of brandy as he went. Caroline, for her part, was scarcely more impressed. "Mon dieu!" she exclaimed. "Is the Prince always like that? I find him very fat, and nothing like as handsome as his portrait."⁹ George continued his petulant behavior until the wedding day, 8 April, clearly hoping for some way out. He was so intoxicated during the ceremony that his friends had to hold him upright.

The wedding night was not an occasion that Caroline remembered fondly. "Judge what it was to have a drunken husband on one's wedding day," she later told one of her ladies-in-waiting, "and one who passed the greatest part of his bridal-night under the grate, where he fell,

⁸ John Doran, *Lives of the Queens of England of the House of Hanover*, 4 rev. ed., 2 vols. (London: Spottiswoode, 1875), 2: 205.

⁹ Holme, *Caroline*, 23.

and where I left him.”¹⁰ According to George’s account, as related to Malmesbury a year later, they had sex three times altogether, twice on their wedding night and once the next night. “There was no appearance of blood,” he informed Malmesbury, and “her manners were not those of a novice.” So disgusted was he with her appearance and hygiene that he vowed “*never to touch her again.*”¹¹ Soon he returned his attentions to Mrs. Fitzherbert, but those two nights were sufficient for Caroline to become pregnant. “I no more believed it than anything for a long time,” she later told Lady Charlotte Campbell. A daughter, Princess Charlotte, was born on 7 January 1796.

Long before that event, an unofficial separation was arranged in which both the Prince and Princess lived in the same palace, but rarely saw each other except on formal occasions. Even so, George’s disgust with his wife increased. It is difficult to understand why his revulsion grew so quickly, but he said, in language suspiciously reminiscent of an alcoholic hallucination, “I would rather see toads and vipers crawling over my victuals than sit at the same table with her.”¹² Nor was that an isolated outburst: six months after Princess Charlotte was born, he told his mother that Caroline was “the vilest wretch this world was ever cursed with, who I cannot feel more disgust for from her personal nastiness than I do from her entire want of principle.”¹³

There were problems aplenty with Caroline. She was still pretty in those days but careless about appearance and hygiene. She often acted inappropriately. Her shortcomings were exacerbated by the awkwardness of her situation, not only shunned by her husband but also exposed to a hostile mother-in-law. She was even tormented by the Prince’s mistress, the Countess of Jersey, who was selected as her Lady of the Bedchamber. Hostile eyes watched Caroline’s every move; no opportunity to make her appear ridiculous was wasted—and her reckless speech and behavior provided plentiful opportunities.

¹⁰Holme, *Caroline*, 32.

¹¹John Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest: Peterloo, Cato Street and the Queen Caroline Controversy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 166; Jane Robins, *The Trial of Queen Caroline: The Scandalous Affair That Nearly Ended a Monarchy* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 17–18.

¹²Roger Fulford, *The Trial of Queen Caroline* (London: Batsford, 1967), 55.

¹³John Brooke, *King George III* (London: Constable, 1972), 550.

In some ways, the Prince of Wales was as pathetic a study as the wife he so heartily despised. Despite many natural gifts, George remained a spoiled child at heart, used to having his way and seeking his mother in times of stress. This trait carried over into his personal life where he chose a succession of mistresses and casual encounters, ranging from high nobility to common prostitutes but usually older women. He sought to escape problems by not facing them. Some of the blame for Caroline's conduct must attach to him, for his treatment of her was bound to bring out her worst. Their daughter, Princess Charlotte, offered a balanced view in later years: "My mother was wicked, but she would not have turned so wicked had not my father been much more wicked still."¹⁴ The prince got little sympathy from his family. When he begged his father for a legal separation, George III refused, trying to make his son understand that this was no private affair, but a matter that concerned the entire kingdom. Others also disapproved on grounds that he was shirking his duty. His brother, the Duke of Clarence, commented: "My brother has behaved very foolishly. To be sure, he has married a very foolish, disagreeable person, but he should not have treated her as he has done, but made the best of a bad bargain, as my father has done. He married a disagreeable woman, but he has not behaved ill to her."¹⁵

Soon George and Caroline were maintaining separate households, although George still attempted to circumscribe his wife's activities. Caroline, who had anticipated an exciting life as Princess of Wales, rebelled at the calculated tedium imposed on her. She summoned her husband and shouted at him in French: "Since I have been in this house you have treated me neither as your wife, nor as the mother of your child, nor as the Princess of Wales: and I tell you that from this moment I shall have nothing more to say and that I regard myself as being no longer subject to your orders—or to your rules."¹⁶ Caroline was never one to bear insult or injury passively. She refused the acquiescent role that her mother had mildly accepted. Relations between the prince and princess were formally terminated in an exchange of notes in April–May 1796. The prince had already made his will in which he left everything to Mrs. Fitzherbert, "who is my wife in the eyes of God and who is and

¹⁴Holme, *Caroline*, 33.

¹⁵Holme, *Caroline*, 54.

¹⁶Holme, *Caroline*, 53.

ever will be such in mine"; but, "to her who is called the Princess of Wales, I leave one shilling."

Caroline developed a lively social circle of her own. The rift with her husband became public knowledge, with sentiment weighing heavily on her side. Her dinner parties were well attended, and she was loudly cheered when she appeared at the opera or went for drives in an open carriage with her daughter. Even the king, who was after all her uncle, showed her marked attention. The prince had run afoul his father in several matters, and, despite the financial rescue by Parliament when he married, he needed to be bailed out yet again, the fourth time in twenty years that Parliament had to pay his debts. The prince's disgust for Caroline turned to hatred, for he perceived her popularity as a threat to himself. He let it be known that to accept an invitation from her was to be stricken from his own guest list. Even more damaging, Charlotte was removed from Caroline's care. She was no longer consulted about her daughter's upbringing, and her visits were restricted.

She adjusted, but in disturbing ways. Sometimes she deliberately committed ostentatious indiscretions, such as disappearing with a man for long periods of time in the middle of one of her parties. Sometimes she played at being pregnant, which she could convincingly do by letting out her corset, for she was putting on weight. Her appearance in 1812 was described by Lord Wadsworth in a letter to Lady Wadsworth. "She is a fat, unwieldy Woman," he wrote, "but has rather a handsome and pleasing countenance, with an expression of hilarity, that's not, however, free from coarseness."¹⁷ Caroline longed for love and attention. "Oh, mine God, I could be the slave of the man I love!" she once exclaimed.¹⁸ Rejected by her husband, she wanted to show that she was still attractive to men. Gossip linked her with several, but she steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, though in her enigmatic manner, saying, "Nobody can improve me in morality. I have a system quite of my own on that head."¹⁹

Lady Hester Stanhope remembered Caroline's tendency to portray herself unfavorably:

¹⁷William Wadsworth and Dorothy Wadsworth, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wadsworth*, Beth Darlington, ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981), 213.

¹⁸Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, 1: 14.

¹⁹Sylvester Douglas, *The Diaries of Sylvester Douglas, Lord Glenbervie*, Francis Bickley, ed., 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1928), 2: 92.