

Lady Caroline Lamb

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Lady Caroline Lamb was an upper-crust Regency writer and celebrity. She was born in 1785 and married the politician William Lamb in 1805. She is most known for her affair with Lord Byron, lasting from around March to November of 1812. Their relationship began when she sent Byron a love letter in March after reading an early copy of his book *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Their dalliance went up in flames in a matter of months. By the end of their relationship, Lady Caroline burned Byron in effigy at her residence, Brompton Hall. During the spectacle, a bonfire was encircled by dancing girls who tossed Byron's letters into the flames. Lamb even wrote a poem for the occasion (biographical information from Douglass). Despite the short length of their relationship, it cast a shadow for years. Even today, books and articles about Lady Caroline Lamb often mention her relationship with Lord Byron.

Byron and Lamb maintained correspondence for quite some time after their relationship ended. Lamb forged a letter in Byron's name in 1813 in order to receive a portrait of him from his publisher. Byron called her expert forgery both "a skillful performance" and "very unpleasant" (see Soderholm). She broke into his apartments soon after and slipped a note saying "Remember me!" into one of his books. Byron wrote an anger-filled poetic response called "Remember Thee," stating that she would be remorseful and remembered negatively by him and her husband. In 1815, Lamb corresponded with Michael Bruce, an acquaintance of Byron's, even during Bruce's marriage. Lamb wrote the novel *Glenarvon* in 1816—its characters thin allegories for real people. It sold well, as a wide reading public was hungry for the scandalous gossip of aristocratic authors. In 1819, Lamb wrote "A New Canto" during Byron's exile, imitating the style in the first two Cantos of his satirical epic poem *Don Juan*. She satirized and mocked Byron's writing in her anonymous publication.

In April 1824 Byron died, age thirty-six, catching Lamb off guard. Six months after his death, "Remember Thee" was published in a collection. She coped by consuming drugs (such as laudanum) and alcohol. Lady Caroline Lamb wrote the poem "Cold Was the Season of the Year" in 1825 while she was monitored by doctors and nurses. Through the poem, Lady Caroline Lamb reflects on her place in the world and her mortality, comparing herself to a rat whose mate has died in

the cold. William Lamb, her husband, had his first affair in the autumn of 1827. In Lady Caroline Lamb's letters to her husband from her deathbed in a London hospital, she tried to assuage his fears and assure him that she was in good health. She died in January 1828 due to liver problems associated with "dropsy," or edema. In her will, Lady Caroline Lamb left the portrait of Byron she swindled from his publishers to her friend Lady Morgan.

Further Reading

Dickson, Leigh Wetherall and Paul Douglass, editors. *The Works of Lady Caroline Lamb Vol 2*, London: Routledge, 2009 (eBook published 19 March 2020).

References

Douglass, Paul. *Lady Caroline Lamb: A Biography*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
Soderholm, James. "Lady Caroline Lamb: Byron's Miniature Writ Large." *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 40, 1991, pp. 27-28.

“Cold Was the Season of the Year”¹

Cold was the season of the year –
 The sun half risen, the skies looked drear² –
 A youth returning to his Bride
 With none to cheer him by his side
 looked on the frozen water nigh – 5
 then on the glorious sun on high
 and thought as he was passing on
 of Hopes now crushed of pleasures gone
 of Life how strange a Dream it proved
 until his very soul was moved 10
 just as he chanced to turn his eye
 upon the stream he then did spy –
 a Rat – of animals created
 the most by Man & Woman hated
 the scorn of all the love of none 15
 the thing accursed by every one –
 He paused I know not why nor care –
 & asked himself why such things were –
 when at the moment he perceived
 the Rat was frozen & none relieved 20
 no aid for thing so much abhorred –
 could sure be given by slave or Lord –

¹ This poem by Lady Caroline Lamb was originally from an 1825 letter in the Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies Office (D/Elb F/62/69). This version was edited and published by Leigh Wetherall Dickson and Paul Douglass in *The Works of Lady Caroline Lamb Vol 2*, London: Routledge, 2009 (eBook published 19 March 2020), pp. 114–115.

² Dreary, bleak.

its mate its wretched mate alone
 came to him when all hope was gone
 she drew she bit she hurt her friend 25
 she looked imploring – none did send
 a sigh for one in durance³ taken –
 a sigh for one by all forsaken –
 Yet Crosby⁴ who at fights could see
 Men fairly strive for victory 30
 Who with shock⁵ nor Bulldog fear'd
 Who never was to Rats endear'd
 remembered him of one same Woman –
 who like the rat was lov'd by no Man
 So he did try Her life to save 35
 of one though Rat was not a slave
 & though the Rat could not recover⁶
 It died at least with friend & lover.

³ Could mean imprisonment or endurance.

⁴ Referring to Mr. Crosby, one of her caretakers, who was Lamb's final object of affection. (Douglass 273).

⁵ A type name for a small terrier with long hair (Belinda's lap dog in *Rape of the Lock* is called Shock).

⁶ Despite Lamb trying in her letters to assure her husband of her improvement, she (like the rat) could not recover.



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