

★ **Lady Caroline Lamb: A Free Spirit**

Antonia Fraser

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Antonia Fraser's biography of Caroline Lamb reassesses the English noblewoman's life—too often defined and confined by her notorious affair with Lord Byron.

Born in 1785, Caroline was a bright, charming, and rather high-strung child. At nineteen, she married handsome, “protective” William Lamb, an aspiring politician and England's future Prime Minister. She later gave birth to her only surviving baby, Augustus, who suffered from what appeared to be epilepsy and autism.

Though Caroline and her husband had a contented relationship, in 1812, she became captivated by charismatic Lord Byron. After Byron tried to end their brief yet passionate romance, Caroline's obsessive, even violent behavior caused a social scandal.

While the book explores Lamb's involvement with Byron, it moves beyond this frequented episode to develop a complex, engaging portrait of Caroline as a mother, wife, and friend. She was devoted to her son, and was known for her compassion, wit, and generosity. She was also skilled at sketching and spoke multiple languages. And Caroline's fictional account of her Byronic affair, written as a literary catharsis, became a bestselling novel.

Fraser details Caroline's “fierce” temperament and love of excitement and drama. She used laudanum as a sedative and later developed a fondness for alcohol. Contemporary psychiatrists might diagnose her as having bipolar or addictive tendencies, exacerbated by the repression of her “unusual, intelligent and independent” personality. Furthermore, her penchant for disguises (and particular fondness for dressing like a male page) is noted as more likely inspired by a need for freedom and anonymity than a desire to change genders.

Set against a fascinating historical backdrop that includes the harrowing battle of Waterloo and the complacent moral hypocrisies and political climate of Britain's Whig-era society, *Lady Caroline Lamb* is an engrossing, immersive biography that captures the troubled spirit of a vibrant, intense society woman.

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