

## Lord Thurlow: A Chancellorship in Caricature through New College's Collection of Gillrays

New College is home to an astounding collection of over two-thirds of the known print caricatures by the famous satirist James Gillray (1756–1815).<sup>1</sup> Gillray, often referred to as the ‘father of the political cartoon’, rose to fame through his vivid, witty, and incisive satirical depictions of many of the most famous political figures of his time.<sup>2</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte, George III, and the Younger Pitt, were among the most frequent victims of his pen. Some of the most beautiful and vibrant among these prints from New College’s substantial collection were exhibited at Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum for the 200th anniversary of Gillray’s death in 2015. However, the target of Gillray’s humorous art to whom I wish to draw attention herein will be somewhat less familiar to most. Lord Thurlow, the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain from 1778 to 1792, was a recurrent character in Gillray’s satires and, as a towering political and legal figure of his time, has been peculiarly overlooked by much of the modern scholarship on the political culture of late eighteenth-century Britain. By tracing his career as Chancellor through the prints of James Gillray, I hope to shed new light not only upon a neglected historical figure but also to draw attention to the intricacies buried within the genre of eighteenth-century British political satire.

Edward Thurlow, 1st Baron Thurlow (1731–1806) was notable for his relatively rapid rise up the social ladder and his even more rapid fall from political power, both of which are rendered clearly in Gillray’s caricatures. Born the eldest son of Thomas Thurlow, a relatively obscure Norfolk clergyman, he attended Caius College, Cambridge but was forced to leave without a degree because of ‘the *vivacity* of his conduct’.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps in part as a result of his early indiscretions at Cambridge, his legal career got off to a rather slow start. Nonetheless, he was admitted a member of the Inner Temple in 1752, called to the bar in 1754, and elected a bencher of the Inner Temple in 1762, taking the silk as a King’s Counsel the same year.<sup>4</sup> It was only after he obtained the friendship of Lord Weymouth, a prominent figure within the Bedford faction, that Thurlow obtained entry into Parliament and first began to cultivate the oratorical reputation that would make him such a notorious political figure in the late eighteenth century. In 1765, Weymouth brought Thurlow into Parliament as member for the borough of Tamworth, over which he had considerable influence.<sup>5</sup> Thurlow quickly established himself as a prominent parliamentary speaker, particularly on legal issues, and the admission of the Duke of Bedford’s followers into the patchwork Grafton administration in 1768 laid the foundations of Thurlow’s rapid advancement in the legal and political fields. The slow and uncertain retreat of Lord Chatham from the administration that initially bore his name occasioned the eventual resignation of Lord Camden as Lord Chancellor and John Dunning as Solicitor General in 1770. These resignations, and the death (possibly by suicide) of Charles Yorke, after controversially abandoning his allies in the Rockingham party to obtain the Lord Chancellorship, created something of a vacuum in the upper echelons of the legal profession, of which Thurlow was to be the chief beneficiary. His allegiance to the Duke of Bedford, alongside his prominent support of the government in its growing conflict

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<sup>1</sup> New College’s extraordinary collection of Gillray prints were gifted to the College by Mrs Winifred Burger, widow of Samuel George H. Burger sometime between 22 February 1961 and 3 June 1970. How they came to be in the possession of the Burgers, however, and why they were gifted to the College is not known.

<sup>2</sup> David Francis Taylor, ‘Five things we learned from the father of the political cartoon,’ *The Conversation* (1 June 2015) <<https://theconversation.com/five-things-we-learned-from-the-father-of-the-political-cartoon-42575>> (Accessed: 7 July 2021); Martin Rowson, ‘Satire, sewers and statesmen: why James Gillray was king of the cartoon,’ *The Guardian* (24 March 2015); David Wootton, ‘A Brief History of Political Cartoons in 7 Works,’ *Sotheby’s* (9 March 2018) <<https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/a-brief-history-of-political-cartoons-in-7-works>>.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine: and Historical Chronicle For the Year MDCCCVI. Volume LXXVI. Part the Second* (London: J. Nichols and Son, 1806), 882.

<sup>4</sup> G. M. Ditchfield, ‘Thurlow, Edward, first Baron Thurlow,’ *ODNB* (5 January 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Namier and John Brooke, eds., *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754-1790 I: Survey, Constituencies, Appendices* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), pp. 376–7. Thurlow represented Tamworth for his entire career in the House of Commons from 1765 to 1778, its two members were chosen by an electorate of around 300.

with the American colonies and domestic radicals such as John Wilkes, ensured Thurlow's rapid advancement. He obtained the post of Solicitor General in March 1770, and then in short order was promoted to Attorney General in January 1771. It was probably his continued support of Lord North's government and particularly on issues so close to the King's heart as the crisis with America, that led to George III repeatedly calling on North to appoint Thurlow as Lord Chancellor in 1778.<sup>6</sup> The King wanted 'an able Chancellor', and therefore Thurlow was ordered 'to be brought forward to give energy to the first station in the Law'.<sup>7</sup> North obliged, although somewhat reluctantly. Promotion to the Chancellorship meant ennoblement and removal to the House of Lords, and Thurlow's support, alongside that of the Solicitor General and Thurlow's lifelong rival Alexander Wedderburn, had been crucial in the Commons during the beginning of the American Revolutionary War.

The fact that the King demanded Thurlow's advancement to the Lord Chancellorship, the pinnacle of the legal profession, and certainly the defining element of Thurlow's political career, is an important one that is reflected throughout Gillray's satires. Of course, Gillray could hardly have been aware of the precise circumstances behind Thurlow's promotion to the Chancellorship, but the proximity between King and Lord Chancellor, and the close relationship that developed between George III and Thurlow in particular, is clearly depicted in his work. The Lord Chancellor was still known in the eighteenth century as 'the keeper of the King's conscience'. While this was something of a throwback to the ecclesiastical origins of the office, it retained some significance in light of the fact that the Lord Chancellor was seen, even more so than other cabinet positions, to be in the gift of the Crown rather than the Prime Minister. Until the solidification of the two-party system in the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for Lord Chancellors to remain in office despite the rise and fall of ministries. Thurlow himself would weather ministerial storms to hold on to the Chancellorship for almost a political generation between 1778 and 1792. In doing so, he was often perceived as the personal appointee of the King and his agent in successive cabinets, an image he often implicitly cultivated and did nothing to dispel. Thurlow's maintenance of political power and significance, therefore, became wedded to his holding the office of the Lord Chancellorship. In Gillray's satires, as well as those of other artists, Thurlow is almost invariably depicted in the robes and full bottom wig of a Lord Chancellor. Likewise, his rather sudden fall from power is depicted through his being stripped of the accoutrements of his office. The final decade and a half of Thurlow's life and career, despite consistent rumours of a return to office, were characterised by a gradual stepping back from the centre of the political stage. After successfully managing the acquittal of Warren Hastings in the House of Lords, he seems to have assumed the role of a kind of elder statesman and lawyer. He continued to offer his legal expertise collaboratively alongside his rival and eventual successor as Lord Chancellor, Alexander Wedderburn (then Lord Loughborough), as well as his protégé and friend Lord Kenyon. His most notable political interventions during the period after his Chancellorship were as an adviser to the Prince of Wales on the subjects of his debts and his unhappy marriage to Caroline of Brunswick. It is a satire upon this last subject that marks the final possible attribution of Thurlow in Gillray's works.

Thus far in my research I have identified 157 satirical prints containing depictions of or substantial references to Lord Thurlow, ranging in date from 1768 to 1804.<sup>8</sup> The dates are

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, King George III to Lord North (30 March 1778) in Royal Archives, Windsor (afterwards RA), GEO/MAIN/2863; King George III to Lord North (18 April 1778) in RA, GEO/MAIN/2923.

<sup>7</sup> King George III to Lord North (3 April 1778) in RA, GEO/MAIN/2881; King George III to Lord North (2 April 1778), in RA, GEO/MAIN/2876.

<sup>8</sup> The Lewis Walpole Library makes an attribution of Thurlow in a print satire as early as 1768 in the anonymous 'The Scots Triumph' (7 June 1768), Lewis Walpole Library, 10713342 <<https://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/941017>>. The figures in question are a group of lawyers depicted on the right side of the print. One of them is almost certainly Lord Mansfield, as identified by both the Lewis Walpole Library and M. Dorothy George of the British Museum. However, one of the robed and bewigged figures on the left of the group has his buttocks bared and is labelled with 'A Thorough low Base', which appears to be a pun on Thurlow's name. As Thurlow briefed for the prosecution in

particularly revealing of the importance of the Lord Chancellorship to Thurlow's political power and reputation. Indeed, if one excludes the eight satirical prints identified after he had been forced to resign in 1792, it becomes even clearer, revealing that he was depicted 148 times during the course of his tenure as Lord Chancellor. Of these 157 satirical prints containing depictions of or references to Thurlow, twenty-three have been attributed to Gillray, ranging in date between 1782 and 1792. Of these twenty-three Gillrays, New College's collection contains eight of them, with the possibility of a ninth, in which the attribution to Thurlow is questionable.<sup>9</sup> New College's Gillrays containing Thurlow range in date between 1787 and 1792. This may seem like a short period but actually incorporates some of the most important events in Thurlow's career, including his participation in the Hastings impeachment, his response to the Regency Crisis in 1788–9 when the King fell dangerously ill, his difficult relationship with the Prime Minister, William Pitt, and ultimately his resignation as Chancellor. Seven of the confirmed depictions of Thurlow and the eighth possible depiction are printed with this text. However, one of the Gillrays at New College, entitled 'Lieut Goveer Gall-Stone, inspired by Alecto; -or-the birth of Minerva' contains only a single brief reference to Thurlow in the rather substantial text accompanying the piece, and the image has therefore not been printed herein. What follows will be a discussion of the nine Gillrays containing depictions of or references to Thurlow in the New College collection and an analysis of the light they shed upon the life and career this neglected Lord Chancellor.

Gillray made his first known contributions to print satire in the mid-1770s, but his rate of production grew exponentially in the early 1780s.<sup>10</sup> It was not until 1782 that Gillray made his first depiction of Thurlow in a print entitled 'Banco to the Knave' satirising the fall of Lord North's ministry in the wake of the British surrender at Yorktown. It contains a view of Thurlow from the back, identified primarily by the large wig and the fact that he was the only member of the North ministry to retain his office in the new Rockingham-Shelburne coalition cabinet.<sup>11</sup> It was not until a print later in the same year, entitled 'Britania's Assassination. Or—The Republicans Amusement', that we can see Gillray's first genuinely caricatured illustration of Lord Thurlow.<sup>12</sup> Clad in the ceremonial gown of the Lord Chancellor with a full bottom wig he stands beside Lord Mansfield, the Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench, in similar attire. Nonetheless, Thurlow is easily discernible by several distinctive features. Stoutier than Mansfield, he is further distinguished by his strong brow, his thick, dark eyebrows, and his rather large nose with a downward turn or protrusion towards its tip. These features, many of which are evident even in the rather extensive portraiture of Lord Thurlow, are a testament to Gillray's keen eye and artistic talent and were quickly emulated by other satirists into something of a stock image, as will be clearly seen in the New College Gillrays displayed below.

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the Wilkes case which was tried around the time of this print there is certainly a strong case for his attribution as the figure depicted in this caricature. It is all the more significant in that I have not found another depiction of Thurlow in any satirical print between 1768 and 1780.

<sup>9</sup> The possible ninth Gillray containing Thurlow in the New College collection is 'Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountains of Wales,—or—Shon-ap-Morgan's Reconcilement to the Fairy Princess'. This has not been counted in either the 156 total satirical prints containing Thurlow or in the twenty-three that have been attributed to Gillray. This has been done because the identification of Thurlow is doubtful, as discussed in more detail below.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the comprehensive list of Gillray prints compiled by Jim Sherry: <<http://www.james-gillray.org/catalog.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> James Gillray, 'Banco to the Knave' (12 April 1782). BM Satires 5972 <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1868-0808-4823](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-4823)>.

<sup>12</sup> James Gillray, 'Britania's Assassination. Or—The Republicans Amusement' (10 May 1782). BM Satires 5987. <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1851-0901-78](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1851-0901-78)>.





James Gillray, 'Ancient Music'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2555

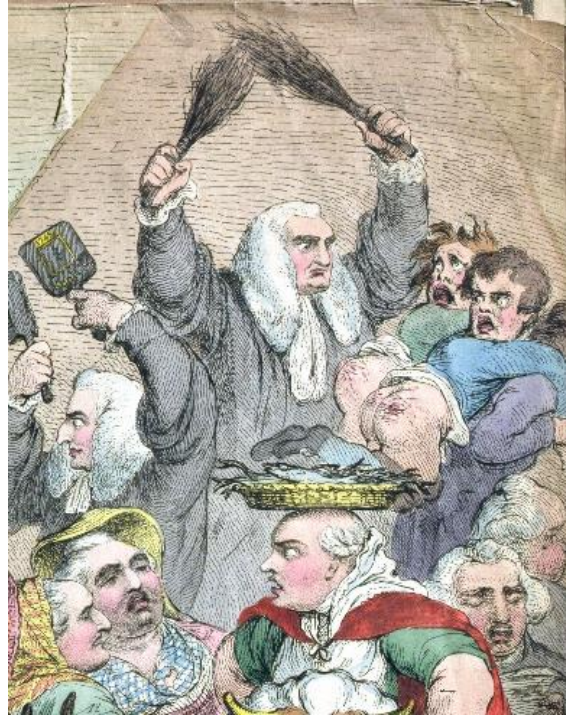
The first of the Gillrays in the New College collection depicting Thurlow was produced in 1787. Entitled 'Ancient Music', this incredibly complex and busy piece nonetheless features Thurlow prominently in the upper right corner. The print depicts the King and Queen in attendance in one of the concerts of 'ancient' music held at the little theatre in Tottenham Street. Having first attended the performances of 'ancient' music in 1785, George III and Queen Charlotte became such constant patrons that the theatre became known as the King's Concert Rooms until they were removed to the King's Theatre, Haymarket in 1794.<sup>13</sup> Gillray depicts the concerts rather disparagingly as sycophantic noise, with many of the key members of the cabinet playing unorthodox instruments, and dogs chasing away the political opposition in the form of a Fox (Charles James Fox) who has a pot with the features of Lord North tied to his tail by a ribbon entitled 'coalition'. Accompanying the image is a set of lines from John Wolcot's *Ode Upon Ode: Or, A Peep at St. James's*: '—Monarchs, who with rapture wild, / Hear their own praise with mouths of gaping wonder, / and catch each crotchet of the Birth-day Thunder'.<sup>14</sup> Gillray is no doubt poking fun at what was commonly seen as the unconventional or unmodish practice of rescuing and performing 'ancient' (largely sixteenth-century) musical works to which their majesties had contributed their supposedly parsimonious patronage by attending the concerts as subscribers

<sup>13</sup> J. R. Howard Roberts and Walter H. Godfrey eds., *Survey of London: Volume 21, the Parish of St Pancras Part 3: Tottenham Court Road and Neighbourhood* (London, 1949), pp. 38-39; W. T. Parke, *Musical Memoirs; comprising an Account of the General State of Music in England: From the First Commemoration of Handel, in the Year 1784, to the Year 1830*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Pindar [John Wolcot], *Ode Upon Ode; Or, A Peep at St. James's; Or, New-Year's Day; Or, What You Will* (London: G. Kearsley, 1787), p. 16.



instead of hosting them at one of their palaces.<sup>15</sup> Many of the founders of the 'ancient' music concerts on Tottenham Street, including Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 'Mr. Assb—ge' [Ashbridge], and Joah Bates are depicted unflatteringly as animals singing, or rather braying, wildly while Pitt, in reference to his youth as the youngest Prime Minister, waves a child's rattle and blows a whistle next to the King's ear.



James Gillray, 'Ancient Music' [detail, showing Thurlow]  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2555

Thurlow is among the largest figures depicted, and stands at the apex of the pyramid of the performers. His robes of office, thick bushy eyebrows, large wig, and distinctive nose render him clearly distinguishable even without the key at the base of the print identifying the figure as 'Ch\_n\_ll\_r'. His black robes, however, mean that he does not particularly stand out amidst the vibrant colours worn by the King and some of the other principal performers. Nonetheless, with a characteristically stern expression on his face, birch held in either hand, Thurlow has been using the bare behinds of two frightened children as if they were kettledrums. The act of Thurlow disciplining children in the print is almost certainly a reference to the relative youth and inexperience of Pitt and his cabinet, and Thurlow's perceived role in keeping them in check and order, as a kind of strict schoolmaster. Thurlow had been Lord Chancellor for almost a decade by the time this print was produced, and was the only surviving cabinet minister from Lord North's administration. Thurlow's serious expression and attention to the task at hand—ridiculous as it may be—stand in stark contrast to those of other ministers, such as the Duke of Richmond, directly below him in the print, who partakes in a private debate with Lord Shelburne and Isaac Barré, which, though surely adding to the noise is not in harmony with the other performers. This is demonstrative of the close relationship between Thurlow and the King and the perception that he acted as something of a monarchical agent in the cabinet. It is, however, a far more subtle detail

<sup>15</sup> For more on 'ancient' music in eighteenth-century Britain, see Percy Lovell, "'Ancient' Music in Eighteenth-Century England', *Music & Letters* 60 (4) (October 1979), 401–415. Also cite M. D. George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum Vol. VI. 1784–1792* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1938), pp. 413–414.

of the copious amount of jewellery covering the hair and neck of Queen Charlotte that provides the main thematic connection between 'Ancient Music' and the next depictions of Thurlow in New College's Gillrays.



James Gillray, 'Blood on Thunder fording the Red Sea'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2865

The next of Gillray's prints in the New College collection depicting Thurlow is 'Blood on Thunder fording the Red Sea.' It was published on 1 March 1788, several weeks after the opening of Warren Hastings's impeachment trial. Its simplicity stands in stark contrast to 'Ancient Music', and its forcefulness as political commentary is perhaps all the more potent as a result. No more detailed image is required as Thurlow occupies the very centre of the canvas. It was, in fact, this image, used on the cover of Nicholas Dirks's *The Scandal of Empire* (2006), which first drew my attention to the vast collection of Gillrays possessed by New College. Obviously chosen for its striking depiction of the corruption of the East India Company's overseas employees and the violent consequences of Company rule, Dirks's work makes no use of it beyond the cover. Indeed, rather astonishingly, Thurlow is not even mentioned by name in the book which focuses on the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the Governor General of Bengal from 1772 to 1785, in clear juxtaposition to P. J. Marshall's older but superior work on the topic which covers Thurlow's substantial involvement in some detail.<sup>16</sup> The print depicts Thurlow, unmistakable, as before, wearing the wig and gown of the Lord Chancellor, with his thick dark eyebrows, wading through the Red Sea while carrying on his back the figure of Warren Hastings, who is dressed in a stylised eastern costume and holds two large sacks of money, each labelled as containing £4,000,000. Around Thurlow's feet are scattered the mutilated bodies of numerous Indians, clearly intended to represent the victims of Hastings's corrupt and rapacious governance, as depicted by the

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); P. J. Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).



prosecution in the opening charges of his impeachment trial. It appears to be an allusion to the crossing of the Red Sea in the Book of Exodus, only with Thurlow conveying Hastings across the sea for a bribe in place of the divine assistance received by Moses and the Israelites. The money carried by Hastings in this print was not simply a suggestion of the wealth illegally obtained by 'nabobs' returning from the East India Company's service but was a more subtle version of a direct accusation of bribery that Gillray made in a print produced just two months later.<sup>17</sup> In this print, entitled 'The Bow to the Throne, -alias- The Begging Bow', Gillray depicts Hastings seated on the British throne, handing out bribes to Thurlow, Pitt, and Queen Charlotte, with numerous faceless others, literally cap in hand, waiting in the wings.<sup>18</sup> It was these riches from the East that Gillray was even more subtly pointing to the previous year in 'Ancient Music' with the lavish jewellery worn by Queen Charlotte.

Simply being the Lord Chancellor presiding over the opening years of Hastings's trial was not in itself sufficient to provoke this prominent depiction by Gillray. It was not merely the general supposition that Hastings had bribed numerous powerful figures in order to obtain a favourable verdict among the peers of the House of Lords who were responsible for determining his guilt or innocence. Various reports suggest that Thurlow had been a keen supporter of Warren Hastings since at least the late 1770s and Hastings had promoted the careers of several of Thurlow's friends when requested around this time. By 1782, despite Edmund Burke's influence upon the Rockingham ministry, Thurlow, who remained Lord Chancellor, assured Hastings's London agent John Scott that 'it is the Determination of the present Ministry, & of the King to support [Hastings] most warmly'.<sup>19</sup> This implicit support in private was put to a public test in late 1783 when the Fox-North coalition predicated the necessity of their controversial East India reform bill upon the guilt of Warren Hastings. In response to the charges laid against Hastings in justification of the bill, Thurlow, in the House of Lords, attacked the evidence from the select committee upon which they were based. Arguing that proof must be provided before using Hastings's guilt as a pretence for East India Company reform, Thurlow announced that he would pay 'as much attention' to the reports of the select committee 'as he would to the adventures of Robinson Crusoe'.<sup>20</sup> While making this public attack on the evidence provided in support of Fox's India Bill, Thurlow was also conspiring in private alongside Earl Temple to convince the King to send a message to sympathetic peers 'that whoever voted for the India Bill was not only not his friend, but would be considered by him as an enemy'.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen, Thurlow had already reported the King's warm support for Hastings the previous year, and George III not only agreed to send the message via Temple to selected peers, he also authorised him to 'use whatever words he might deem stronger

<sup>17</sup> On the prevalence of the negative views of returned East India Company employees as 'nabobs', see Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips, "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain", *Albion* 16 (1984), 225–41; and James Holzman, *The Nabobs in England: A Study of the Returned Anglo-Indian, 1760–1785* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926).

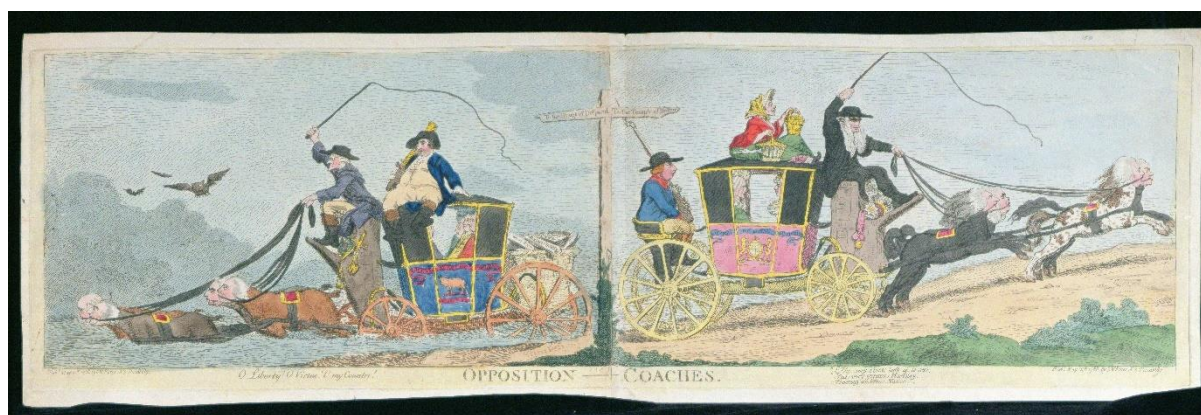
<sup>18</sup> James Gillray, 'The Bow to the Throne, -alias- The Begging Bow' (6 May 1788). BM Satires 7312 <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1868-0808-5726](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-5726)>.

<sup>19</sup> John Scott to Warren Hastings (11 July 1782) in BL Add MS 29155, f. 69. For the letters containing patronage requests from Thurlow to Hastings, see John Macpherson to Warren Hastings (17 June 1780), Lord Thurlow to Warren Hastings (24 June 1780) in BL Add MS 29145, f. 201 and f. 254.

<sup>20</sup> *An Authentic Account of the Debates in the House of Lords, on Tuesday, December 9, Monday, December 15, and Wednesday, December 17, 1783. On the Bill For establishing certain Regulations for the better Management of the Territories, Revenues, and Commerce of this Kingdom in the East-Indies.* (London: J. Debrett, 1783), p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Duke of Buckingham, ed., *Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George the Third from Original Family Documents*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853), I, 285. For more on the context surrounding Thurlow's and Temple's responses to Fox's India Bill and its consequences, see Richard Connors and Ben Gilding, "'Hereditary Guardians of the Nation': The House of Lords and the East India Company in the Age of the American Revolution", *Parliamentary History* 39 (1) (February 2020), 159–89; see also M. W. McCahill, *The House of Lords in the Age of George III (1760–1811)* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 184–7; and Michael W. McCahill, *Order and Equipoise: The Peerage and the House of Lords, 1783–1806* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), pp. 24–7.

and more to the purpose'.<sup>22</sup> When it came to the final vote in the Lords, the King's influence was decisive, Fox's India Bill was thrown out and the Fox-North coalition was ejected from office, to be replaced by that of Pitt the Younger. In addition to playing a leading role in bringing about the rise and fall of ministries, Thurlow, in effect, had engineered his way back into office as Lord Chancellor after the brief hiatus of the Fox-North Coalition, during which time the office was put into the hands of a commission led by his rival Alexander Wedderburn, now Lord Loughborough. Throughout his attacks against Fox's India Bill and his concurrent defence of Warren Hastings, Thurlow was in close correspondence with Hastings's agent John Scott, who gladly provided the necessary first-hand information in defence of his patron. Thereafter, for several years prior to the impeachment trial, Hastings and Thurlow maintained a professional but amicable correspondence almost entirely related to India affairs. Thurlow even reportedly pushed to obtain an English peerage for Hastings but this was refused by Pitt on account of the charges hanging over him and the impending impeachment.<sup>23</sup> Gillray's choice of Thurlow, therefore, as the individual carrying Hastings over the Red Sea in his print, was based on far more than his position as Chancellor. Although our access to the private correspondence between the two allows us to cast doubt upon Gillray's accusations of Thurlow accepting bribes from Hastings, we know that Hastings did provide various gifts to George III and Queen Charlotte that provided fodder not only for Gillray but many other satirists.<sup>24</sup> Gillray must also have been well aware that the figures of £4,000,000 in each of the two bags carried by Hastings in this print were a gross exaggeration of the wealth he brought back from India. P.J. Marshall calculates that Hastings returned from India 'with a fortune of approximately £75,000'.<sup>25</sup> Though it must be admitted that this latter figure is surprisingly low and would have almost certainly been disbelieved by many of Hastings's contemporaries. Nonetheless, Gillray's caricature effectively conveyed a simple yet serious charge not only against Warren Hastings as a governor but, by accusing the Lord Chancellor of accepting bribes, also against the integrity of the impeachment process itself.



James Gillray, 'Opposition Coaches'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2681

The next Gillray print containing Thurlow in the New College collection was produced two months later in May 1788. Entitled 'Opposition Coaches' and designed in two plates, it follows a similar theme to the last. Two coaches drive in opposite directions.

<sup>22</sup> Buckingham, ed., *Memoirs of the Court*, I, 285.

<sup>23</sup> See John Scott to Warren Hastings (15 October 1784) in BL Add MS 29166, f. 298; John Scott to Warren Hastings (30 October 1784) in *ibid.*, ff. 384–5; see also Earl Stanhope, *Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt*, 4 vols (London: John Murray, 1867), I, 296.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, the anonymous print 'The Diamond Eaters, Horrid Monsters!' (c. March 1788). BM Satires 7288 <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1868-0808-5740](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-5740)>.

<sup>25</sup> See P. J. Marshall, 'The Personal Fortune of Warren Hastings', *The Economic History Review* 17 (2) (1964), 284–300; and P. J. Marshall, 'The Private Fortune of Marian Hastings', *Historical Research* 37 (96) (1964), 245–53.





James Gillray, 'Opposition Coaches' [detail, left coach]  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2681

The coach driving to the left is manned by Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox, and other key members of the opposition in Parliament and is heading towards 'the Slough of Despond', all the while carrying with them documents labelled 'Bill of Rights', 'Magna Charta', and 'Impeachment of W. Hastings'. The whole iconography, including the symbol of a bull on the coach (representing John Bull, or England) and the motto 'Pro Bono Publico' ('for the public good') as well as the line beneath the plate 'O Liberty! O Virtue! O my Country!' is sympathetic to the opposition, which is depicted as meaning well but ultimately heading for failure and despondency.



James Gillray, 'Opposition Coaches' [detail, right coach]  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2681



In contrast, the coach driving to the right represents the monarchy and government. The coach bears the royal coat of arms and is being driven by Lord Thurlow, while George III sits behind the carriage holding a musket and guarding its rear. Queen Charlotte sits on the roof holding a basket of golden eggs in one hand and a caged goose on the other, a reference to Aesop's fable and, presumably, in this case, also alluding to the bribes their majesties had received, and might well continue to receive, from 'nabobs' returning from India. Inside the coach, appearing more regal than either George or Charlotte, sit Warren and Marian Hastings, Warren clad in eastern dress as in 'Blood on Thunder', and Marian notably wearing a crown and covered in jewellery. Their positioning inside of the coach while the royals are relegated to exterior seating suggests that their bribes have led to them controlling the monarchy. The horses pulling the coach have the faces of Pitt, Lord Sydney, Henry Dundas, and Pepper Arden, all prominent members of Pitt's administration. The fact that they are yoked and driven by Thurlow is particularly significant and a continuation of the theme first observed in 'Ancient Music' that Thurlow was seen as a controlling influence on the cabinet while also remaining a loyal and dedicated servant of the Crown. Indeed, just as in much of the opposition propaganda of the time, ministers such as Lord North and William Pitt are often depicted as puppets under the control of the burgeoning 'influence of the Crown'.<sup>26</sup> Beneath Thurlow's feet, rest a red ribbon and a coronet, presumably in reference to the rumoured rewards of a peerage and induction into the Order of the Bath which Thurlow was pushing for Hastings to receive. Unlike the opposition coach, the government coach is represented in a negative light, albeit undeservedly heading in the direction of the 'Temple of Honor' and success.



James Gillray, 'John-Bull, Baited by the Dogs of Excise'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2651

The next depictions of Thurlow in New College's Gillray prints mark something of a departure from the themes of the previous. Thurlow has thus far been depicted as a domineering royal agent within the cabinet but not in any sort of disharmony with his cabinet colleagues. However, the period between the publication of 'Opposition Coaches' in May 1788 and 'John-Bull, Baited by the Dogs of Excise' in April 1790 was a crucial one in the relationship

<sup>26</sup> For the opposition propaganda surrounding the influence of the Crown, see A. S. Foord, 'The Waning of "The Influence of the Crown"', *English Historical Review* 62 (245) (1947), 484–507; and Earl A. Reitan, *Politics, Finance, and the People: Economical Reform in the Age of the American Revolution, 1770–92* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



between Lord Thurlow and William Pitt the Younger. The King fell dangerously ill in the winter of 1788–9 due to what have become popularly known as his bouts of ‘madness’. When a regency was proposed, the Pitt administration attempted to significantly limit the powers of the regent, and to delay the process in the hopes of the King’s recovery. Thurlow, meanwhile, while still being privy to the meetings of the cabinet council as Lord Chancellor, was known, by his colleagues at least, to be courting the Prince of Wales in the hopes of retaining his office under the expected regency. When the King’s recovery appeared certain, Thurlow broke off his rather unlikely alliance with the opposition and publicly announced with tears streaming from his eyes, ‘When I forget him, may God forget me!’<sup>27</sup> Despite Pitt’s reported frustrations with Thurlow’s supposed duplicity, they continued to work together in apparent, albeit strained, harmony.<sup>28</sup>

The print ‘John-Bull, Baited by the Dogs of Excise’ depicts William Pitt rushing out of the Treasury buildings and ordering his dogs (with the faces of his cabinet colleagues) to attack the bull, representing England, which has been chained to a post labelled ‘Excise’. Pitt himself is holding further chains labelled ‘New Excise Bill for John Bull’, and carries in his pocket plans for many more excise schemes on products such as ‘Cyder, Flour, Hardware, Linnens, Woolens, Coals, Butchers, Bakers, Cheesemo[n]gers, Fish, [and] Water’. The whole is in reference to the Tobacco Excise Bill that Pitt successfully passed in the spring of 1789. The tobacco excise sought to transfer the duties paid on that product from the customs to the excise, both to help curb smuggling and to raise additional revenue, since the excise was widely considered to be by far the more efficient and effective department.<sup>29</sup> Pitt’s measure was very similar to that which nearly toppled Sir Robert Walpole at the height of his power in 1733, and it was the introduction of an excise on cider that occasioned the resignation of the Earl of Bute as Prime Minister in 1763.<sup>30</sup> The excise, therefore, was an extremely sensitive topic in eighteenth-century Britain, and one upon which serious opposition would be expected.



James Gillray, ‘John-Bull, Baited by the Dogs of Excise’ [detail, showing Thurlow]  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2651

It is not the Whig party in opposition, however, that is depicted in Gillray’s ‘John-Bull, Baited by the Dogs of Excise’—although they certainly opposed the tobacco excise with vigour—but rather the opposition of the Lord Chancellor. Thurlow in this print is depicted alongside his cabinet colleagues with the body of a dog. He is very easily identifiable by his Chancellor’s wig and dark eyebrows. Unlike the other dogs in the image, however, who wear collars bearing their names to assist with identification, Thurlow’s collar has the name ‘Snap Dragon’. This no doubt refers to his reputation for harsh and blunt retorts against his interlocutors in debate which were reinforced

<sup>27</sup> Henry B. Wheatley, ed., *The Historical and Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall 1772–1784*, 5 vols (London: Bickers & Son, 1884), V, 222–3.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the Regency Crisis of 1788–9, see John Derry, *The Regency Crisis and the Whigs 1788–9* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

<sup>29</sup> For Pitt’s excise scheme, see John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The Years of Acclaim* (London: Constable, 1969), p. 246; for the excise more generally, see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 101–114.

<sup>30</sup> For more on this earlier excise crisis, see Paul Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); for the tax on cider, see Stephen Farrell, ‘The Cider Excise, 1763–8’, *History of Parliament Online* <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/themes/economy/the-cider-excise-1763-8>>.

by his reputedly domineering presence. While the other ministerial dogs diligently follow Pitt's instructions to pin down John Bull so that he can be shackled with further chains of excise, Thurlow skulks in the shadows of an overturned barrel of tobacco, urinating upon its spilled contents. Thurlow holds in his mouth a bone labelled 'Opposition' at one end and 'Ministry' at the other as he glares towards Pitt with a look of malice. Thurlow bites in the middle of the bone, perhaps suggesting his willingness to play both sides, as he is now widely understood to have done during the Regency Crisis of 1788–9. Although Thurlow's flirtation with the opposition and the Prince of Wales during the Regency Crisis was known by his cabinet colleagues and also by several key members of the opposition, including Charles James Fox, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Georgiana the Duchess of Devonshire, it was not generally known by the public or even by the King himself.<sup>31</sup> Gillray was probably equally ignorant of it, which may help to explain the appearance of his later print 'Wierd-Sisters' in which Thurlow and Pitt appear very much in collaboration. Nonetheless, Gillray was certainly well aware of the very public opposition of Lord Thurlow to the tobacco excise bill when it reached the House of Lords in July 1789.<sup>32</sup> It is probably for this reason, therefore, that Gillray depicts Thurlow as an unpredictable and disobedient hound of the cabinet.

Despite acknowledging that 'a great quantity of tobacco escapes the duty by law now ordered to be imposed upon it', and that 'extending the Excise laws to tobacco, with a view to improve the revenue, was a principle founded in the strictest justice and highest wisdom', Thurlow nonetheless attacked the measure proposed by the government of which he was ostensibly a member.<sup>33</sup> Thurlow decried 'the harshness and severity' of the excise laws, particularly those that empowered excisemen to search premises without a warrant. He argued forcefully that precedent, of however long a duration, could not 'change oppression into justice'.<sup>34</sup> Thus Gillray's print, showing the Lord Chancellor as something of a wildcard in the cabinet, denigrating from time to time the measures he was expected to support, rightly depicts him at odds with his colleagues in asserting his independence as Lord Chancellor. Indeed, Thurlow felt strongly that he was an appointee of the Crown and not the minister. Thurlow's opposition, however, was in vain as the bill passed relatively easily through the Lords. Whether Lord Thurlow was genuinely collaborating with the opposition Whigs at this time, however, is rather doubtful. Throughout his tenure as Lord Chancellor, Thurlow periodically asserted his independence from his cabinet colleagues to an extent unprecedented even before the thoroughgoing advent of cabinet collective responsibility. The tobacco bill in 1789 was just one famous example of this, and one that happened to catch Gillray's eye. It is also important to note, however, that Gillray's print was produced in April 1790, a year after the Tobacco Excise Bill had become law. At this time, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was attempting to bring into the House of Commons an act to repeal the tobacco excise, and therefore Gillray's print must be seen as part of a concerted opposition campaign achieve that end.<sup>35</sup> Thurlow's being depicted with the bone labelled both 'Opposition' and 'Ministry', could well be interpreted as an attempt to drive a further wedge between him and Pitt, rather than as a reflection of the actual state of affairs in the spring of 1790. As it turned out, Thurlow hardly needed the assistance of opposition to alienate himself from Pitt. His actions, such as those during the tobacco excise debates and during the Regency Crisis, almost certainly contributed, alongside later controversies, to his eventual dismissal from office.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the entries in the Duchess of Devonshire's diary for 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 26 December, printed in Walter Sichel, *Sheridan*, 2 vols (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), II, 412–20; Oscar Browning, ed., *The Political Memoranda of Francis Fifth Duke of Leeds, Now First Printed from the Originals in the British Museum* (London: Camden Society, 1884), pp. 121–41; W. W. Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham (30 November 1788) in Buckingham, ed., *Memoirs of the Court*, II, 23–4.

<sup>32</sup> See Thurlow's speeches of 29, 30, 31 July 1789 in *The Parliamentary Register; or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons*, 2nd Series, 43 vols (London: J. Debrett, 1789), XVI, 287–9, 290–99.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 288, 296–7; see also *The Diary; or, Woodfall's Register* 173 (16 October 1789).

<sup>34</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, XVI, 289.

<sup>35</sup> *Parliamentary Register* (London: J. Debrett, 1790), XXVII, 450; and *Public Advertiser* (15 May 1790).



None of that animosity between Thurlow and Pitt, however, appears in the next of Gillray's prints of Thurlow in the New College collection. Indeed, the vibrantly coloured 'Wierd-Sisters; Ministers of Darkness; Minions of the Moon' which was produced in December 1791, appears to show Pitt, Thurlow, and Henry Dundas very much in collaboration. In spite of the suggestions in Gillray's earlier print 'John-Bull, Baited by the Dogs of Excise' that Thurlow was conspiring with the opposition to Pitt's ministry, many commentators continued to praise the so-called 'two chancellors' (Pitt was Chancellor of the Exchequer as well as First Lord of the Treasury) and their collective defence of the British Constitution from the innovations of the proposed Regency.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, despite the revelations of later historians of considerable differences between their positions and the mutual animosity this created, commemorative medals were struck following the King's recovery in 1789 with the face of Thurlow on one side and the face of Pitt on the other.<sup>37</sup> The *St. James's Chronicle* remarked '[i]t is (under Heaven) to the Vigilance of Lord Thurlow and Mr. Pitt, that we owe the Preservation of our King'.<sup>38</sup> It is thus not particularly surprising that Gillray and other satirists continued to evoke this image of collaboration in addition to the rumours of discord and opposition.



James Gillray, 'Wierd-Sisters; Ministers of Darkness; Minions of the Moon'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2277

Thurlow is easily identified in this print, as usual, by his thick dark eyebrows and full bottom wig. Likewise, Pitt can be discerned through his pointy and upturned nose and his youthful features. Dundas, who had recently been appointed Home Secretary and was seemingly less easily

<sup>36</sup> For the usage of 'two chancellors' see, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (13 November 1789); *Morning Herald* (16 November 1789); *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (3 December 1790); *Public Advertiser* (24 May 1792).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance the Commemorative Medal (MG.1495) in the British Museum <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_MG-1495](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_MG-1495)>.

<sup>38</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (3 March 1789). For evidence of toasts being raised to both Thurlow and Pitt on this occasion from Somerset to Scotland, see *London Chronicle* (14 March 1789); *The World* (16 March 1789); *Whitehall Evening Post* (17 March 1789); *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* (28 March 1789), among many others.

caricatured, is partly veiled in tartan to mark him out as a Scotsman. The three are represented as a satire on Henry Fuseli's famous painting of 'Macbeth, Act I, Scene 3, the Weird Sisters' (c. 1783).<sup>39</sup> Gillray's 'Ministers of Darkness' and 'Minions of the Moon' stand in almost identical poses to those of Fuseli's painting, mimicking and mocking the awkwardness of the original. The three stand side by side in profile, 'each at once her chappy finger laying upon her skinny lips'.<sup>40</sup> They gaze intensely towards the moon, upon which the King and Queen appear in janiform, the Queen occupying the bright side and therefore the attention of the three ministers, and the King occupying the dark side of the moon, asleep, and therefore is probably a reference to his decreased activity following his illness in 1788–9. By portraying the Queen as the object of the ministers' attention, Gillray is also tapping into the gendered opposition language of a so-called 'petticoat government' which was also more than implicit in his depictions of the Queen, rather than the King, as primary recipient of Hastings's bribery.<sup>41</sup> The three 'Minions' are presented as seeking guidance from the moon (i.e. the Queen) rather than possessing any power to foresee the future themselves. Besides its humorous jab at 'high' art, and its vividly detailed caricatures in profile of three of the most prominent political figures of the age, 'Weird-Sisters' is also important in that it offers us a glimpse of the continued belief, as late as December 1791, that Thurlow was still working strongly in collaboration with the Pitt ministry. Just six months later, events would lead to a very different portrayal of the relationship between the 'two chancellors'.



James Gillray, 'The Fall of the Wolsey of the Woolsack'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2650

<sup>39</sup> See <<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/macbeth-act-i-scene-3-the-weird-sisters-54899>> (Accessed: 7 July 2021).

<sup>40</sup> Quoted from William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 1.3.45–7.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson eds., *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1–18; Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Making a New Start: Queen Charlotte, Popular Politics, and the fear of "Petticoat Power" in Britain c. 1760–1770', European University Institute, EUI Working Papers, HEC 2010/2, Giulia Calvi and Isabelle Chabot eds., *Moving Elites: Women and Cultural Transfers in the European Court System*.



Gillray's 'The Fall of the Wolsey of the Woolsack', produced on 24 May 1792, depicts Lord Thurlow's forced resignation from the office of Lord Chancellor. A radiantly coloured print, its iconography is simplistic and yet emphatic. Thurlow is depicted with a distressed expression while seated on the woolsack, the seat of the Speaker of the House of Lords, a role which, in spite of frequent protests asserting the incompatibility of the two roles, was, until constitutional reforms in 2005, combined with the post of Lord Chancellor.<sup>42</sup> Pitt, wearing the same colours as the King, tugs away at the woolsack from behind, attempting to dislodge from it Thurlow's hefty figure. Lord Grenville, standing beside Pitt in the brown coat, attempts to remove the wig from Thurlow's head. Neither Pitt nor Grenville appear to be succeeding in their tasks with any ease, alluding to the difficulty they faced in removing the Chancellor from his office—something which it was rumoured that Pitt had wanted to effect since at least the Regency Crisis, if not earlier. The King, standing directly in front of Thurlow, is tugging at the purse containing the Great Seal which Thurlow is evidently unwilling to let go of. Nonetheless, unlike many of Gillray's other prints, and particularly those discussed herein, it contains a fairly substantial amount of accompanying text in the form of speeches from its four characters. Pitt, for instance is depicted as wishing to remove Thurlow from the Chancellorship, not due to any principled disagreement or personal resentment, but purely so as to 'secure every thing into our own Family' before subsequently taking 'a pull at Old Nobbs [George III], & John Bull'.<sup>43</sup> Grenville, who was a cousin of Pitt, is repeatedly referred to as 'Ranger' in this print, in a disparaging reference to his recent appointment as Ranger and Keeper of St. James's and Hyde Parks, a lucrative sinecure post.<sup>44</sup> In his own speech in the print, Grenville is depicted as an avaricious placemonger, admitting that he had 'a mighty fancy for this Wig! I think it would add dignity to my Ranger, & Secretaryship'.<sup>45</sup>

The King, on the other hand, speaking in a rather childish manner, repeatedly asks 'Neddy' to 'leave go' of the Great Seal. Gillray, as we have seen even in the small selection of prints discussed herein, has repeatedly portrayed George III as placid, docile, poorly educated, easily dominated by others, or lacking in maturity, all of which were common themes, particularly in opposition propaganda in the earlier part of his reign.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, the fact that George refers to Thurlow as 'Neddy', is suggestive of a particularly intimate connection between them. At least insofar as it depicts a close relationship between the two men, as opposed to the use of informal nicknames, Gillray's print is reflective of the reality revealed by their private correspondence. Indeed, when Pitt issued the King with an ultimatum, stating 'the impossibility of His Majesty's service being any longer carried on to advantage, while [Thurlow] and myself both remain in our present situations', George III responded in emotional terms.<sup>47</sup> Writing to Thurlow after having sent an initial message through Henry Dundas, the King hoped 'that the Lord Chancellor is fully convinced of my sorrow at being obliged to form a decision so revolting to my feelings'.<sup>48</sup> Further explaining his decision, the King stated that '[t]he Chancellor's own penetration

<sup>42</sup> See, the letter signed 'Crito, *Inner-Temple*, July 8, 1783' in *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* (10 July 183); 'Counter Character. Sketch of a Character of Edward Lord Thurlow, Lord High Chancellor of Great-Britain' in *Oracle* (29 August 1789); and the note entitled 'Chancery' signed 'Hint' in *Morning Chronicle* (7 August 1794). Such writers frequently complained that the business of the Court of Chancery was being increasingly held up by the political responsibilities of the Chancellor as Lord Speaker.

<sup>43</sup> The reference to Pitt obtaining lucrative and responsible positions for his family members refers not only to the positions held by Lord Grenville described briefly herein, but also the appointment of his elder brother, Lord Chatham as First Lord of the Admiralty, and another cousin, the Marquess of Buckingham, who had served as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland between 1787 and 1789 and even more briefly as Pitt's Foreign Secretary in December 1783.

<sup>44</sup> George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum*, VI, 887.

<sup>45</sup> Grenville was also appointed Foreign Secretary in 1801.

<sup>46</sup> Linda Colley has shown how the later decades of the reign of George III were characterised by an 'apotheosis' of his image and reputation. See, Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760-1820', *Past and Present* 102 (1984), 94-129.

<sup>47</sup> William Pitt to Lord Thurlow (16 May 1792) in BL Egerton MS 2232, f. 83.

<sup>48</sup> King George III to Lord Thurlow (17 May 1792) in Arthur Aspinall, ed., *The Later Correspondence of George III*, 5 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), I, 595.

must convince him, that, however strong my personal regard, nay affection, is for him, that I must feel the removal of Mr. Pitt impossible with the good of my service.<sup>49</sup> Although Gillray's print does not reveal the extent to which Pitt effectively forced the King's hand by threatening his own resignation, it does convey something of the close bond between the monarch and his Chancellor of fourteen years. When the King finally received the Seals from Thurlow, at the end of the legal term, 'His Majesty seemed much affected at the loss of a servant so long employed, and so intimately trusted'.<sup>50</sup>

Thurlow is depicted speaking with characteristic ill manners:

*Take it ingrate;—and then farewell,—O damnation  
I've touch'd the highest point of all my greatness—damnation  
And from that full meridian of my glory—damnation  
I haste now to my setting—I shall fall—damnation  
Like a bright exhalation in the evening—damnation  
And no man see me more—Damnation! O damnation.*

Countless anecdotes of Thurlow make reference to his uncouth, impolite, and even profane or sacrilegious language. In fact, such characterisations of the Lord Chancellor had become so hackneyed that they had become the butt of humour in the newspapers. Indeed, one article, purporting to offer advice to young lawyers claimed that one had to 'affect to be very familiar with the names of the leading Counsel . . . a little anecdote about Lord Chancellor Thurlow, if accompanied with a few oaths, a dark complexion, and a protusion of the eye-brows, will give you some consequence at a Sunday Ordinary'.<sup>51</sup> However, the frequency with which such anecdotes were repeated, as well as their diversity even among those who were long-time friends of the Chancellor, suggests that these ill-mannered representations of Thurlow had more than a grain of truth to them. However, nothing could be further from the tenor of the Lord Chancellor's official response to his monarch. He wrote to the King that he was '[d]eeply affected with your Majesty's gracious expressions of goodness and condescension' and that he 'cheerfully resigns himself to your Majesty's pleasure'. In a final note on the topic of his resignation, Thurlow notes in dutifully emphatic terms that 'his Majesty's pleasure will always be a law to him'.<sup>52</sup> In private, Thurlow may have been as indignant as rumour suggested,<sup>53</sup> but he continued to meet and converse extensively with the King, even at public functions.<sup>54</sup> Their mutual affection, while it may have somewhat cooled, remained nonetheless intact.

We have already seen that Thurlow and Pitt had a remarkably fractious relationship for cabinet colleagues of almost nine years' standing, but why did Pitt choose to force Thurlow's dismissal in the late spring of 1792? This may be partly explained by the accumulated frustrations that had developed between the pair. Whether it be from disagreements over the Hastings impeachment, disputes over the nature of the proposed regency in 1788–9, or Thurlow's repeatedly taking an independent line from the government on issues such as the Tobacco Excise Bill or Fox's Libel Bill (which, despite its informal title, major figures in the government actively promoted), the relationship between the 'two chancellors' had been repeatedly strained. Thurlow's sudden opposition to the 'Sinking Fund' proposed in Pitt's legislation for paying down the national debt on 14 May 1792 could be considered as simply the straw that broke the camel's back.

<sup>49</sup> King George III to [Henry Dundas] (17 May 1792) in BL Egerton MS 2232, f. 84.

<sup>50</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post* (18 June 1792).

<sup>51</sup> *Oracle* (16 June 1789).

<sup>52</sup> Lord Thurlow to King George III (17 May 1792) in Aspinall, ed., *Later Correspondence of George III*, I, 595.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, the hostile account in Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, II, 150.

<sup>54</sup> There are several examples of Thurlow, even while out of office, reportedly monopolising the King's attention at public events, see *General Evening Post* (26 June 1792); *Lloyd's Evening Post* (20 June 1794).

However, as much as the exact wording of parliamentary debates before the emergence of the modern *Hansard* is subject to some doubt, the sheer intensity of the language reported to have been used in Thurlow's speech on the occasion was such that, regardless of any history between himself and Pitt, it may well have been sufficient to occasion Pitt's dramatic ultimatum that the two could no longer serve together in cabinet.<sup>55</sup> Given that Thurlow's only full-length biographer incorrectly claimed that the text of the speech had been lost, it has been thought proper to transcribe it here at length, which will also serve to emphasise the severity of his opposition to Pitt's ministry:

The LORD CHANCELLOR approved of the object of the bill, as the system of paying off the national debt, with which it was connected, but he had strong objections to that clause [‘enacting, that no future loan shall be made without being provided for at the time’]; it could tend to no one definite, or good purpose, and at the same time exhibited a degree of presumption and arrogance, in dictating to future Parliaments, which, he trusted, their Lordships never would countenance. He ridiculed the idea of legislating to Parliaments, or dictating to Ministers twenty or thirty years hence, who certainly might be as wise, and as able to act, as circumstances required, as they were.—In short, the scheme proposed by that clause was nugatory and impracticable—the inaptness of the project was equal to the vanity of the attempt. The act, if passed in its present form, would only hand down to posterity aphorisms, that however proper now, would, in times of urgency, be completely inapplicable. He said it was impossible to bind down future Parliaments, and it was idle to suppose that future Ministers would take directions from this act, how they were to make a loan. At present the country was in a state of prosperity and tranquillity, but it might happen to be otherwise, and he should consider any Minister, who could not judge at the time when a loan was necessary, what was the proper mode of doing it, as unfit for his situation; and none but a novice, a sycophant, a mere reptile, as a Minister, would allow this act to prevent him from doing what the exigency of circumstances might require at the time, according to his own judgement. He argued, that it was impossible in a loan bill, to make a provision for the payment of it at any given time; because it was impossible to say, that the same circumstance that made it necessary to obtain a loan, might not exist at the time specified for paying it. The Lord Chancellor treated this clause with great severity and force of argument [. . .]<sup>56</sup>

The immediate response of Grenville, the leader of the government in the Lords, was a warm defence of the clause as ‘extremely necessary for carrying the great purpose into effect,’ arguing that it was ‘materially connected with the principles of the Bill.’<sup>57</sup> In the event, Grenville probably did enough to uphold the importance of the clause to the routine supporters of government in the Lords, who must have been rather confused by the sudden opposition of the Chancellor, which might be seen as implying royal displeasure against the measure. In the event, the vote was close-run, with the clause being approved by only six votes—28-22. After the clause had been carried, Thurlow, as the Speaker, was then reported to have added insult to injury by repeatedly interrupting Grenville and asking the Lords if it was their pleasure to adjourn. Grenville, who was already on bad terms with Thurlow, then reportedly left the House of Lords to provide

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<sup>55</sup> Several contemporary private letters comment on the severity of Thurlow's opposition to the Sinking Fund. See James Bland Burges to Lord Auckland (18 May 1792) in Lord Auckland, ed., *The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland*, 4 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1862), II, 406; Archbishop of Canterbury to Lord Auckland (22 May 1792) in *ibid.*, II, 407; and Lord Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham (15 May 1792) in Buckingham, ed., *Memoirs of the Court*, II, 208.

<sup>56</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, XXXIII, 418.

<sup>57</sup> *The Senator; Or, Clarendon's Parliamentary Chronicle* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792), V, 814.



Pitt with an ultimatum threatening his resignation similar to that which Pitt would the following day submit to the King.<sup>58</sup> Pitt reportedly considered Thurlow's speech not only as 'a direct and decided mark of hostility to his Ministerial measures' but also 'felt the language made use of on the occasion as a personal affront'.<sup>59</sup> Pitt's response was hardly surprising given Thurlow's accusations of 'arrogance' and 'vanity' towards the minister and 'inaptness' and 'impracticability' towards his measure.

In his speech in the print, Thurlow remarks that 'I've touched the highest point of all my greatness . . . [a]nd from that full meridian of my glory . . . I haste now to my setting'. In this regard, Gillray's print was remarkably accurate. Although there were prevalent rumours that Thurlow would swiftly return to his office and his name was more than once thrown out by opposition figures such as Fox and Leeds as a figure who might serve in an alternative government to that of Pitt, Thurlow never did return to high political office.<sup>60</sup> Given the nature of his appointment as Lord Chancellor, and especially the fact that he held the office almost entirely as a result of his close relationship with the King, Gillray could be somewhat confident that, unless Pitt's government fell, Thurlow's return to office was seriously doubtful. The King had been forced to make his choice and Pitt was unlikely to countenance the return of Thurlow into his cabinet. Insofar as Gillray's projected the permanence of Thurlow's fall from office, the comparison with Cardinal Wolsey, the Chancellor of Henry VIII, was quite apt. In the sense, too, that Thurlow had been a dominant political figure while Chancellor, there are some reasonable parallels between the two.<sup>61</sup> Thurlow was not only one of the major figures in the councils of his monarch but was also imperious in the House of Lords as its stern presiding officer. No doubt in common with Wolsey's opponents in the court of Henry VIII, Pitt felt some suspicion and perhaps even jealousy of the intimacy between the monarch and his Chancellor, especially given that Pitt and George III were never warm and maintained a largely practical and professional relationship.<sup>62</sup> In terms of the overall significance and political implications of his fall, however, Gillray's comparison between Thurlow and Wolsey is somewhat flattering to the former. Despite fears that he would become a fearsome opponent of the Pitt administration in the Lords, Thurlow maintained a fairly balanced stance, opposing and supporting measures by his estimation of their merits rather than as the policies of government or opposition.<sup>63</sup> In this respect, his behaviour while in opposition was not too dissimilar from his somewhat inconsistent support of government measures while Chancellor. Indeed, even when his rival Loughborough obtained the office of Lord Chancellor in 1793, he continued to act collaboratively with him and other law lords during the frequent appeals heard by the House of Lords. By acting as such, and yet remaining on the fringes of the political stage, Thurlow's fall from office did not occasion any seismic shift in politics. Nonetheless, the dramatic fall from power of the 'keeper of the King's conscience' in both cases, was parallel enough to serve Gillray's needs in emphasising the significance of the event depicted.

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<sup>58</sup> For Thurlow's actions after the passage of the clause, see R. Gore-Brown, *Chancellor Thurlow: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Lawyer* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 295.

<sup>59</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post* (21 May 1792).

<sup>60</sup> For rumours of Thurlow's remaining in office as Chancellor, see Archbishop of Canterbury to Lord Auckland (18 May 1792) in Auckland, ed., *Journal and Correspondence of Lord Auckland*, II, 406; or for the gossip and proposals of his forming a new ministry with Leeds, Fox, and Moira, see *London Chronicle* (2 August 1792); Duke of Leeds to Stephen Rolleston (27 October 1794) in BL, Leeds Papers, Add MS 28067, ff. 124–5; Stephen Rolleston to the Duke of Leeds (11, 12 November 1794) in BL, Leeds Papers, Add MS 28067, ff. 134–6.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of the historiographical debates surrounding the fall of Wolsey, see G. W. Bernard, 'The Fall of Wolsey Reconsidered', *Journal of British Studies* 35 (3) (1996), 277–310.

<sup>62</sup> Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> On fears that Thurlow would join the opposition and become a threat to Pitt, see, James Bland Burges to Lord Auckland (10 July 1792) in Auckland, ed., *Journal and Correspondence of Lord Auckland*, II, 414–7.



James Gillray, 'Sin, Death, and the Devil. Vide Milton'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2477

The next, and possibly the last, Gillray print containing Thurlow in the New College collection also illustrates the theme of Thurlow's resignation, albeit from a rather different perspective. 'Sin, Death, and the Devil. Vide Milton' was produced in early June 1792, between the immediate shock of Thurlow's forced resignation on 17 May and his actually giving up the seals at the end of the legal term on 14 June, after tying up loose ends in the Court of Chancery. Artistically, it may be the most elaborate of the Gillray prints of Thurlow, and is certainly highly characteristic of the style that made him such a successful satirist. In this print, Gillray is once again satirising Thurlow's fall from office, or rather the battle over his position as Lord Chancellor. But, as in his 'Weird-Sisters', Gillray is also taking aim at Fuseli and his artistic representations of famous literary episodes. In this case, Gillray is satirising the scheme, began by the publisher Joseph Johnson in 1790, to print a new edition of Milton's poetry, to be edited by William Cowper (incidentally a close friend of Thurlow's from the beginning of his legal career), and richly illustrated by a series of commissioned paintings to be engraved to adorn its pages.<sup>64</sup> It was to be modelled on the early success of John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery.<sup>65</sup> However, Fuseli was forced to pursue the project himself as mental illness forced Cowper's withdrawal and Johnson abandoned the scheme due to Boydell's opposition.<sup>66</sup> Fuseli did eventually succeed in opening his

<sup>64</sup> David Irwin, 'Fuseli's Milton Gallery: Unpublished Letters', *The Burlington Magazine* 101 (681) (1959), 436–7, 439–40, at p. 436.

<sup>65</sup> On Boydell's gallery, see Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Irwin, 'Fuseli's Milton Gallery,' 436.

gallery, but only several years later in 1799–1800 and it was a financial failure.<sup>67</sup> Gillray, however, took aim at the initial scheme, just as he had the Shakespeare Gallery. In small print, below the feet of the figures in the image, he engraved ‘NB: The above performance containing Portraits of the Devil & his relatives, drawn from the Life, is recommended to Messrs Boydell, Fuzelli & the rest of the Proprietors of the Three Hundred & Sixty Five Editions of Milton, now publishing, as necessary to be adopted, in their classic Embellishments’. Gillray was probably aware that Fuseli had, just several weeks earlier, completed his own version of ‘Satan, Sin and Death’.<sup>68</sup> Whether Gillray had seen Fuseli’s portrait, however, is doubtful, as there is almost no resemblance beyond the subject. Indeed, Gillray’s print is more reminiscent of Hogarth’s unfinished painting of the scene from the late 1730s, which may have provided some inspiration.<sup>69</sup>

Gillray’s ‘Sin, Death, and the Devil’ is a satire on the famous scene from book two of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in which Satan arrives at the gates of hell, only to find his path blocked by Death, but before they can engage in combat, Sin intervenes, informing Satan not only that she is his daughter but also that Death is their son, the result of their incestuous union. It has been argued by Milton scholars that the trio constitute a complex allegorical inversion of the Christian Trinity.<sup>70</sup> Gillray, however, depicts Thurlow in the role of Satan, Pitt in the role of Death, and Queen Charlotte as Sin. Thurlow, easily identifiable through his full bottom wig and exaggerated eyebrows, stands shirtless in a Greek or Roman style skirt with tassels or pteruges. With bird-like wings, he stands poised ready to strike Pitt with what appears to be the ceremonial mace of the Lord Chancellor, which is severely cracked, symbolising his loss (or impending loss) of office. In his left hand Thurlow holds a round shield bearing the Lord Chancellor’s purse, used to carry the Great Seal, and a golden representation of the woolsack. Pitt appears emaciated and afraid, but ready to exchange blows. He wears only a royal crown and mantle and is firing what appear to be lightning bolts from a sceptre, which are deflected by Thurlow’s shield. Diving between them is a very unflattering depiction of Queen Charlotte as a topless hag with a serpentine lower body. She appears to have thrown herself between the interlocutors. She bears a large key entitled ‘The Instrument of all our Woe’ which M. Dorothy George of the British Museum, who engaged in a systematic and impressive analysis of eighteenth-century print satires, has identified as ‘symbolizing Secret Influence’<sup>71</sup> Cerberus, with the heads of Dundas, Grenville, and Richmond, symbolising the relative weakness of Pitt’s other cabinet ministers, appears to cower behind the Queen. This could be another example of the critique of the Queen’s supposed power and ‘petticoat government’ mentioned earlier. However, a more complex interpretation, building on the idea of the ‘inverted trinity’ in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is that the Queen is attempting to break up the quarrel because Thurlow in fact begot Pitt and that to fight among themselves would destroy the ‘system’ of influence and corruption by which many opposition writers accused George III and his ministers of maintaining a hold over the reins of power. Depicting Pitt as Thurlow’s ‘son’, therefore, may well be a reference to the creation of Pitt’s administration in December 1783, when Thurlow played a prominent role in advising the King to dismiss the Fox-North coalition on account of its controversial India Bill.

As with Gillray’s other print concerning Thurlow’s resignation ‘The Fall of Wolsey from the Woolsack,’ this caricature is adorned with numerous lines of text. In this case, most of the text is taken from book two of *Paradise Lost*, where the scene depicted takes place. Crucially, however,

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 439–40.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Fuseli to William Roscoe (29 May 1792) in Liverpool Public Library, Roscoe MSS. 1607, printed in Irwin ‘Fuseli’s Milton Gallery,’ 436. Fuseli’s ‘Satan and Death with Sin Intervening’, which is far more abstract than many other contemporary depictions of the scene, is now held by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, see <<https://collections.lacma.org/node/233050>>.

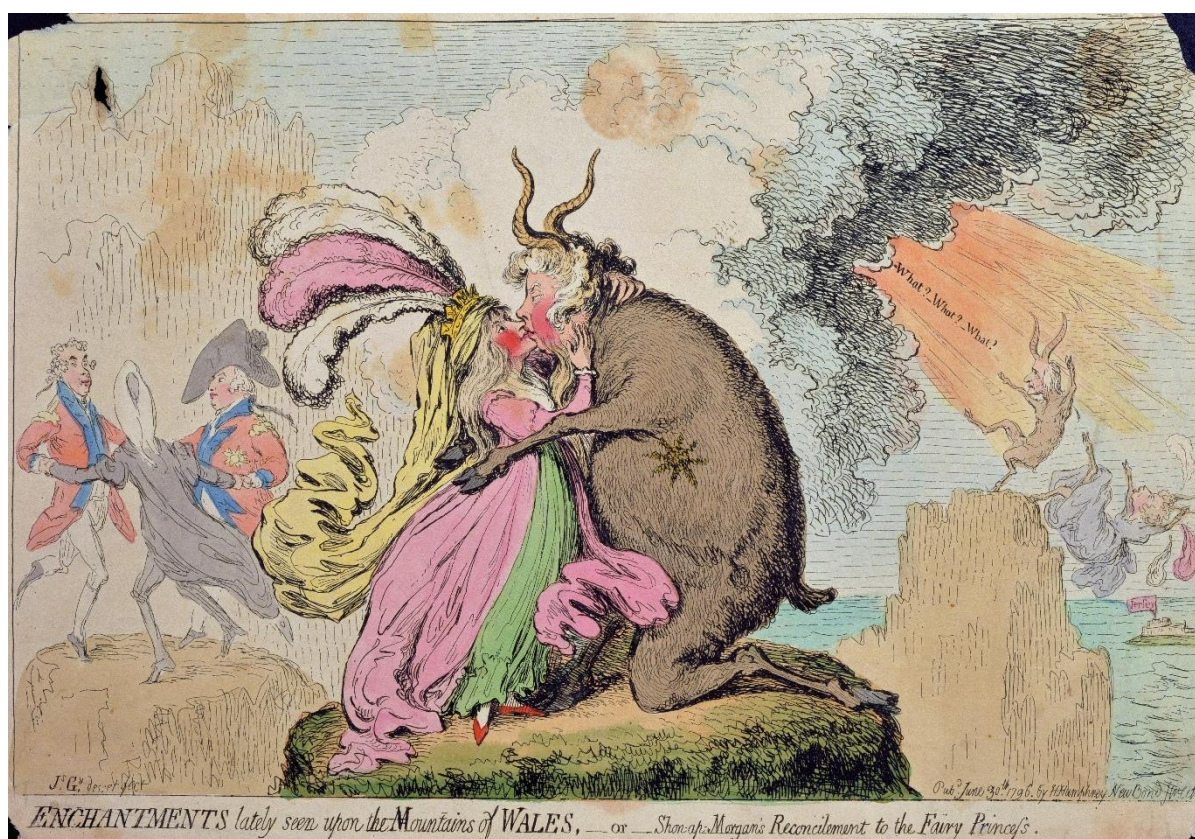
<sup>69</sup> William Hogarth, ‘Satan, Sin and Death’ (c. 1735–40) <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hogarth-satan-sin-and-death-a-scene-from-miltons-paradise-lost-t00790>>.

<sup>70</sup> Robert B. White, ‘Milton’s Allegory of Sin and Death: A Comment on Backgrounds’, *Modern Philology* 70 (4) (1973), 337–41.

<sup>71</sup> George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum*, VI, 916.



there is one incongruity. It seems that in searching for a description of Thurlow (Satan), Gillray found an even more apt excerpt in book one. The opening lines: 'Incenc'd with indignation Satan stood / Unterrified' are from book two, lines 707–8. However, it continues: 'but under brows / Of dauntless courage, & consid'rate pride / Waiting revenge.' These lines are taken from book one, lines 602–604. They are both descriptions of Satan, and yet it is clear that Gillray chose the second line specifically for his caricature of Thurlow, whose prominent brows in this print are even more considerably exaggerated. One is left somewhat surprised that he did not also try to incorporate the line above describing the 'Deep scars of thunder . . . intrencht . . . on his faded cheek', given that 'Thunder' was the nickname given to Thurlow in the infamous print of him carrying Warren Hastings across the Red Sea.<sup>72</sup> The scene of Satan's being confronted by Sin and Death from *Paradise Lost*, an evidently unfavourable depiction of all involved, was a very effective visual metaphor for what opposition rhetoric certainly painted as an incestuous system of corruption in Pitt's government. Unlike the comparison to the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, Thurlow's depiction as Satan holds out the prospect that he might either remain in office or quickly return to it, both of which were prominent rumours at the time. In the event, he did not, and the remaining years of his life were only infrequently the subject of caricature. 'Sin, Death, and the Devil' may well be Gillray's final depiction of Thurlow. That it depicts his rather sudden and disagreeable resignation as Lord Chancellor is testament not only to the importance of that office, but even more so to the identification, in both textual and visual commentary, of Thurlow as *the* Chancellor for much of a political generation between 1778 and 1792, a feat seldom achieved by his successors or predecessors.



James Gillray, 'Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountains of Wales,  
—or—Shon-ap-Morgan's Reconciliation to the Fairy Princess'  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2788

<sup>72</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I, 601–2 (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1817).

This last print from New College's collection of Gillrays contains some aspects that are difficult to interpret, and thus has not been counted among the total number of Gillray prints depicting Thurlow. It was the only one of New College's collection of Gillrays discussed herein to have been selected among the fifty that were displayed at the *Love Bites* exhibition at the Ashmolean. Partly, this was probably due to the fact that none of the other prints containing Thurlow obviously depict love, embraces, kisses, and marriage, which were among the major themes of the exhibit. Furthermore, 'Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountains of Wales' contains prominent illustrations of the Prince of Wales and his wife Princess Caroline, far more easily recognisable figures than a woefully neglected eighteenth-century Chancellor. The immediate context of the piece, which was produced in June 1796, was the rumoured reconciliation of the Prince and Princess, who had married the previous year and had produced what would be their only child, Charlotte, in January 1796. The marriage was fundamentally undermined from the start by the Prince of Wales's continued attachment to his former clandestine wife, Maria Fitzherbert, and to his mistress Lady Jersey, who is depicted in the print being blown from a rocky pedestal by a strong gust labelled 'What? What? What?' a well-known phrase attributed to George III.<sup>73</sup> The reconciliation depicted in the print, however, proved at best abortive and possibly even apocryphal as the couple continued to live apart for the remainder of their stormy marriage.



James Gillray, 'Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountains of Wales,  
—or—Shon-ap-Morgan's Reconcilement to the Fairy Princess'  
[detail, of the group of three figures on the left, containing the possible depiction of Thurlow]  
New College, Oxford, NCI 2788

<sup>73</sup> For more on the marriage between the Prince of Wales and Princess Caroline, see E. A. Smith, *A Queen on Trial: The Affair of Queen Caroline* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1993).



The main question, for the purposes of the present discussion, is whether the figure depicted in legal robes, dancing with two other male figures in jubilation at the reconciliation, can be positively identified as Lord Thurlow. All seem to be agreed that the figure on the right of the three is the Duke of York. The figure on the left has been variously identified as either Lord Cholmondeley and Lord Moira. There are compelling reasons why either of these identifications may be correct. Both men, for instance, were reportedly involved in attempts to reconcile the royal couple. Both the figures on the left and the right stand with their faces towards the viewer, allowing for more probable identifications based on existing portraiture. The central figure, however, depicted wearing legal robes and a full bottom wig, is facing away from the viewer, perhaps deliberately so. M. Dorothy George identified the figure as Lord Loughborough purely on the basis of 'wearing his Chancellor's wig and gown'.<sup>74</sup> However, the problem with this interpretation is that neither the legal robes nor the full bottom wig identify a figure exclusively as the Lord Chancellor, as opposed to other high judges, law lords, or attorneys and solicitors general who are commonly depicted in similar attire throughout eighteenth-century graphic satire. The Gillray scholar Jim Sherry, on the other hand, has suggested that the figure in legal garb could well be Thurlow, who was involved, alongside Lord Moira, in attempting to reconcile the Prince and Princess around this time. It has been rightly noted, however, that as the figure 'is seen from the back the identification is less certain.' Furthermore, in most (though not all) of Gillray's illustrations, Thurlow is depicted as a somewhat stocky character, whereas the figure wearing legal robes in this print is exceptionally lean, particularly in comparison to the Duke of York. On the other hand, one of Gillray's other depictions of Lord Loughborough from a few months earlier in December 1795, depicts him as a strikingly similar emaciated and notably faceless figure in legal gown and robes.<sup>75</sup> Of all of the figures depicted in 'Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountains of Wales', however, Gillray appears to have given the least attention to the lawyer, who will probably never be identified with full certainty. Nonetheless, my inclination is not to classify the figure as Lord Thurlow and therefore not to count this last print among New College's collection of Gillray prints depicting him.

This final print, satirising the fraught relationship between the Prince and Princess of Wales and the fact that it is only a questionable depiction of Thurlow makes it an apt one with which to conclude. If it does depict Thurlow, 'Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountains of Wales' would be Gillray's final depiction of the retired Lord Chancellor and one of only nine prints to appear after his forced resignation in mid-1792. If it does not depict Thurlow, then the previous print, 'Sin, Death, and the Devil' would be the final Gillray containing a representation of the former Lord Chancellor, not just among those in the New College collection, but among all known Gillrays. The fact that Gillray probably never caricatured Lord Thurlow after 1792, after which he produced over half of his known output, is reflective of the extent to which Thurlow's political power was intimately connected to his position as Lord Chancellor. This fact is reinforced by his being depicted in graphic satire almost invariably in legal robes and wig. That the last possible depiction of Thurlow in a Gillray print is related to the connection between the Prince and Princess of Wales is equally revealing, even if by coincidence in this case, of his final interventions in public life. Thurlow's remaining on good terms with the King, Queen, and the Prince of Wales and possessing their confidence to a considerable degree placed him in a unique position as a mediator between opposing factions within the royal family. Nevertheless, the loss of his position as Lord Chancellor and the longevity of Pitt's administration ensured that Thurlow's political fall in 1792 was a permanent one. The combination of his serving as Lord Chancellor during much of what may be termed the 'golden age' of political satire and his eminently caricaturable features mean that Thurlow's career can be traced with uncommon clarity through the work of the leading

<sup>74</sup> M. D. George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. Vol. VII. 1793–1800* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1942), p. 261.

<sup>75</sup> See James Gillray, 'Substitutes for Bread;—or—Right Honorables Saving the Loaves & Dividing the Fishes.' BM Satires 8707.

satirists of the time, with Gillray foremost among them. The collection of Gillray's works in the possession of New College has provided a platform not only to highlight important moments in the life of a long-neglected Lord Chancellor but also to further unravel the beauties and complexities of a fascinating genre of art and one that warrants and rewards our patience, particularly in a social media age in which we are confronted by countless but fleeting images.

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