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978-0-521-10185-1 - Gillray Observed: The Earliest Account of his Caricatures in London und Paris

Edited by Christiane Banerji and Diana Donald

Excerpt

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Introduction

The historical importance of *London und Paris's* articles on caricature and Gillray

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a wide and interesting cultural exchange took place between Britain and Germany. At a time when German thinkers could claim primacy in aesthetic theory and attempts to understand the history of the arts in society, German culture was nevertheless remarkably porous and receptive to influences from abroad. Many works of British literature were transmitted, translated and reviewed, and prints produced in London were similarly imported in large numbers.¹ This growing trade was not restricted to the engravings of historical subjects, mezzotint portraits and genre scenes etc. which had apparently begun to displace French prints in Germany: it also included large numbers of popular English satires. Pastor Wendeborn, a long-time German resident in London, noted in the 1780s that

Caricature prints go likewise in great quantities over to Germany, and from thence to the adjacent countries. This is the more singular and ridiculous, as very few of those who pay dearly for them, know any thing of the characters and transactions which occasioned such caricatures. They laugh at them, and become merry, though they are entirely unacquainted with the persons, the manners, and the customs which are ridiculed. The wit and satire of such prints, being generally both local, are entirely lost upon them.²

¹ Albert Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public 1740–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 37, 46, 55, 69–70, 86. Timothy Clayton, 'Reviews of English Prints in German Journals, 1750–1800', *Print Quarterly* 10.2 (June, 1993), 123–37 and *The English Print 1688–1802* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 261–4. Antony Griffiths and Frances Carey, *German Printmaking in the Age of Goethe* (London: British Museum, 1994), pp. 14–16, 18–21.

² Frederick A. Wendeborn, *A View of England Towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1791), vol. II, pp. 213–14.

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It was perhaps to remedy this situation that the journal *London und Paris*,³ started in Weimar in 1798, published among its varied contents extensive commentaries on current caricatures, which were sent over from England and France. They did indeed provide accurate and detailed information about the ‘characters and transactions’ satirised in the prints, so that their humour would be more intelligible to German enthusiasts. But these caricature commentaries, the journal’s novel and distinctive feature, were much more than a key for collectors. They fed the hunger of the growing German *Lesepublikum* for accounts of political and social life in the metropolises of London and Paris, in all their aspects – good and bad. The tolerance of caricature in Britain suggested a freedom of opinion, and an indulgence on the part of the authorities, which educated Germans marvelled at, and many readers of *London und Paris* certainly envied. If one could interpret their astonishing imagery, one could better understand the British national character they appeared to express, and instructively set them alongside the cultural products of other countries. Despite the frivolity of the prints themselves, the articles on them reflect that intellectual curiosity and zest for self-improvement so typical of educated Germans at this period. Some rise above the level of jobbing journalism, as essays of lasting historical interest.

In each issue of *London und Paris*, the final section was devoted to caricature, and reproduced a selection of French and English prints, carefully copied in reduced form as etchings (Plates 2 and 16), and bound in as folding

³ The literature on the history of *London und Paris* is sparse. The main works are Ellen Riggert, ‘Die Zeitschrift “London und Paris” als Quelle englischer Zeitverhältnisse um die Wende des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts. London im Spiegel ausländischer Berichterstattung’, inaugural dissertation, Göttingen (1934); Karl Riha, ‘Großstadt-Korrespondenz. Anmerkungen zur Zeitschrift *London und Paris*’ in *Rom–Paris–London: Erfahrung und Selbsterfahrung deutscher Schriftsteller und Künstler in den fremden Metropolen*, edited by Conrad Wiedemann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988), pp. 107–22; Iris Lauterbach, ‘*London und Paris* in Weimar. Eine Zeitschrift und ihre Karikaturen als kunst- und kulturgeschichtliche Quelle der Zeit um 1800’ in *Festschrift für Hartmut Biermann*, edited by Christoph Andreas et al. (Weinheim: Verlag VCH, Acta Humaniora, 1990), pp. 203–18. See also *BM* vol. VII, pp. xv–xvi, xlvi, and vol. VIII, p. xiv; Paul Hocks and Peter Schmidt, *Literarische und politische Zeitschriften, 1789–1805. Von der politischen Revolution zur Literaturrevolution* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975), pp. 26–8; David Kunzle, ‘Goethe and Caricature: From Hogarth to Töpffer’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985), 164–88 (172–5).

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plates with the accompanying commentaries. The French prints chosen (significantly fewer in number) were mainly mild satires on social affairs, fashion and manners,⁴ while the English caricatures were predominantly political.⁵ There was, it seems, an intentional contrast between the understated Neoclassical style of the French prints, which were mainly drawn in neat outline and uncoloured, and the licentious exuberance of the richly tonal, hand-coloured English ones, with their exaggerated caricatures of the leading statesmen of the day: ‘British liberties’ appeared as much in the style of the prints as in their content.

Freedom did not, however, necessarily imply crudity. The best of the English prints evinced a political and artistic sophistication which was unprecedented in the field of caricature. They were the work of James Gillray, described by *London und Paris* as the most famous caricaturist in Europe.⁶ So famous was he, indeed, that his name and style were adopted by several continental satirists.⁷ The very first issue of the journal carried an article on ‘Gillray and Mrs Humphrey’, to be followed later in the year by a biographical sketch of the artist. In subsequent numbers Gillray’s prints, featured as they appeared in London, occupied by far the largest space in the caricature section of the journal, and their characteristic traits were minutely analysed. One of the last articles sent from London before Napoleon’s continental blockade cut off communications between Germany and Britain was entitled ‘Caricaturists in London Today’, but was in fact a eulogy of Gillray, and a fitting valediction. *London und Paris*’s

⁴ In some issues no French caricatures were included, although this imbalance was partly compensated by a larger number of non-satirical French prints. The writers in *LuP* seem to have regarded French satires as inferior to the English ones. See the articles ‘Pariser Carricaturen’ in 2 (1798) 78f.; ‘Betrachtungen über die französischen Karikaturen’ in 20 (1807), 127–30; and cf. *French Invasion*, especially footnotes 4 and 5, in our collection, pp. 160–1 below.

⁵ A few of the French prints in *LuP* were also political, e.g. *Divers Projets sur la descente en Angleterre* in 1 (1798) and *Situation de l’Angleterre Au Commencement du 19ième Siècle* in 7 (1801).

⁶ ‘Caricaturists in London Today’ in 18 (1806). See p. 245.

⁷ Johann Gottfried Schadow signed his anti-Napoleonic satires of 1813–14 ‘Gilrai’, ‘Gilrai à Paris’ etc., and the Swiss David Hess signed himself ‘Gilray Junior’. *BM* vol. vii, p. xv. Hill (1965), p. 73. Kunzle, ‘Goethe and Caricature’, 175. Griffiths and Carey, *German Printmaking*, p. 170.

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writers well understood the instrumentality of satire in the sometimes murky, callous and cynical world of British politics, yet they could at the same time recognise Gillray himself as an original artist in the full sense. To the twentieth-century reader, accustomed to the presentation of caricature history as an apostolic succession of ‘great cartoonists’, with Gillray standing at their head, *London und Paris*’s approach might seem conventional. However, in the eighteenth century, when the political caricaturist tended to be viewed merely as an executant, a hack labouring at the behest of his political taskmasters, and scarcely known by name, the attention paid by this journal to ‘the extraordinary talents united in Gillray’s works’ was a complete innovation.⁸ Contemporary German notions of genius and appreciation of the unique creative gifts of artists could, it seems, rescue even a caricaturist from obscurity. But *London und Paris* did not rely on airy theorising in order to justify Gillray to its readers. The descriptions of his prints were based on first-hand accounts provided by the journal’s London correspondents: one of whom, as will appear, had direct contact with Gillray himself. The authority with which they interpreted his intentions and the deeper meanings of the designs cannot be doubted.

None of Gillray’s English contemporaries thought fit to give his work this kind of notice in print. Only after his death in 1815, when old controversies lost their heat and the passage of time bred forgetfulness of the people and incidents in the caricatures, did English publishers decide to explain them retrospectively for the benefit of print collectors. *The Caricatures of Gillray; with Historical and Political Illustrations, and Compendious Biographical Anecdotes and Notices*, an anonymous work, was apparently issued in parts between 1818 and the mid 1820s.⁹ It contains some valuable comments on the role and reception of Gillray’s prints during the Napoleonic Wars, emphasising their patriotic effects, but hardly lives up to the promise of its title. In the later 1820s the printseller Thomas McLean reissued Gillray’s plates to subscribers, and supplied a catalogue, the *Illustrative Description of the*

⁸ The status of the caricaturist in eighteenth-century Britain and Gillray’s critical heritage are dealt with at greater length in Donald (1996), ch. 1.

⁹ Published in London by John Miller, Rodwell and Martin, in Edinburgh by William Blackwood; undated. It is illustrated with etched, reduced copies of the prints. Nine parts survive in the British Library’s copy. Hill (1976), p. xxvi.

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Genuine Works of Mr. James Gillray (1830).¹⁰ The entries often include witty and astute remarks on the artist, his subjects and the practice of caricature in his day; but they are merely thumbnail sketches. Moreover, as McLean's writer complained (p. 57), 'In looking back to these "by-gone days" it seems already as though our gray goose-quill were busied in recording the events of a period at least a century back.' The contemporaneous, extended and reflective commentaries on Gillray's prints in *London und Paris*, informed by journalists with an intimate knowledge of passing events, are a prime historical source which has no English counterpart.

The history and general character of *London und Paris*

London und Paris was a characteristic product of Weimar's distinctive political and artistic culture. The ducal court dominated a town of about 6,000 inhabitants, which still preserved much of its feudal and bucolic character.¹¹ However, Duke Karl August, absolute ruler of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, was unusual among German princes in the relative liberality of his social and religious views and (at least until Germany was threatened by Napoleon) his relaxed attitude to the licensing of the press.¹² Goethe, whom the Duke had appointed as an adviser in 1776, was, by the date of *London und Paris*'s launch, the all-powerful director of the arts at the court of Weimar, and round him had gathered many of Germany's leading writers, including Wieland, Herder and Schiller. The high intellectual tone established in Weimar's aristocratic and literary circles seems to have been diffused at a more popular level in many of the journals published in the duchy.¹³ It

¹⁰ On p. 233, the date of writing is given as 1828. It was a limited edition of 100 copies, evidently for wealthy collectors. Hill (1976), p. xxvii.

¹¹ W. H. Bruford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 56–73. Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol. 1, *The Poetry of Desire (1749–1790)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 233f.

¹² He permitted Bertuch's *Oppositionsblatt*, published from 1817 to 1820. Cf. Bruford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar*, pp. 77, 81f., 93–6. Friedrich Kapp and Johann Goldfriedrich, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 5 vols. (Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler, 1886–1923, reprinted Leipzig, 1970), vol. iv, p. 76. Ilse-Marie Barth, *Literarisches Weimar* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), p. 102.

¹³ Bruford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar*, pp. 291, 294.

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explains something of the erudition, mental energy and openness to ideas which is evident even in the commentaries on Gillray's caricatures.

The men who conducted *London und Paris* were close to, if not always in perfect harmony with, this literary elite. The proprietor, Friedrich Justin Bertuch (1747–1822),¹⁴ had started as a translator and literary hack, whose business reputation led to an appointment as the Duke's private secretary; he had gone on to make a fortune as a manufacturer, entrepreneur and publisher. His varied enterprises in Weimar turned its cultural productions into saleable commodities, and had done much to enhance the duchy's fame, influence and prosperity. In a country which was still overwhelmingly agricultural, his 'Landesindustriecomptoir', a commercial agency set up in 1790 to promote and channel orders for Weimar's craft wares, and facilitate import of goods from abroad, constituted an early experiment in capitalism. It was particularly important in the field of books and prints.¹⁵ Bertuch was, indeed, strikingly successful in his own publications. The highly respected *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, founded in 1785, was a broad-ranging international literary review, whose anonymous contributors could conveniently be recruited from the duchy's University of Jena. An illustrated monthly, the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, popularly known as the *Modejournal*, followed in 1786, and lasted until 1826.¹⁶ It dealt with fashion and all aspects of domestic design, but also literature, travel and society news. Like the 'Landesindustriecomptoir', it was intended to advertise and foster an international trade in expensive and tastefully designed consumer articles, and had subscribers

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 297–308 and Barth, *Literarisches Weimar*, pp. 102–4 for a full account of Bertuch's career and publications. See also Wilhelm Feldmann, *Friedrich Justin Bertuch: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Goethezeit* (Saarbrücken: Schmidtke in Komm., 1902); Albrecht von Heinemann, *Ein Kaufmann der Goethezeit: F. J. J. Bertuchs Leben und Werk* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1955) and *Friedrich Johann Justin Bertuch: ein Weimarer Buchhändler der Goethezeit* (Bad Münster: Hempe, 1950).

¹⁵ Griffiths and Carey, *German Printmaking*, p. 20. See also Fritz Fink, *Friedrich Johann Justin Bertuch: der Schöpfer des Weimarer Landes-Industrie-Comptoirs 1747–1822* (Weimar, 1934).

¹⁶ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-century Europe* (London: Batsford, 1984), p. 52. Gerhard Wagner, 'Von der Galanten zur Eleganten Welt: Das Journal des Luxus und der Moden im Einflußfeld der englischen industriellen Revolution und der Französischen Revolution', *Weimarer Beiträge* 35 (1989), 795–811.

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in England, France and the Netherlands as well as Germany. *London und Paris* happily complemented these sister publications. As a subscription journal with costly, hand-coloured etched plates, it was evidently aimed at an affluent and discriminating readership.¹⁷ It could be ordered ‘from all good post offices in and outside Germany, from all newspaper offices, and from all good German and foreign booksellers’,¹⁸ but sales were probably numbered in hundreds rather than thousands.¹⁹ Nevertheless, each copy is likely to have circulated among many readers, and the journal was soon well known and greatly admired.²⁰ Only Napoleon’s invasion of Germany prevented it enjoying the same longevity in Weimar as Bertuch’s other publications.

The nature of the Weimar journal which was to make such a significant contribution to our understanding of English satire was explained in an announcement preceding publication in 1798: ‘To entertain, to amuse and to recount’; to reproduce faithfully the reports sent back to Weimar by two ‘not entirely inexperienced German men’, living and observing life in the greatest capital cities of Europe, London and Paris, the ‘playgrounds of the

¹⁷ The ‘Announcement’ to *LuP* gives the annual subscription price of the journal in three of Germany’s many currencies: ‘1 Carolin; 6 Reichsthaler and 8 Groschen; or 11 fl. Reichsgeld’, roughly equivalent to 19 shillings in English currency (‘Plan und Ankündigung’, 1 (1798), 11). See W. H. Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century: The Social Background of the Literary Revival* (Cambridge University Press, 1965), Appendix 1, ‘German Money and its Value, Weights and Measures’. By 1810 the subscription price had dropped slightly to 6 Reichsthaler and 4 Groschen, or 11 Gulden.

¹⁸ *LuP* 23 (1810), 1.

¹⁹ Sales figures of several hundred would have been the norm for journals of this kind. Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 281–2.

²⁰ Kunzle, ‘Goethe and Caricature’, 173, n. 31, summarises some of the evidence for *LuP*’s renown. He quotes Eduard Fuchs, who in *Karikatur der Europäischen Völker* described it as ‘probably the most highly regarded periodical of the early nineteenth century’. While this is clearly an exaggeration, the journal was certainly admired by informed contemporaries such as Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, who referred to it in his *Annalen der Britischen Geschichte* as ‘the well-known journal *London und Paris*’. Riggert, ‘Die Zeitschrift “London und Paris”’, p. 93. *London und Paris* was sufficiently well known and respected to be used as a source for Johann Dominik Fiorillo’s *Geschichte der zeichnenden Künste von der Wiederauflebung bis auf die neuesten Zeiten*, 5 vols. (*Geschichte der Künste und Wissenschaften* Abth. 2) (Göttingen, 1796–1850). See vol. v, pp. 598–600, where Fiorillo reproduces almost word for word Gillray’s biographical details from a footnote to the commentary on *Search-Night* (pp. 55–6 in this volume).

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fashions which rule the world'.²¹ Devoting approximately equal space to each city, *London und Paris* provided full and highly readable accounts of the politics and current affairs, social life, gossip, famous people, customs, arts and institutions characteristic of these two very different nations. A typical Paris section might discuss topics as varied as a recent election, French schools, Parisian parks, and clairvoyants, while the accounts of London life included articles on the theatre, sports, balls and fashions, and scandalous divorces, together with thoughts on the English character and English xenophobia. Anxious not to idealise, the contributors dealt also with the dark and dangerous aspects of both cities, in reports on poverty, crime and prostitution. Even the texts of the popular songs of the moment were reprinted, translated and explained. The journal was illustrated with fine engravings, including maps, views, and scenes of public ceremonies. Through this spectrum of impressions, *London und Paris* conveyed a sense of what it was like to live in a great city, an experience denied to most of its German readers, who must have perused the journal's contents with mingled envy and horrified fascination. In the kaleidoscopic intermingling of aristocratic and demotic culture and the abrupt juxtapositions of reports on the two opposed capital cities, the journal provided a perfect context for understanding the ephemeral satires reproduced in each issue.

Since travel restrictions were frequently imposed on their subjects by the rulers of German states, many educated Germans had become 'armchair travellers', addicted to the exploration of other countries through the medium of books, periodicals and prints. *London und Paris* announced its intention of catering to these 'German newspaper readers and observers of current world conflicts', who hungrily 'devour news from abroad'.²² It was consciously modelled on the many late eighteenth-century works which represented the dynamic western European world to the German reader, and were often quoted in the journal itself: for example Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz's *Annalen der Britischen Geschichte des Jahrs 1788–1796*²³ or

²¹ 'Plan und Ankündigung', 31 May 1798. *LuP* 1 (1798), 3–11.

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ 20 volumes; published in Hamburg, Vienna and Tübingen (1790–1800). The *Annalen* made Archenholz famous throughout the German-speaking world, where he was regarded as an

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Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* (1781–8) and its post-revolutionary sequel, *Le Nouveau Paris*.²⁴ A genre of travel literature had arisen, in which the author adopted the standpoint of a knowledgeable, on-the-spot but non-participant observer, able to communicate a wealth of objective information to the reader,²⁵ and *London und Paris*'s accounts of Gillray's caricatures shared these characteristics. They assumed that the reader would have not only an extensive knowledge of literature, but also an unlimited appetite for news of the British political world, and for the mass of ephemeral publications associated with it. Lacking a major metropolis which could focus and project their own dawning sense of national identity, German readers looked longingly to the capital cities, London and Paris, which seemed to epitomise all the political, economic and cultural advantages of the modern unitary state. In particular they marvelled at the constitutional protection, voting rights and free press apparently enjoyed by the people of Britain, where, it was frequently said, even commoners were well versed in public affairs: privileges described in idealistic terms by successive German visitors to England such as Karl Philipp Moritz, Georg

expert on English affairs. He also produced an English-language journal, *The British Mercury, or Annals of History, Politics, Manners, Literature, Arts etc. of the British Empire*, 17 vols. (Hamburg: 1787–91). His book *A Picture of England: Containing a Description of the Laws, Customs and Manners of England* was published in English translation, 2 vols. (London: Edward Jeffery, 1789), and later editions (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1791 and London: 1797).

²⁴ *Tableau de Paris*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: 1782), translated into English as *Paris in Miniature* (London: G. Kearsley, 1782). *Le Nouveau Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1797).

²⁵ E.g. Karl Philipp Moritz, *Reisen eines Deutschen in England im Jahr 1782* (Berlin: Maurer, 1783), translated as *Travels, chiefly on Foot, through several parts of England in 1782, described in Letters to a Friend* (1795) and reprinted (London: Humphrey Milford, 1924); newly translated by Reginald Nettel as *Journeys of a German in England: Carl Philip Moritz. A Walking-tour of England in 1782* (London: Eland Books, 1983). Gebhard Friedrich August Wendeborn, *Beyträge zur Kenntniss Großbritanniens vom Jahr 1779* (Lemgo: Meyer, 1780); also *Der Zustand des Staats, der Religion, der Gelehrsamkeit und der Kunst in Großbritannien gegen das Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1785–8), translated by the author and published in London in 1791; cf. note 2 above. Karl Gottlob Küttner, *Beyträge zur Kenntniss vorzüglich des Innern von England und seiner Einwohner* (Leipzig: Dyk, 1791–6). See also Michael Maurer, *Aufklärung und Anglophilie in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1987) and Conrad Wiedemann (ed.), *Rom–Paris–London*.

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Christoph Lichtenberg and Archenholz,²⁶ and echoed by *London und Paris*'s writers. Middle-class readers still confined by the system of rank, hierarchy and rigid protocol prevalent in the Holy Roman Empire must have been astonished by Gillray's brazen but licensed abuse of high-ranking figures in public life; and the relative press freedom which made this possible stood in contrast to the state censorship and self-imposed observance of decorum which was normal in Germany. 'Anglomania' may partly have blinded *London und Paris*'s journalists to the real restrictions on political societies and publications in Britain during the period that followed the French Revolution, or caused its journalists sometimes to underestimate the degree of Gillray's complicity in the workings of the political establishment for which he displayed so little deference or admiration. Not that *London und Paris* was naively disposed to consider press freedom an unmitigated good, or to ignore completely the signs that in Pitt's Britain it was far from absolute. An extensive quotation from Peter Pindar's *Out at Last, or the Fallen Minister*, for example, was followed by comments which were characteristically equivocal:²⁷ 'It would be hard to overcome the revulsion' aroused by the 'loutish crudity and insolence' of Pindar's satire, were it not a reminder of 'the extent to which liberties can still be taken in England. It shows the ignorance of those people who maintain that the once free Briton has now had a padlock permanently clamped on his muzzle', as in fact he was shown in some contemporary prints.²⁸

London und Paris's writers were prone to compare 'British liberties', if only by implication, with the situation in Germany, but they were also well aware of the dangers of straying into such controversial territory. The editor announced he would 'guard against politics, as against a sphinx which daily devours the sons and daughters of the Boeotians'.²⁹ This was a sensi-

²⁶ Margaret L. Mare and W. H. Quarrell, *Lichtenberg's Visits to England, as Described in His Letters and Diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938). Hans Ludwig Gumbert (ed.), *Lichtenberg in England: Dokumente einer Begegnung*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977). Nettel, *Journeys of a German in England*, especially pp. 54–7, 184. Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, *England und Italien*, second edn, 5 vols. (Carlsruhe: Schmieder, 1791), pp. 1f. Archenholz, *A Picture of England* (1791 edn), chs. 1 and 2. Donald (1996), pp. 109–10.

²⁷ In the commentary on Gillray's *Integrity retiring from Office!*, see pp. 108–10 below.

²⁸ George (1959), p. 18 and pl. 7. Cf. BM 8710 and 8711, undated prints of c. 1795.

²⁹ *LuP* 1 (1798), 7.