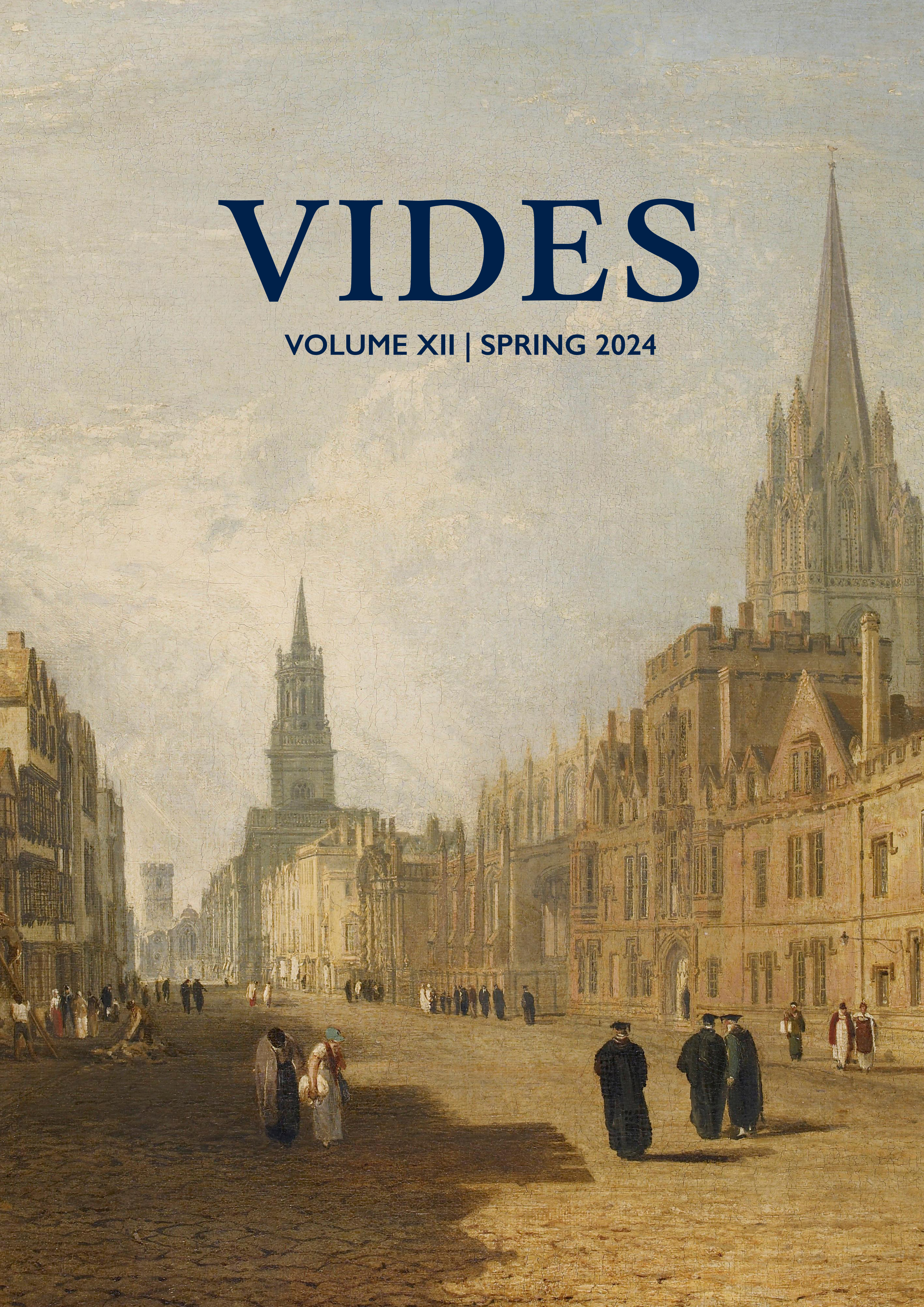

VIDES

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DR CARLY WATSON, CO-DIRECTOR, MST IN LITERATURE AND ARTS

Preface

It is a privilege to introduce *VIDES* Volume XII, created by students on the MSt in Literature and Arts at the University of Oxford. It showcases the remarkable ingenuity and variety of the work being done by students in the second year of the programme. There is something here to capture the interest of every curious reader, with articles exploring the Arthurian tradition, the history of British exploration and imperialism, issues of race, gender, and sexuality, the history of science, and even the history of time itself.

Each of the articles in this volume focuses on two artefacts, a word we use to encompass not just objects that might be found in a museum but all kinds of products of human endeavour, including objects, images, and texts. Students are asked to choose two artefacts of different kinds and analyse them alongside each other, showing how they shed light on larger historical conditions or developments. The inspiration for this brief comes from the interdisciplinary ethos of the MLA, which encourages students to pursue questions about the past across disciplinary boundaries, looking at more than one kind of artefact to arrive at a more rounded understanding of culture and history. It is not an easy brief, as I know from my own attempts to come up with examples of promising pairings of artefacts! But the contributors to this volume have risen to the challenge and their articles vividly demonstrate how bringing different artefacts into conversation with one another can generate new insights and breathe new life into products of human labour and imagination created centuries ago.

VIDES stands for *Volume of Interdisciplinary Essays*; the word vides is also Latin for 'you see'. (It is a form of the verb *videre*, 'to see', which is the origin of the modern English word *video*.)[1] What do we see when we look at the past? When we look at three-hundred-year-old painting, or visit a historic house, or read a two-hundred-year-old novel, are we seeing into the lives and thoughts of people who have lived before us? Or are we creating our own version of the past? In his influential study *Art and Illusion* (1960), the art historian E. H. Gombrich argued that we cannot see anything without forming an impression of it that is shaped by our habits of mind:

[1] 'video (adj. & n.)', *Oxford English Dictionary*, March 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7922527730> [accessed 24 March 2024].

[2] E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation – Millennium Edition* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 297, 298.

> Whenever we receive a visual impression, we react by docketing it, filing it, grouping it in one way or another, even if the impression is only that of an inkblot or a fingerprint. [...] The innocent eye is a myth.

To a certain extent, in other words, we create what we see. Similarly, when we look at artefacts from the past, what we see is shaped by our knowledge, experience, biases, interests, and enthusiasms. But we do not need to think of this as a failure to see things with an 'innocent eye'. We form impressions of things in order to make sense of them, evaluate them, and add to our knowledge. We might not be able to see straightforwardly into the past, but we can form interpretations of the past based on the artefacts that are available to us and in doing so we not only make sense of the past but also reveal what matters to us in the present. We do not simply look back at history – we create it, and the versions of it that we create resonate in the present. The articles in this volume are contributions to the ongoing process of interpreting and reinterpreting the past, and each of them allows us to see an aspect of British history with fresh eyes. I hope you find them interesting and inspiring.

Introduction

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*[1]

A study of British history, literature, philosophy and fine arts over the past five centuries brings into relief humankind's immense creativity and the capacity to see and develop possibilities - to see the infinite in all things. It also produces an awareness that, as John Donne noted, no one lives or creates alone, that no one 'is an island, entire of itself'.[2] We are all part of a joint endeavour called society or, more generally, humanity, and contribute to it in various ways. However, those ways are connected. The artist, philosopher, poet, political thinker and scientist are not different personas but different facets of the same creative individual, as they contribute multifacetedly at their point in time, drawing on the contributions of those that have gone before and speaking through time to those that will come after. Unlike most scholarly journals, *VIDES* therefore rejects the artificial silos into which academia has been arranged over the past two centuries and is explicitly interdisciplinary. Thus, this volume of *VIDES* is dedicated to the idea of collaboration: the collaboration between the range of different skills required to study diverse forms of material culture, the collaboration between the various academic disciplines that endeavour to interpret them, and the collaboration of the international team of students involved in the production of this scholarly journal. The result of such cooperation is a collection of essays which seeks to draw new and exciting connections between objects that tell the story of Britain over the past five hundred years. They tell the story of the country not only to itself but also to the rest of the world and, even though many of the artefacts discussed within these pages are centuries old, the stories remain relevant today. Examining such a wide variety of artefacts might make arriving at some consistent themes almost impossible, yet with careful consideration, some common ideas emerge. Thus, this collection of essays has been organised under three broad themes: Narration, Representation, and Exploration.

[1] David V. Erdman (ed), *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), p. 490.
[2] John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 98.

An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump by Joseph Wright of Derby, 1768, oil on canvas, 183 cm × 244 cm. National Gallery, London. Image Obtained from Wikimedia Commons.

Narration

Narratives, or stories, are common to all branches of human thought. Narratives are the stories that permeate our lives, shaping our perspectives and understanding of the world. They provide structure and depth to both actual occurrences and imagined scenarios, as well as to power systems. History is the product of narrative construction as we endeavour to comprehend the past by organising and interpreting 'facts'. Through these narratives, we aim to elucidate the decisions and mechanisms that have influenced our existence. Regardless of its form—fiction or non-fiction, poetry or prose – creative literature relies on narrative, whether compressed, extended, linear, or nonlinear. Narrative art serves as a visual representation of specific stories and the inherent meanings

they convey. Scientists tell stories about how the world works, develops and evolves, while philosophers develop narratives about how we can know and understand those processes. The three essays in this first section each examine the nature of the narrative process in art and literature.

Sara Farnworth, in her essay 'Politics, Myth and Folklore: Depictions of the Oxford Physick Garden in a Seventeenth-Century Ballad and an Eighteenth-Century Frontispiece', considers the implied narratives in two depictions of the Oxford Physick Garden and its keepers, both dating from the eighteenth century. The first work is a broadside (a form of descriptive or narrative verse), and the second is the frontispiece of *Vertumnus*, a poetic epistle written by Abel Evans. Both were written at a time of political and social upheaval, and Farnworth illuminates some of the messages from Oxford that were being expressed in print during this volatile period.

Poppy Priestley explores the differing perspectives of narration in literature and art in her essay 'He's just a K(e)night: Tennyson's Geraint and Enid poems and Butler, Heaton and Bayle's Geraint Kills a Bandit as explorations of masculinity in the Victorian age.' Priestley charts the literal and metaphorical journey of Sir Geraint, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, and his wife, Enid, through the work of Alfred Tennyson and a stained-glass window by Butler, Heaton and Bayle. Priestley argues that the isolation of the scene in a single stained-glass panel undermines Tennyson's message of emphasising the equally vital but fundamentally different roles of both genders and instead centres the physical, violent dominance of the masculine through the forced marginalisation of the feminine.

Anna Shmunis Zappia, in 'Contrasting Interpretations of Nimue in Arthurian Legend', also examines the link between a Tennyson narrative and fine art in the context of Arthurian lore. Shmunis Zappia examines the Arthurian figure of Nimue through a study of Edward Burne-Jones's painting *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1877) and Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem 'Vivien' in his *Idylls of the King* (1856) to show how myths continually morph to reflect the time and cultural circumstances of their retelling.

Representation

Representation is the use of signs that substitute for and depict something else. Through this process, people organise the world and perceptions of reality by assigning names to its various components. Signs are arranged to form semantic constructions and convey relationships. Literature uses language to create the signs that make up representation; fine art uses images. There can be no objectivity in representation; all representations are subjective, shaped by the perspectives of both the creator and the viewer and the sociocultural contexts in which they are produced or perceived. Notably, representation is heavily influenced by cultural, political, sexual, racial, and ideological factors, rendering it inseparable from the society that spawns it. The five

essays in this section explicitly address the subjectivity of representation in the artistic endeavour.

In 'Ob-Scene Encounters: The Shifting Phenomenological Dynamic Between Nineteenth Century Viewer and Object', Rebecca Ahmed-Geere investigates Dante Gabriel Rossetti's watercolour *St George slaying the Dragon* (1863) and *Position 18* (1904), an Underwood & Underwood stereographic image of Jerusalem, to illustrate how late nineteenth century perspectives on perception and experience moved away from the Cartesian model, dissolving the boundaries between the observer and the observed in light of the quest for Britain's imperial identity. Ahmed-Geere demonstrates that viewing is not a passive reception of visual information but rather a dynamic, interpretive process shaped by the viewer's perceptions, experiences, and emotions.

In his essay 'A figure cut in alabaster': Dynastic Concerns Depicted in a Portrait of Arbella Stuart (1577) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612)', Stephen Pitchers examines an unattributed portrait of Arbella Stuart from the sixteenth century alongside John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* of 1612, using the different methodologies available within art history and literary criticism, to examine what these artefacts tell us about representations of dynastic control during the period.

In 'Transgression, Resistance, and Agency': Explorations of the New Woman and Lesbian Desire in *A London Plane-Tree, and other Verse* (1889) and *The Little Foot-Page* (1905)', Helena Quiney offers a close reading of both a collection of poems by Amy Levy and an oil painting created by Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale. Quiney shows that these two pieces arguably challenge the place of women within late Victorian and Edwardian society and explores how each might be read as a representation of Lesbian identity.

Stephen Jones offers a critical reading of Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* (c. 1776), recently acquired by the National Portrait Gallery in London and the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, in his essay 'Celebration or Assimilation? A Critical Reading of Joshua Reynolds' Portrait of Mai (Omai)'. Comparing Reynolds' portrait of the first Polynesian to visit Great Britain with examples of indigenous Tahitian dress that accompanied Mai on his journey to Britain, Jones questions the established narrative that the painting helped to demonstrate Britain's supposed enlightened attitudes to its ever-growing Empire.

In 'Abolition, Race and Religion in Victorian Britain', Nina Hunt examines the first autobiography published by a black woman, the former slave Mary Prince, published in 1831, alongside John Bell's life-size bronze sculpture of a female slave, exhibited at the International Exhibition in London in 1862. The abolitionist movement had gained momentum in the intervening three decades, but some critical social issues remained unresolved. Hunt shows how each work illuminates the interlinked ideas of race and religion and how they are represented in art, specifically the prejudiced perception of black females and the racial and

religious undercurrents in the Victorian arts.

Exploration

By the end of the seventeenth century, Britain had supplanted Spain and Portugal as the preeminent global maritime force and British exploration extended its sphere of influence to encompass settlements in North America, the West Indies, and India, laying the foundations of an Empire that was to grow over the next two centuries to cover a quarter of the Earth's surface. Simultaneously, Britain assumed a pivotal role in a distinct realm of exploration: the expansion of scientific frontiers. Throughout the Enlightenment period, the British Empiricist School of philosophy laid the groundwork for modern scientific methodology, emphasising empirical observation and experimentation as fundamental principles. This scientific fervour flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Britain advanced the boundaries across various scientific disciplines, including physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics, solidifying its reputation as a global centre for scientific innovation and discovery. These developments in geographic and scientific exploration profoundly affected British culture and the arts, and the five essays organised under this theme explore various facets of these influences.

Debra Winter, in '"Metal More Attractive": Shelley's Arctic Frame and Nineteenth-Century Polar Exploration', draws parallels between two early nineteenth-century historical accounts of Arctic expeditions, notably Sir John Barrow's advocacy for exploration in the *Quarterly Review* and Mary Shelley's portrayal of the Arctic as a sublime yet perilous landscape in *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, to illuminate the intertwined themes of colonialism, scientific inquiry, and Romantic sensibility towards Nature.

In '"These Sad Relics": Victorian Responses to the 1845 Franklin Expedition', Niamh Smith explores two diverging interpretations of Sir John Franklin's lost Arctic expedition, Edwin Landseer's 1864 painting *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, and a sign from the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891, to illuminate how historical events were constructed and contested during the Victorian period.

In his essay, 'About Time: Anne Boleyn's Wedding Gift and William Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode*,' Mark Taylor studies the interplay between English decorative arts, scientific progress, and shifts in societal concepts of time through the examination of two artefacts: a domestic clock given by Henry VIII as a wedding gift to Anne Boleyn in 1533 and Hogarth's mid-eighteenth-century depiction of the miserable end to a transactional marriage.

In 'Worlds in Miniature: The Culpeper Microscope, Mary Leapor's *The Enquiry*, and the Social Construction of Science in the Eighteenth Century', Liz Reed considers a poem by Mary Leapor, first published in 1748, and the Culpeper Microscope, one of the most popular scientific instruments in the period, to support a more sociological view of what is meant by scientific advancement.

Finally, Philip Williams, in his essay 'Sense

in Relation to Morality: A Comparison of John McLure Hamilton and Christina Rossetti', considers two artefacts from the late-middle Victorian era: a painting depicting an animal and vivisector by John McLure Hamilton (engraving by Charles John Tomkins) and a poem for children by Christina Rossetti. Both artefacts are analysed through the physical senses and show that Hamilton and Rossetti used propositional language sparingly, depending almost entirely on the senses. Thus, the analysis considers whether sensorial communication occupies a privileged position in relation to morality.

Narration, Representation and Exploration: three lenses through which to examine five hundred years of British culture. Whilst all these essays investigate objects from the past, they also tell a story relevant to the present and the future. We hope you enjoy them.

Narration

SARA FARNWORTH

Politics, Myth and Folklore: Depictions of the Oxford Physick Garden in a Seventeenth-Century Ballad and an Eighteenth-Century Frontispiece

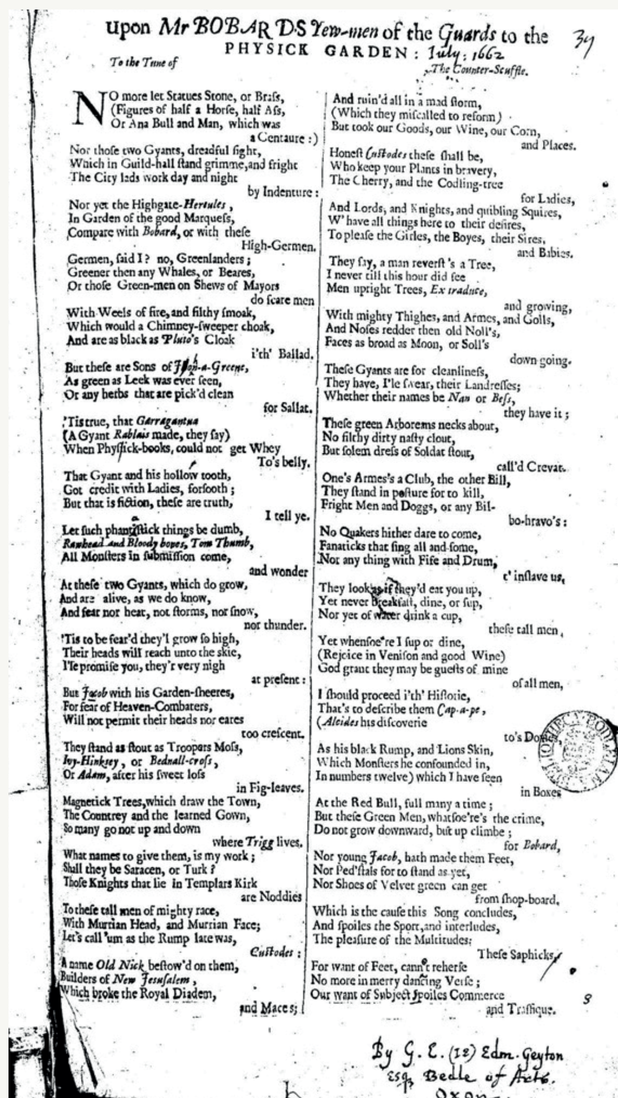
This article considers two depictions of the Oxford Physick Garden and its keepers separated by a period of fifty-two years. The first work is the broadside ballad entitled Upon Mr BOBARDS Yew-men of the Guards to the PHYSICK GARDEN *(1662) attributed to Edmund Gayton (1608-1666). The second is the frontispiece of* Vertumnus *(1713) a poem written by Abel Evans (1679-1737). Gayton and Evans were both fellows of Oxford University, who used myth and folklore in their works to express political views. They wrote during a time of political and social change after the English Civil Wars (1642-1651) but before the completion of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713-1714). This article hopes to illuminate some of those messages from Oxford, which were being expressed in print during this volatile period.*

In seventeenth-century Oxford, the Bobarts (father and son) were highly successful botanists and keepers of the Oxford Physick Garden (later known as the Botanic Garden). During their lifetime a number of works, highlighting contemporary political concerns in connection to myth and folklore, featured the Bobarts. Two of these obscure works will be considered in this article. *Upon Mr BOBARDS Yew-men of the Guards to the PHYSICK GARDEN* (1662)[1] by Edmund Gayton (1608-1666) is a comical seventeenth-century broadside ballad, calling attention to political concerns while focusing on folklore and the humorous side of two topiary yew trees sculpted as guards by Bobart the elder (Figure 1). *Vertumnus* (1713)[2] by Abel Evans (1679-1737) is an eighteenth-century poem celebrating peace and offering a vision of hope. It praises the work of Bobart the younger, as a successful ruler over his green kingdom, while the frontispiece engraving immortalises Bobart the elder as a god of medicine. Both works feature similar locations, people and politics, but differ in artefact type, audience and mythological focus. Evans confines himself to classical mythology, while Gayton mostly explores local

[1] Edmund Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men of the Guards to the Physick Gaden*, EEBO Bodleian Library records – unstructured (Oxford, 1662).

[2] Abel Evans, *Vertumnus An Epistle To Mr. Bobart, Botany Professor To the University of Oxford, and Keeper Of the Physick-Garden* (Oxford: Printed by L.L. for Stephen Fletcher, 1713).

and continental folklore. A comprehensive evaluation is beyond the scope of this article, but it is hoped that introducing a pattern of themes will encourage further interest in these under-represented works.



Upon *Mr BOBARDS Yew-men* of the *Guards* to the PHYSICK GARDEN: July: 1662 34

To the Tune of The Counter-Scuffle.

NO more let Statues Stone, or Braſs,
(Figures of half a Horſe, half Aſs,
Or Ana Bull and Man, which was
a Centaure :)
Nor thoſe two Gyants, dreadful ſight,
Which in Guild-hall ſtand grimme, and fright
The City lads work day and night
by Indenture :

Nor yet the Highgate-*Hercules*,
In Garden of the good Marqueſs,
Compare with *Bobard*, or with theſe
High-Germen.
Germen, ſaid I? no, Greenlanders;
Greener then any Whales, or Beares,
Or thoſe Green-men on Shews of Mayors
do ſcare men

With Weels of fire, and filthy ſmoak,
Which would a Chimney-ſweeper choak,
And are as black as *Pluto*'s Cloak
i'th' Ballad.
But theſe are Sons of *John-a-Greene*,
As green as Leek was ever ſeen,
Or any herbs that are pick'd clean
for Sallat.

'Tis true, that *Garragantua*
(A Gyant *Rablais* made, they ſay)
When Phyſick-books, could not get Whey
To's belly.
That Gyant and his hollow tooth,
Got credit with Ladies, forſooth;
But that is fiction, theſe are truth,
I tell ye.

Let ſuch phantaſtick things be dumb,
Rawhead and Bloody bones, Tom Thumb,
All Monſters in ſubmiſſion come,
and wonder
At theſe two Gyants, which do grow,
And are alive, as we do know,
And fear nor heat, not ſtorms, nor ſnow,
nor thunder.

'Tis to be fear'd they'l grow ſo high,
Their heads will reach unto the skie,
I'le promiſe you, they'r very nigh
at preſent :
But *Jacob* with his Garden-ſheeres,
For fear of Heaven-Combaters,
Will not permit their heads nor eares
too creſcent.

They ſtand as ſtout as Troopers Moſs,
Ivy-Hinksey, or *Bednall-croſs*,
Or *Adam*, after his ſweet loſs
in Fig-leaves.
Magnetick Trees, which draw the Town,
The Countrey and the learned Gown,
So many go not up and down
where *Trigg* lives.

What names to give them, is my work;
Shall they be Saracen, or Turk?
Thoſe Knights that lie in Templars Kirk
are Noddies
To theſe tall men of mighty race,
With Murrian Head, and Murrian Face;
Let's call 'um as the Rump late was,
Cuſtodes :

A name *Old Nick* beſtow'd on them,
Builders of *New Jeruſalem*,
Which broke the Royal Diadem,
and Maces;
And ruin'd all in a mad ſtorm,
(Which they miſcalled to reform)
But took our Goods, our Wine, our Corn,
and Places.

Honeſt *Cuſtodes* theſe ſhall be,
Who keep your Plants in bravery,
The Cherry, and the Codling-tree
for Ladies,
And Lords, and Knights, and quibling Squires,
W' have all things here to their deſires,
To pleaſe the Girles, the Boyes, their Sires,
and Babies.

They ſay, a man reverſt 's a Tree,
I never till this hour did ſee
Men upright Trees, *Ex traduce*,
and growing,
With mighty Thighes, and Armes, and Golls,
And Noſes redder then old Noll's,
Faces as broad as Moon, or Soll's
down going.

Theſe Gyants are for cleanlineſs,
They have, I'le ſwear, their Landreſſes;
Whether their names be *Nan* or *Beſs*,
they have it;
Theſe green Arborems necks about,
No filthy dirty naſty clout,
But ſolem dreſs of Soldat ſtout,
call'd Crevat.

One's Armes's a Club, the other Bill,
They ſtand in poſture for to kill,
Fright Men and Doggs, or any Bil-
bo-bravo's :
No Quakers hither dare to come,
Fanaticks that ſing all and ſome,
Nor any thing with Fife and Drum,
t' inſlave us,

They look as if they'd eat you up,
Yet never Breakfaſt, dine, or ſup,
Nor yet of water drink a cup,
theſe tall men,
Yet whenſoe're I ſup or dine,
(Rejoice in Veniſon and good Wine)
God grant they may be gueſts of mine
of all men,

I ſhould proceed i'th' Hiſtorie,
That's to deſcribe them *Cap-a-pe*,
(*Alcides* his diſcoverie
to's Domes,
As his black Rump, and Lions Skin,
Which Monſters he confounded in,
In numbers twelve) which I have ſeen
in Boxes

At the Red Bull, full many a time;
But theſe Green Men, whatſoe're's the crime,
Do not grow downward, but up climbe;
for *Bobard*,
Nor young *Jacob*, hath made them Feet,
Nor Ped'ſtals for to ſtand as yet,
Nor Shoes of Velvet green can get
from ſhop-board.

Which is the cauſe this Song concludes,
And ſpoiles the Sport, and interludes,
The pleaſure of the Multitudes;
Theſe Saphicks,
For want of Feet, cann't reherſe
No more in merry dancing Verſe;
Our want of Subject ſpoiles Commerce
and Traffique.

By G. E. (12) Edm. Geyton Esq. Bedle of Arts. Oxon.

Figure 1: Gayton, Edmund, *Upon Mr Bobard's yew-men of the guards to the physick garden to the tune of The counter-scuffle*, 1608-1666. Text: Oxford Text Archive. This image is released under Creative Commons CC0 Licence.

In 1662, Gayton, an author and beadle of the university, wrote two ballads about the Oxford Physick Garden and its two yeomen guard topiary bushes. The white-letter broadside ballad form he used was typical in mid-seventeenth-century culture when expressing political views through song and music.[3] Ballads were songs written by poets, playwrights, and scholars. They were part of a successful early modern commercial music industry, which saw songs printed on one side of a large sheet, known as a broadside.[4] Angela McShane indicates that while black-letter ballads were the pop songs of the period, white-letter, usually without illustration, were more sophisticated political songs.[5] Such ballads were accessible to all social spheres, though mostly accessed by the working classes who would sing them in pubs and taverns, or hear them sung on the streets by paid singers.[6] McShane also suggests that ballads were used by the Cavaliers and Tory party to encourage excessive drinking by old royalists, who had been financially ruined by the Civil War and Interregnum, to promote loyal obedience and discourage discontent which could cause disloyalty.[7] After the English Civil War, due to their oral nature, ballads could present political views and religious debate cheaply, therefore reaching a wide audience.[8]

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[3] Sarah Page Wisdom, 'Ballads, Culture and Performance in England 1640-1660', (Thesis Georgia State University, 2011), p. 7, 71.
[4] Angela McShane, Drink, song and politics in early modern England, Popular Music, Vol.35, No.2, Special Issue: Music and Alcohol (May 2016), p. 166.
[5] McShane, pp. 167.
[6] Ruth Perry, Ballad in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by John T. Lynch (Oxford University Press, 2016) pp. 549-550.
[7] McShane, p. 166,176,177.
[8] Wisdom, p. 7 and 19.

The ballad contrasts with the frontispiece of Evans' *Vertumnus* (Figure 2), an engraving fronting a book that would have been most accessible to the literate and classically educated. Evans was a Church of England clergyman and poet, his book deified the Bobarts, immortalising their work and success while also enthusing over a long awaited time of peace for the country. Evans' poem is not being examined here, but will be considered as context for its frontispiece, which depicts Bobart the elder as a god in an orderly world (Figure 2). Clare Le Corbeiller attributes the frontispiece to Michael Burghers (1653-1727), an Oxford illustrator, and connects the figure in it to Bobart the elder, who Burghers engraved before.[9]

Frontispieces aimed to attract readers through visual expression of the book's contents.[10] Janine Barchas indicates there was a long standing tradition to use the author's portrait as a feature of British book production in the seventeenth-century, however from the mid seventeenth-century this convention was creatively expanding.[11] By displaying Bobart the elder, and writing about the younger, Evans was exploring advertising potential. He may also have highlighted both Bobarts to capitalise on their reputation or with an intention to define or even redefine their legacy.

Gayton and Evans both attended the

Figure 2: Wikisource contributors, *Great Gate of the Physic Garden, Oxford*, 1713. Engraving. Wikisource. This image is released under Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 Licence.

Merchant Taylors' School, London and were members of St John's College, Oxford. Gayton studied medicine 1625 to 1633 and would have been in Oxford at the physick garden's foundation. However, Gayton left Oxford, only returning after the Restoration of 1660 to become a beadle at the university.[12] In 1662 Gayton wrote his two ballads. His return to the gardens after being away may have encouraged

[9] Clare Le Corbeiller, *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974), pp. 105-107.
[10] Rodney Shirley, Allegorical images of Europe in some atlas title pages, frontispieces, and map cartouches for *National Committee of Geography of Belgium* (Leuven), 2008-12,Vol.3 (3-4), pp. 341-354.
[11] Janine Barchas, Prefiguring Genre: Frontispiece Portraits from "Gulliver's Travels" to "Millenium Hall", *Studies in the Novel*, summer 1998, Vol. 30, No.2 Making Genre: Studies in the Novel or Something Like It, 1684-1762 (summer 1998), p. 261.
[12] Ian William McLellan, Edmund Gayton in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biograph* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

his reflections, as the gyants would have appeared during his absence. Evans motivations for writing are less obvious because he would have been five when Bobart the elder died and thirty-eight when writing about the seventy-two year old Bobart the younger. However, his poem does indicate a friendship with Bobart the younger.

> And now, methinks, my Genius sees
> My Friend, amidst his Plants and Trees;[13]

The Oxford Physick Garden was established in 1621, when Henry Lord Danvers, acquired five acres of land from Magdalen College, for the purpose of growing medicinal plants.[14] When the site and plantings had become established, Jacob Bobart the elder was the first keeper of the garden (Figure 3). Bobart is mentioned by Samuel Felton in his book *Portraits of English Authors on Gardening* (1830) as supervisor of the physick garden at Oxford in 1632.[15] However, the only official record of Bobart the elder's appointment to the gardens was in an agreement made in 1641, held by Falconer Madan, Esq.[16] Jacob Bobart was a native of Brunswick and believed to have been a soldier before his appointment to the physick garden, a post he would retain until death. He is known to have spoken Dutch and English and also had a good understanding of Latin. Thomas Baskerville (c.1630-1700), the son of an antiquarian, toured Oxford in the early 1680s and reported Bobart the elder as a tall, stocky, strong man who tagged his waist length beard with silver and who drew crowds to the garden.[17] This may indicate why Bobart became the focus of at least three ballads – he was an interesting character.

David Jacques, a British garden historian, states that England excelled in figurative

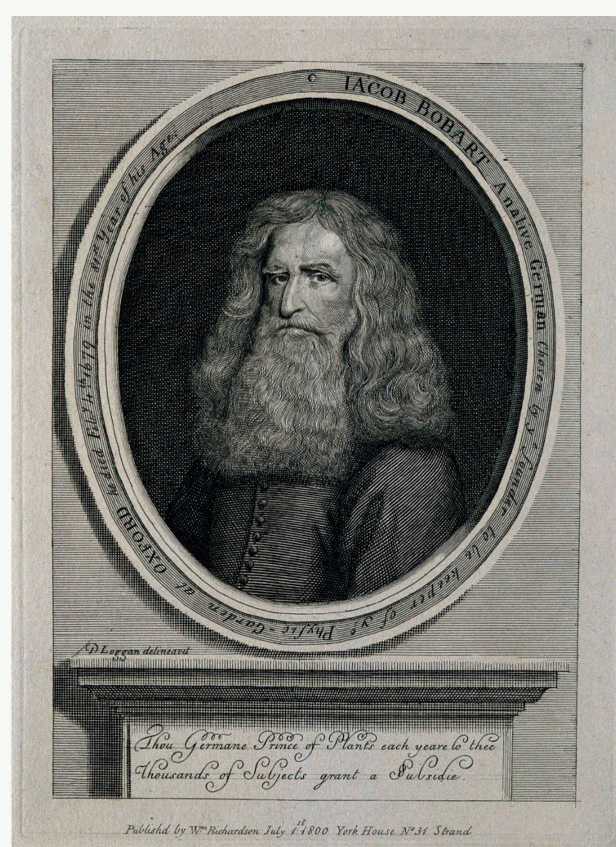

Figure 3: D. Loggan, *Jacob Bobart*, 1800. Line engraving. Wikimedia Commons. This image is released under Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 Licence.

[13] Evans, p. 29.
[14] John Newman, The Architectural Setting in *The History of the University of Oxford. Vol 4, Seventeenth-century Oxford* ed. by Nicholas Tyache (Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 135-177.
[15] Samuel Felton, *On the portraits of English authors on gardening*, (London: Wilson, 1830), available on the Internet Archive [accessed 22 February 2024] pp. 108-109.
[16] Sydney Howard Vines and George Claridge Druce, *An Account of the Morisonian Herbarium in the possession of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), available on the Internet Archive [accessed 22 February 2022] p. xvi.
[17] D. E. Allen, Bobart, Jacob, the elder (c.1599-1680), botanist and gardener in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

topiary in the late sixteenth-century and that the art form descended the social ranks. From the 1620s until the 1720s, topiary was primarily in high status gardens and better recorded than in the previous century. Jacques notes that English architect, Robert Smythson (1535-1614) made reference in the seventeenth-century to yews being 'cut into beasts' at Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire. Jacques also quotes Gervase Markham (c.1568-1637), editor of *La Maison Rustique*, as commenting on curious hedges, 'Your Gardener can frame your lesser wood to the shape of men armed in the field, ready to give battell ...'.[18] Gayton displays this battle ready stance in his ballad:

> One's Armes's a Club, the other Bill
> They stand in posture for to kill,
> Fright Men and Doggs, or any Bilbo-bravo's:[19]

Not everyone enjoyed decorative topiary at this time. Sir Francis Bacon in his essay *On Gardens* (1625) disapproved of 'images cut out in juniper or other garden stuff; they be for children.'[20] Despite this view, it appears that the creation of characters like the yew gyants reflected garden design during this time period. The difference appears to be that ornamental topiary mainly existed in high status gardens, typically attached to an estate or country house. This means that the large topiary gyants at the Oxford Physick Garden would have stood out as an odd novelty and this may have encouraged the comical portrayals.

> Germen, said I? no, Greenlanders;
> Greener then any Whales, or Beares,
> Or those Green-men on Shews of Mayors
> do scare men[21]

In 1642, at the start of the English Civil War, King Charles I took up residence in the city of Oxford.[22] This brought troubles for Bobart and uncertainty for the physick garden.[23] A map of the city in 1578 by Ralph Agas shows the Physick Garden outside the city walls, beyond the East Gate (Figure 4).[24] Though the physick garden had its own walls, the height of them in the frontispiece appear lower than they actually would have been, and there is no gate at the entrance. This gives the appearance of a less fortified site and without a gate the garden appears open to all. This may be a sign of the de-escalating changes occurring in the eighteenth-century. Gayton does not mention the garden walls or gates in his ballad, but the positioning of the gyants is indicated in the title. 'Yew-men

[18] David Jacques, 'English Topiary', in *Topiarius, the Journal of the European Boxwood and Topiary Society*, Vol.8, Autumn 2004, pp. 10-15.
[19] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*
[20] Francis Bacon, *On gardens, two essays by Francis Bacon & Abraham Cowley*, (England: Astolat Press, A.C. Curtis, 1903) p. 6.
[21] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*
[22] Eleanor Chance, Christina Colvin, Janet Cooper, C J Day, T G Hassall, Mary Jessup and Nesta Selwyn, 'Early Modern Oxford', in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 4, the City of Oxford*, ed. Alan Crossley and C R Elrington (London, 1979), pp. 74-180. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol4/pp74-180> [accessed 22 February 2024].
[23] Vines and Druce, pp. xviii.
[24] Joseph Skelton, *Oxonia antiqua restaurata*, (England: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1843) available on HathiTrust.

of the Guard' probably refers to the yeomen guards placed in the interior of a royal palace.

Figure 4: David Loggan, *Town plan of Oxford at ca. 1:3,265 (Nova & accuratissima celeberrimae Universitatis civitatisque Oxoniensis scenographia)*, 1675. Slide. University of Oxford, Digital Bodleian. This image is released under Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 Licence.

During the civil war, in 1644, the Earl of Danby died and his estate, which had been sequestrated for the use of the Commonwealth, was eventually released in 1649 to the Earl's brother, Sir John Danvers.[25] It appears that during this period, Bobart was unable to obtain his stipend and made a petition to the Vice-Chancellor of the University for help in the matter.[26] Despite the hardships brought on after the death of Danby, Bobart continued at the gardens. He probably survived by selling fruits and vegetables, grown in the garden.[27] Bobart also may have conceived, at this time, the idea of forming a topiary attraction at the garden entrance to encourage visitors who paid for tours and bought his produce. The frontispiece for Evans' poem also highlights the importance of plants with many unusual looking specimens growing randomly in the grass next to Bobart, who also holds a plant. (Figure 2) Gayton hints at yew guards protecting the plants and fruit trees of the garden in his ballad, which is likely a political reference to the importance of 'honest protectors' in a successful society.

> Honest Custodes these shall be,
> Who keep your Plants in bravery,
> The Cherry, and the Codling-tree for Ladies,[28]

Oxford seemed to recover its prosperity after the Civil War but by the later seventeenth-century the university was in a period of decline and the city's growth ended. The poll-tax assessments of 1667 assessed 8,566 persons, of whom 6,499 were citizens and 2,067 were members of the university. Citizens outnumbered members, but most of the unrest centred around students. The first openly

[25] Vines and Druce, p. xviii.
[26] Vines and Druce, p. xviii, xix.
[27] Karin Seeber, Jacob Bobart (1596-1680): First Keeper of the Oxford Physic Garden in *Garden History*, WINTER 2013, Vol 41, No.2 (WINTER 2013), pp. 278-284.
[28] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*

political riot of the seventeenth-century was in 1658 when scholars pelted the mayor and his brethren while they proclaimed Richard Cromwell Protector.[29] Gayton recognised the upheaval which occurred during and after the Civil War. The Parliamentarians, led by Oliver Cromwell, had beheaded the king and began a massive reform. Taxes were placed not only on royalists but anyone against Cromwell's government.[30]

> And ruin'd all in a mad storm,
> (Which they miscalled to reform)
> But took our Goods, our Wine, our Corn, and Places.[31]

Even with all the political and economic uncertainty about, Bobart proved to be an excellent gardener and under his care the garden acquired a great reputation. By 1662, visitors using the North Wall Entrance from the city would have seen the two yew trees which Bobart planted some twenty years previously and carefully formed into imposing gyants.[32] Gayton's impression of the garden gyants prompted him to makes a connection to the gyants, Gargantua and Pantagruel from novels written in the sixteenth-century by Francois Rabelais, a doctor in physick.

> Tis true, that Garragantua
> (A Gyant Rablais made, they say)
> When Physiick-books, could not get Whey To's belly.
>
> That Gyant and his hollow tooth,
> Got credit with Ladies, forsooth;
> But that is fiction, these are truth, I tell ye. [33]

The novels tell of the adventures of two giants, father and son. They include the giants' origins and the birth of Pantagruel as well as his time at university and acquisition of a great reputation. The story certainly displays similarities with the Bobarts. The Penguin Classics edition of Rabelais tales characterises the gyants as parodies of 'tall tales of chivalry', which satirises the law, theology and academia to portray Gargantua as a 'Renaissance Socrates'.[35] Gayton saw similarities between this folktale and the happenings around him. Both he and Rabelais had trained as physicians. They also were both writing in a comical way about the political change brought on by religious reform. Rabelais with regards to the reform of the French church, while Gayton considers the effects of religious politics in England. An engraving of Pantagruel (Figure 5) displays some similarities (clothing,

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[29] Eleanor Chance, Christina Colvin, Janet Cooper, C J Day, T G Hassall, Mary Jessup and Nesta Selwyn, pp. 74-180.
[30] Christopher Durston, 'The Fall of Cromwell's Major-Generals' in *The English Historical Review*, Feb., 1998, Vol. 113, No. 450 (Feb., 1998), pp. 18-37.
[31] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*
[32] Vines and Druce, p. xix.
[33] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*
[34] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *'Gargantua and Pantagruel'*, Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://britannica.com/topic/Gargantua-and-Pantagruel> [accessed 22 February 2024].
[35] Penguin, *'Gargantua and Pantagruel'*, Penguin Classics <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/35176/gargantua-and-pantagruel-by-rabelais-trans-ma-screech/9780140445503#> [accessed 22 February 2024] (para. 1).

plants and backdrop) with the frontispiece of *Vertumnus*.

While the ballad focuses on the gyants, the frontispiece does not show the yew topiary guards, even though they should be visible through the gateway. This may indicate a change in focus for the time period. Joseph Addison (1672-1719), a fellow of Magdalen, complained about topiary in 1712, 'We see the Marks of Scissars upon every Plant and Brush'.[36]

Figure 5: Page de titre du Disciple de Pantagruel, 1538. Engraving. Wikimedia Commons. This image is released under Creative Commons CC0 Licence.

Even if the yews were not still being formed into guards by 1713, when Evans published his book, they were likely still there. The current Oxford Botanical Garden & Arboretum website remarks that the oldest plant in their collection is an English yew planted by Bobart in 1645.[37] Why the yews were excluded from the frontispiece is unknown, but perhaps to alter previous views of Bobart's character, such as those in the ballads, to form a new view. Also, it is possible that the artist of the frontispiece saw topiary as dated and unappealing to consumers of the book so excluded them.

Additional political concerns during this time included the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. In response, European powers began to consolidate their efforts against the Ottomans by forming the 'Holy League'.[38] Gayton refers to this concern in his ballad, but appears to make light of it.

> What names to give them, is my work;
> Shall they be Saracen or Turk?
> Those Knights that lie in Templars Kirk are Noddies[39]

Saracen and Turk were terms associated with the tribes of Arabia and people of the east. Gayton goes on to suggest, perhaps with comical intent, that it may be better to call these men of might race Custodes:

> To these tall men of mighty race,
> With Murrian Head, and Murrian Face;
> Let's call 'um as the Rump late was, Custodes:
>
> A name Old Nick bestow'd on them,
> Builders of New Iesusalem,
> Which broke the Royal Diadem, and Maces;[40]

[36] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, Vol. 3, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 552.
[37] Oxford Botanical Garden & Arboretum, *The Literary Garden* (2024) <https://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/literary-garden> [accessed 22 February 2024] (para. 1).
[38] Gabor Agoston, 'The Ottoman Empire and Its Wars in Europe' in *The Last Muslim Conquest* (Princeton University Press, 2021) p. 244.
[39] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men* ...
[40] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men* ...

The builders of New Jerusalem is a phrase often used in the seventeenth-century in reference to Puritan (and also Cromwellian) views. Katharine Gillespie highlights how those views were affecting not only political expression and censorship laws, but challenging the whole of society.[41] The late Rump is likely a reference to the Rump Parliament, that ordered the execution of Charles I and which continued to sit after Pride's Purge (1648). In 1660 the members excluded by Pride were readmitted in preparation for the Restoration of the monarchy.[42] This was just a couple of years before Gayton wrote his ballad which takes a Royalist stance in opposition to those who 'broke the Royal Diadem'. 'Old Nick' was a humorous reference to the devil, first recorded in the seventeenth-century.[43] 'Old Nick' is not the only early English folklore reference by Gayton; Tom Thumb is mentioned as well in the ballad.

The frontispiece also exhibits political references. On the Danby Gate, behind Bobart, two statues are visible, one of Charles I and another of Charles II. These should be seen as indicators of retrospective royalist support as the statues did not exist until the 1690s, over ten years after Bobart the elder died in 1680. Anna Svensson also noticed this retrospective political connection when she examined the frontispiece.[44] It is possible that the statues were included to show the gate as it was at the time of publication, because the poem celebrates the Stuart monarchy and Queen Anne. This inaccuracy, however, does indicate that the frontispiece is likely more metaphoric than realistic.

Jacob Bobart the younger (1641-1719) took over as keeper when his father died in 1680. Gayton mentioned the young Bobart helping to form the yew gyants. A second ballad by Gayton acts as a continuation of the first and goes on to explore what happens when the gyants are given feet (perhaps by the young Bobart).[45]

> Nor young Iacob, hath made them Feet,
> Nor Ped'stals fir the stand as yet,
> Nor Shoes of Velvet green can get from shop-board.[46]

Bobart the younger is not on the frontispiece, but is referred to in the poem where he could be interpreted as Vertumnus, the god of seasons, change and plant growth.[47] Bobart might also be seen as the god Asclepius, son of Apollo, 'Or those Apollo first did teach/

[41] Katharine Gillespie, 'Prophecy and Political Expression in Cromwellian England' in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers, (Oxford Academic, online edn, 2012) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199560608.013.0025> [accessed 22 February 2024] pp. 462-480.
[42] 'Rump Parliament' in *A Dictionary of World History* (2 ed.), ed. by Edmund Wright (Oxford University Press, 2006).
[43] *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, ed. by Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, (Oxford University Press, 2003) keywords 'Old Nick'.
[44] Anna Svensson, 'And Eden from the Chaos rose': utopian order and rebellion in the Oxford Physick Garden in *Annals of Science*, 2019-04, Vol.76 (2) pp. 156-183.
[45] Edmund Gayton, *A ballad on the gyants in the physick garden in Oxford who have been breeding feet as long as garagantua was teeth*, EEBO Bodleian Library records - unstuctured, 1 sheet (Oxford, 1662).
[46] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men …*
[47] Evans, pp. 25-26.

His Son, the Epidaurian Leach'.[48] Asclepius was the god of medicine, who had a sanctuary in Epidaurus.[49] In 1710, when Zacharias von Uffenbach visited the gardens, he was shocked by the keeper and reported that Bobart the younger's face and hands were as black and coarse as those of any gardener and that he dressed in clothes that were very bad.[50] Not exactly a description matching a god.

The frontispiece depicting Bobart the elder contrasts this image of his son as it presents an old man in clean clothes and shoes, wearing a sash belt and cap. Confusingly, the father is shown with a snake wrapped around a staff, while in the company of a dog and a goat. These are symbols often associated with the god Asclepius, but could have other meanings as Karin Seeber indicates in her assessment of the frontispiece.[51] My view is that both men are being presented as the god Asclepius, as if the role of god and ruler was being passed down from father to son. Evans might be attempting to establish a lasting reputation for the Bobarts, which he may have felt they never fully achieved in life.

Evans lived through the period proceding the treaty of Utrecht (1613-14), when the nature and scale of warfare in Europe was changing. There was a military revolution, where armies grew dramatically and battles were fought on a larger scale. According to Jeremy Black, the period between 1660 and 1710 witnessed an important step in this revolution as the scale and organisation of armies became tied up with the growth of state administration and inevitably higher taxes.[52] All these changes undoubtedly had an effect on society. It is, therefore, possible to suggest that one of the motivations for creating yew-men guards at the physick garden was as a royalist symbol, as yeomen of the guard were the oldest military corps in Britain. Gayton creates similarities between the gyants and soldiers.

> These green Arboreans necks about,
> No filthy dirty nasty clout,
> But solem dress of Soldat stout, call'd Crevat[53]

A 'soldat' was an ordinary soldier, not an officer. Gayton highlights that the gyants represent all that is clean and good, not dirty and nasty, which he associates with political power and control of armies 'Nor any thing with Fife and Drum, t' inslave us'.[54] In the frontispiece, Bobart the elder could represent a retired soldier, as he had previously served.

Evans was a Tory, who had seen the chaos of politics. The Treaty of Utrecht (1714) when concluded, would end twelve years of global warfare and establish a peace between

[48] Evans, p. 16.
[49] Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidaurus, unesco World Heritage Convention (2024) <https://whc.unesco/en/list/491/> [accessed 22 February 2024] (para. 1 of 19).
[50] D. E. Allen, Bobart, Jacob, the younger (1641-1719), botanist in *Oxford National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
[51] Seeber, p. 280.
[52] 'Introduction' in *Performances of Peace: Utrecht 1713*, ed. by Renger E de Bruin, Cornelis van der Haven, Lotte Jensen, and David Onnekink (Brill: 2015) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76w4b.5> [accessed 22 February 2024] pp. 1-21.
[53] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*
[54] Gayton, *Upon Mr Bobards Yew-men ...*

France, Britain, the Dutch Republic, Prussia, Portugal and Savoy. Utrecht would ultimately lay lasting foundations for international relations.[55] Just four years after Evan's poem was published, Bobart the younger struggled with a period of illness and eventually died two years later in 1719.[56] This ended the Bobart's long connection with the physick garden.

In *Vertumnus*, Evans captures a summary of the times he lived in:

> Thank Heav'n! at Last out Wars are o'er;
> We're very wise, and very Poor:
> All our Campaigns at once are done;
> We've Ended, where we just Begun,
> In Perfect PEACE: Long may it last!
> And Pay for all the Taxes past: [57]

Despite differences in artefact type, time frame, and audience, both *Upon Mr BOBARDS Yew-men of the Guards to the PHYSICK GARDEN* and *Vertumnus* highlight contemporary political concerns and explore connections between reality and fantasy using mythology and folklore. Gayton creates amusing verses on the yew guards of the physick garden, while making a number of references to soldiers and fighting as well as government and taxes. Evans on the other hand is excited to see the end of fighting and wars. He turns away from past political mistakes and looks instead towards what makes a better future. Evans focus is on peace and highlighting what a more perfect world and monarchy would look like. The frontispiece of Evans' book offers a glimpse of that optimism by displaying a clean, perfectly ordered world in harmony, while also hinting at a connection to classical mythology.

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[56] Allen, Bobart, Jacob, the younger.
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FIGURES

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POPPY PRIESTLEY

He's just a K(e)night: Tennyson's *Geraint and Enid* poems and Butler, Heaton and Bayle's *Geraint Kills a Bandit* as explorations of masculinity in the Victorian Age

Part of Alfred Tennyson's Idylls of the King, The Marriage of Geraint *and* Geraint and Enid *chart the literal and metaphorical journey of Sir Geraint, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, and his wife, Enid, towards a harmonious marriage through misunderstanding, physical hardship and flawed reconciliation. Geraint attempts to re-establish his masculine reputation solely through feats of military might and aggressive violence before realising that without his wife he cannot be successful. Butler, Heaton and Bayle's representation of the tale in stained-glass removes the vital feminine influence of the story. Arguably, the isolation of the scene in a single stained-glass panel undermines Tennyson's message in his Arthurian texts of emphasising the fundamentally different, but equally vital, roles of both genders and instead centres the physical, violent dominance of the masculine through the forced marginalisation of the feminine.*

Inspired by events described in two poems from Tennyson's poetry collection *Idylls of the King (1859-1885)*, Butler, Heaton and Bayle's 1870 stained glass window *Geraint Kills a Bandit* depicts the moment that Sir Geraint, a knight of the Round Table, defends himself from an attempt on his life. The window is a snapshot of a much larger tale detailed across the longest of Tennyson's Arthurian poems. The story crosses two separate poems: *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid.*[1] In the tale, Geraint and his young wife, Enid, are journeying from Camelot back to Geraint's ancestral lands in Cornwall after Geraint worries that his wife's close friendship with the disgraced Queen Guinevere might have tainted her (and by extension his) reputation within King Arthur's court.

After mishearing Enid's confession of feelings of wifely inadequacy compared to Geraint's nobility as a confession of guilt and infidelity, Geraint forces his wife to endure an arduous and, frankly, dangerous journey across the country to prove whether she is 'true', ordering her to 'put on thy worst and meanest dress' and demands that 'on thy duty as a wife,/ Whatever happens, not to speak to

[1] While the poems are two separate texts within Tennyson's Idylls of the King, both explore the same characters, events and themes and this essay will therefore refer to both and consider them as two parts of one narrative tale.

me,/ No, not a word!'[2] Enid attempts to warn him on several occasions of a deadly threat approaching on the road, but each time he responds with 'a wrathful answer', and asks 'Did I wish/ Your warning or your silence?'[3] His insistence on controlling not only her actions but also her voice and her clothing emphasises the forced loss of Enid's autonomy; Geraint begins his attempts to reestablish his dominance within the marriage through the subjugation of his wife. The specific demand for Enid's 'worst and meanest dress' is clearly intended to humiliate her when she is seen in public and, while Geraint sees his demands for her silence as a way of proving his own martial prowess, it could equally be seen as an attempt at further emotional punishment. Geraint risks not only his and his wife's lives, but also puts her at significant risk of deep emotional trauma; if he cannot defeat his enemies, she will not only have to watch her husband die in front of her, but also face the threat of armed and dangerous men as a lone women with no protection.

Figure 1: Butler, Heaton and Hayle, Geraint Kills a Bandit, c.1870. Stained-glass window, approx. 111 x 101cm © The Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

Each time the bandits approach, Geraint must fight for his life, culminating in an attack that almost kills him. It is worth noting that Geraint was only ever in danger because of his forced silencing of his wife. He chooses to keep his injury secret from her in a convoluted plan to prove her love; he 'lay still, and feigned himself as dead' to see how she responds, his theory being that if she is 'true' she will mourn him loudly and refuse the safety of another husband, but if she is dishonest she will 'cleave to the better man.'[4]

Enid refuses the advances of Sir Doorm, declaring that she 'never loved, can never love but [Geraint]' and begs Sir Doorm to 'let [her] be.'[5] It is only when Sir Doorm threatens her and Enid 'sent forth a sudden sharp and bitter cry' that Geraint rises and slays the other knight. The two are reconciled, while Geraint supposedly learns his lesson and forever more

[2] Alfred Tennyson, 'The Marriage of Geraint' and 'Geraint and Enid' in *Idylls of the King*, (London: Penguin Classics), p.40 and p.53. All subsequent quotations from the poems will be taken from this edition.
[3] Ibid., p. 54
[4] Ibid., p. 55
[5] Ibid., p. 65

'kept the justice of the King/ So vigorously yet mildly, that all hearts/ Applauded and the spiteful whispers died.'[6] Enid's plea to leave Sir Doorm's castle is the final time that her voice is heard within the two poems.

Geraint's intention for the metaphorical and physical journey was, in a roundabout way, to save his marriage. It was the imbalance of power – with Enid's influence over his behaviour distracting him from his responsibilities – that created the 'spiteful whispers.'[7] Tennyson makes it clear that the establishment of male physical dominance alone is not enough to salvage an imbalanced marriage; for Tennyson it instead requires the rediscovery of the two fundamentally different, but equally important, roles for man and wife for a marriage to be successfully saved. While Geraint must regain his trust in his wife and balance his priorities within the domestic and public spheres, Enid must prove her fidelity and re-establish her role as the moral compass and voice of both caution and reason. Her role may be quiet, almost silent even, but Tennyson insists that it is vital.

Standing at 111 x 101cm, *Geraint Kills a Bandit* forms part of a wider collection of eight stained-glass windows, originally acquired by the mayor of Winchester, Robert Poulsom Forder (1832-78), for his house at 77 Kingsgate Street. Renamed Wellington House, the property was acquired in 1939 by Winchester College but requisitioned by the War Department in 1940. The stained-glass windows were removed for safekeeping from German air raids and only rediscovered in 2013 in the loft of the Warden's Stables on the college's site when the building was being renovated to become the school's Treasury.[8] Each of the windows depict a key moment from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, with five of the eight relating in some way to Sir Lancelot. One of the remaining three depicts the young Prince Arthur discovering an ancient crown whose diamonds he later uses as prizes in a tournament, one details the parting of Guinevere and Arthur at the end of the *Idylls*, and the remaining is the subject of this essay.

Little record is left of the commissioning and creation of the windows beyond the name of the acquirer, so it is difficult to state with any certainty why these particular moments were chosen; it is interesting, however, to note that every scene relates in some manner to ideas of masculinity, most commonly exploring masculinity's relation to women. Three female characters are depicted in the scenes: Queen Guinevere, Elaine of Astolat (the Lady of Shallott) and Enid, Sir Geraint's wife. The centring of the female figures within Tennyson's poems 'reflects a Victorian society in which women really were central to ideas of order, morality and national stability.'[9]

Tennyson, influenced by a broader debate

[6] Ibid., p. 69
[7] Ibid.. p. 69
[8] Museum display notes from Winchester College Treasury.
[9] Ingrid Ranum, 'An Adventure in Modern Marriage: Domestic Development in Tennyson's *Geraint and Enid* and *The Marriage of Geraint, Victorian Poetry*, 47.1 (2009), p. 241.

about gender roles in the changing political and social climate of the nineteenth century, seemed to believe that men occupied two different spheres of existence – the domestic and the public – and in order to be a truly successful man, it was necessary to strike a balance between the two. Masculine success required a delicate balancing act between being a 'respected, productive public figure' and being 'a loving and involved husband.'[10] Should a man fail to maintain this balance, he might be 'reduce[d] to a brute' if he prioritised the public sphere and ignored the moral guidance of the feminine or, fatally, if he spent 'too much time in the company of wife and daughters [he] might become effeminized, at the expense of both his manly vigour and his familial authority.'[11]

Tennyson's Geraint and Enid poems explore the dangers of these extremes in detail. Geraint's success before marriage comes from the sort of rampant displays of 'traditional masculinity', rooted in violence and conquest, that can be seen within the stained glass.[12] He is one of Arthur's greatest knights, renowned across the country for his deeds and, most importantly, for his masculinity; he embodies the virtues and values that Tennyson intended his work to promote to 'young gentlemen.'[13] It is when he gets married, however, that issues begin to surface. He succumbs to the trap of 'excess woman worship,' which completely 'diminishe[s] his knightly reputation.'[14] As Tennyson describes, Geraint became 'forgetful of his promise to the King,/ Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,/ Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,/ Forgetful of his glory and his name,/ Forgetful of his princedom and its cares.'[15] Now a figure of ridicule as 'the people/ Began to scoff and jeer and babble of him/ As of a prince whose manhood was all gone,/ And molten down in mere uxoriousness,'[16] Geraint had swung too far towards what Ingrid Ranum describes as 'domestic involvement', committing his time and attention to the 'lov[e] and reverenc[e]' of his wife, 'compass[ing] her with sweet observances.'[17] It is only when the spectre of damage to his reputation caused by his wife's actions surfaces that Geraint petitions King Arthur for leave to return to his own lands.

Geraint and Enid's journey from Camelot to Cornwall is intended almost as a pilgrimage, with the various tests of strength on the road allowing Geraint the space to re-establish a sense of masculinity in both his own view of himself and the public perception of him within Arthur's court. Each of these 'tests' demands a reprioritising of physical and violent dominance and requires Geraint to kill a large number of 'bandits.' While it is never specified within the text why these

[10] Ranum, p. 242.
[11] John Tosh in Ranum, pp. 251-2.
[12] Ranum, p. 243.
[13] Hughes in Ranum, p. 242.
[14] Debra N. Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur: The Myth Through Victorian Eyes*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams), 1995, p. 84.
[15] Tennyson, p. 39.
[16] Tennyson, p. 39.
[17] Tennyson, p. 40. and p. 54.

men have been classified as 'bandits,' the clear implication of moral right on the part of Geraint is a vital component of his redemption as a successful male figure within society; one who could be seen and consumed by a Victorian society that 'accepted fighting as a necessary and indeed glorious activity, but [which] set out to soften its potential barbarity by putting it into the hands of men committed to high standards of behaviour' and morality.[18]

While Geraint believes that these feats of physical and moral prowess will allow him to defend his reputation and determine whether his wife is 'true', Tennyson warns his readers that true contentment and true masculinity can only be achieved 'in relation to women' and that, while becoming a man requires the making of one's own way in the world and getting the respect of one's peers, a successful and balanced marriage is the sole means of achieving the 'full privileges of masculinity.'[19] Such a marriage required two things: a man who could be relied upon to 'protec[t], provid[e]' and a woman who could be equally relied upon to provide a 'sanctuary from an inhospitable world' and to whom a husband could look for 'moral guidance.'[20] At the poems' close, Tennyson describes how the two lived contented lives following their return to court where Geraint 'nor did [...] doubt her more,/ But rested in her fealty.'[21] Defined as 'the fidelity of a vassal or feudal tenant to his lord,' 'fealty' reads to a modern audience as an uncomfortable choice of wording; it suggests an imbalance of power, with one receiving loyalty and the other giving it.[22] While it seems somewhat at odds with Tennyson's underlying message of equally vital roles within a marriage, the general sense of the word choice mirrors John Ruskin's contemporary comments on the importance of different roles within a marriage – 'that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails.'[23] A Victorian husband might expect his wife to metaphorically swear fealty to him and their family unit, but if she does not (or cannot) successfully fulfil her own role, the implied imbalance of power becomes almost irrelevant; forced fealty from an unsuccessful and unequally yoked marriage becomes a public embarrassment, the sort that causes 'spiteful whispers.'

By the end of the two Geraint and Enid poems, the two characters have 'reshap[ed] themselves and tak[en] on the values of domesticity... provid[ing] the balanced platform for Geraint to rule both "vigorously" and "mildly."'[24] The reconciliation – if it can be described as such – requires a level of self-reflection in Geraint that is not seen within the

[18] Mark Girouard in Ruth Robbins, 'Man-made Fibres? The split personalities of Victorian manliness,' *Victoriographies*, 4.2, p. 144.
[19] Tosh in Ranum, p. 242.
[20] Ranum, pp. 242-3.
[21] Tennyson, p. 124
[22] 'Fealty' in *Merriam Webster Dictionary* [online],< https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fealty>
[23] John Ruskin, *Of Queens' Gardens*, (Edinburgh: Ballantyne Press, 1902), p. 96.
[24] Ranum, p. 255.

rest of the poems. He admits that he has 'used [Enid] worse than that dead man' and promises that 'henceforward [he] will rather die than doubt.'[25] He does not, however, allow Enid any space to speak beyond an expression of fear of reprisals for the death of Sir Doorm, instead speaking over her completely; he 'generously' decides that he 'will not ask [her] meaning in' the misheard confession of inadequacy that was the catalyst for the entire affair, nor are readers given much indication of Enid's response to Geraint's supposed apology. She is not even mentioned in the closing lines of the text. By the end of the second poem, Enid has ultimately served her purpose; her words gave Geraint the impetus to regain his 'spurs' and restore the balance of his role in the public and domestic spheres, a decision that then allows her to return to her role as the hand that braces the metaphorical armour of Geraint's soul. It is a vital role, as Tennyson suggests, but not one that requires her to speak.

Although Tennyson's poetry clearly centralises the importance of a balanced and harmonious marriage, the stained-glass window shifts the focus of the narrative. By choosing a single moment from the poem, the designers remove the scene from its wider context. While it is possible that Butler, Heaton and Bayle assumed a level of prior knowledge in the potential viewers of the windows – Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* was particularly popular at the time – and therefore saw no harm in isolating moments from the poems, this is impossible to prove due to the lack of records surrounding the production of the window.[26] Instead, the snapshots in the windows lose their nuanced exploration of both marriage and masculinity in their isolation, and it is difficult to see a clear connection, underlying theme or wider narrative arc in the chosen scenes. It is possible that the subjects of the windows were chosen by the original owner purely because they were his favourite moments from the *Idylls*. However, the creation of eight windows of significant size and cost, whose audience would have been any and all of the mayor's visitors – which, in a relatively large town like Winchester can be assumed to be a decent amount, and would also have included anyone who walked past the busy thoroughfare of Kingsgate Street – is unlikely to have been driven purely by personal preference. With this ambiguity surrounding why each moment was chosen in mind, comparing the original text of Tennyson's Geraint and Enid poems with the finished window raises more questions.

At first glance, a viewer could be forgiven for thinking that there are only two figures within the stained glass: Geraint and the bandit. Upon closer inspection, however, behind Geraint's raised right arm is his wife, Enid. She is forced into the background by the physical dominance of her husband in the centre of the frame and the colouring of her face, clothes and hair seem to almost blend her

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[25] Tennyson, p. 66.
[26] James Tozer, 'Tennyson's Popularity,' *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 10.4 (November 2015), pp. 372-386.

into the natural landscape. She is easy to miss, perhaps deliberately so, in order to focus the viewer's attention onto Geraint and his actions. Enid becomes, in this depiction, almost an irrelevance; the charger, decked in all its finery, enjoys a greater attention to detail and, in fact, more emotion in its expression than Enid, a key character within the original poems. This version of Enid, her hands clasped in prayer as she observes the scene unfolding before her, is far removed from the woman of Tennyson's text.

It is Geraint instead who physically dominates the scene, the bulk of his armour and his horse occupying approximately two thirds of the main panel. His left hand expertly controls the rampant charger beneath him, while his right wields a broken lance with ease, the tip broken off in the chest of the bandit who lies sprawled and undignified in the bottom third of the main panel. There is something undeniably phallic about the wielding and positioning of Geraint's lance and the penetration of the bandit's armour that is not implied within Tennyson's text. The quotation drawn directly from *Geraint and Enid* depicted in the bottom panel makes reference to how Geraint 'struck thro' the bulky bandit's corselet,' which is difficult to read as anything other than a straightforward description of Geraint's success. Usually worn in the medieval period with a mail shirt underneath, the corselet was relatively difficult to penetrate, but not impossible, particularly with a sharp, pointed weapon such as a lance wielded at speed as in the stained glass.[27] The phallic imagery emphasises Geraint's desperation to reestablish his masculine reputation, furthered again by the physical positioning of the two knights. Geraint is positioned as the clear moral superior, looming over his vanquished foe. He is faceless, given a degree of mystery and intrigue by the artist, while the bandit he has killed is unhelmed; his blank and staring face becomes almost ghoulish compared to the sanitised anonymity of Geraint.

Tennyson's text outlines a journey made by Geraint and Enid, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. The characters' physical journey to Cornwall allows Geraint the space to pursue what he initially perceives as the best way to 'regain his spurs,' before realising his initial judgement of his wife was baseless and his treatment of her cruel. His emotional journey culminates with a clear understanding of the two very separate, but fundamentally symbiotic, roles that Geraint and Enid have within their marriage in order to make it a success, and so allows Geraint to 'vigorously but mildly' carry out the King's justice. Butler, Heaton and Bayle's stained-glass, however, isolates a single moment from the two poems for aesthetic effect, completely removing the scene from its wider context. A level of nuance is thus lost from the narrative and the physical dominance of Geraint, both within the story and within the main panel, prioritises his violent expression of masculinity over the

[27] Not to be confused with the 20th Century women's underwear of the same name, this instance of 'corselet' stems from the Middle French 'cors', meaning body, and describes a piece of armour that covers the trunk of the body.

realisation of the significance of the balancing of the public and domestic spheres.

This is not to say that the stained-glass is not itself beautiful. The delicacy of the flowers within the border – the daisy (symbolising loyalty and shared feelings) and the pomegranate (symbolising conceit) – the depths of the colours and the clear mastery of the intricate details of the background all make the window an aesthetically stunning piece of art.[28]

The piece is currently lit by artificial light within the college's Treasury, but it is not difficult to imagine it illuminated with sunlight. All eight of the windows displayed together would have undoubtedly created an impressive effect when viewed from both inside and outside their original building. However, the distortion of the source text arguably undermines the beauty of the piece. The strength of Tennyson's poems stems in no small part from his ability to explore the multitudinous nuances of human nature, society and marriage; reducing his characters to the gendered stereotype of hypermasculinity and the concept of the marginalised woman arguably loses that depth of meaning.

Within the stained-glass Geraint is celebrated and – literally – raised above other characters for his physical prowess and his ability at 'the hunt [...] the tilt and tournament.'[29] He is placed as a figure to be admired and whose values and actions should be emulated by any and all who see the window; a notion that is particularly interesting when considering the fact that the windows are today in the public collection of Winchester College, whose students are still predominantly male. While the windows were stored away from view for a considerable period, they now take pride of place within the College's Treasury, physically dominating the wall space of its first room and framing a broad range of artefacts from the College's wartime experiences.

There is perhaps something to be said here about the placement of the windows within an educational setting, historically famed for its single-sex academic prowess but currently undergoing a period of intense existential reform and self-reflection on its future as a bastion of male education. The inclusion of female day students within the sixth form for the first time in 2022 after almost 800 years of exclusion raises questions about which pieces of the collection should be chosen for display.

Tennyson's original texts are not in themselves a modern reader's ideal presentation of a woman's role within society – there are few who would consider Geraint's treatment of his wife fair or justifiable, and even fewer who would deem a woman's role to be purely silent – but they raise interesting questions about Victorian concerns about gender generally and specifically gendered roles within society and marriage. However, the scene chosen for the stained-glass window,

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[28] Miss Ildrewe, *The Language of Flowers*, (Boston: De Vries, Ibarra, and company, 1865), p. 90 and p. 111.
[29] Tennyson, p. 39.

removed from its context, loses all semblance of remaining nuance; what was intended to be a tale about the fundamentals of marriage and the equally vital roles of men and women within traditional Victorian relations is reduced instead to a beautiful, but ultimately violent, scene of the dominance of the masculine and the forced marginalisation of the feminine.

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ANNA SHMUNIS ZAPPIA

Contrasting Interpretations of *Nimue* in Arthurian Legend

In Arthurian legend, Merlin is young King Arthur's tutor and counsellor, and the architect of Camelot. He originates in the mists of Welsh myth as pagan wild-man Myrddyn, rumored to be the son of a devil, and is known for his wizardry and prophesy. Merlin has romantic entanglements with several women, including Arthur's half-sister Morgan le Fay, and another faery, Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, who ultimately enchants him through love or an equally potent magic spell. This article examines the story of Nimue through two nineteenth-century artefacts, one visual, the other literary, each of which casts Nimue differently. The first artefact, Edward Burne-Jones's painting The Beguiling of Merlin *(1877), follows Sir Thomas Malory in presenting Nimue as an intelligent, alluring female with whom Merlin is understandably enthralled. In sharp contrast, the second artefact presents her as a stereotypical Evil Sorceress, in the mold of Lilith, Medea, Circe, and Maleficent. The second artefact is Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem* Vivien *(1856) later renamed* Merlin and Vivien, *the first story in what became Queen Victoria poet laureate's epic* Idylls of the King *(1859-1885). Tennyson placed his story of Vivien in the literal and thematic center of his Idylls, highlighting her importance as a key figure. This essay compares and contrasts these two interpretations of Merlin's 'Final Girl,' and probes into why Tennyson so distorted her character.*

I. Who is Nimue?

Nimue is a young woman or faery[1] with whom Merlin is enamored in the myth cycle of King Arthur and Camelot. Our most cohesive English literary source retelling the Merlin-Nimue legend is Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte D'Arthur, first printed in 1485. It is Malory who most directly influenced artists in the nineteenth century such as the Pre-Raphaelites, and informed their sympathetic interpretation of Camelot, specifically the central plot of the adulterous (but genuinely loving) relationship between King Arthur's wife, Queen Guinivere, and King Arthur's knight, Sir Lancelot. One of the many sub-plots in this uber-myth of the Foundation and Fall of Camelot is Merlin's relationship with a young, bright 'gleam' of

[1] 'Fairies are just the name poor naïve people give to women who know more than most.' Anne Berthelot, *Merlin and the Ladies of the Lake*, in Essays on Merlin, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Scriptorium Press, Spring 2000), p. 61.

2 Gordon Haight, *Tennyson's Merlin*, in Studies in Philology, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 1947), p. 550: 'Tennyson told his son: "in the story of '*Merlin and Nimue*' I have read that Nimue means the Gleam—which signifies in my poem 'the higher poetic imagination.'"'

female inspiration, Nimue.[2]

Malory's brief mention of Nimue (or Nenyve as he calls her) only tells us that she is the Chief Lady of the Lake, that she was Lancelet (du Lac's) benevolent foster mother, that she helped King Arthur several times, and that she had once enchanted senescent Merlin to stop his endless sexual harassment of her.[3] As Malory put it, 'alweyes Merlyn lay about the lady to have her maydenhede.'[4]

Malory primarily relied on the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century French Vulgate cycle, and earlier Celtic myths about pagan prophet Myrrdyn.[5] Of these multiple fragmentary sources, Malory stayed closest to the early thirteenth century French Vulgate, which presents Nimue as a bright faery who, like 'every damsel' in Prophesies de Merlin 'who wishes to learn some magic has but to come and offer herself to Merlin...Numerous maidens seek out the prophet precisely with this intention, willingly exchanging sex for forbidden science.'[6]

Perversely, Merlin may have 'had to' sleep with his students to neutralize the prophesy that he will be killed by a virgin.[7] In *Estoire de Merlin*, Nimue completes the standard exchange, but genuinely loves Merlin and seals him in a beautiful tower so she can keep him for herself. In the subsequent Post-Vulgate cycle, Nimue only resorts to casting a disabling spell on Merlin to stop his endless lechery. So while some tales do mention Nimue's 'ugly breakup' with Merlin, Nimue is not defined by or blamed for this final denouement.[9] *None* of these medieval sources casts Nimue as the villain.

To the contrary, in the French cycle, Nimue goes on to leave a positive legacy as Lancelot's benevolent adoptive mother, and she helps King Arthur several times, including on his final voyage to Avalon.[10] Likewise, 'in *Le Morte D'Arthur* Nymue, the Chief Lady of the Lake, has a secure identity as the bold and helpful female who ever 'dyd grete goodenes vnto kynge Arthur and to alle his knyhtes.'[11]

In contrast, Alfred Lord Tennyson presented a completely different Disney villain version of Nimue in his *Idylls of the King*, which surpassed and displaced Malory as the most widely-known rendition of Arthurian legend. Tennyson's Nimue is so different from her counterpart in

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[3] Catherine Phillips, "*Charades from the Middle Ages?" Tennyson's Idylls of the King and the Chivalric Code*, in Victorian Poetry, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall 2002), p. 247: 'In Malory the story takes only two pages and is simply the tale of a young woman incessantly pestered by an old man, who she finally manages to lock up in a cavern.'

[4] S. E. Holbrook, *Nymue, The Chief Lady of the Lake, in Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur*, in Speculum, Vol. 53, No. 4 (University of Chicago Press, Oct 1978), p. 769.

[5] Peter Goodrich, *The Erotic Merlin*, in Arthuriana, Vol. 10, No. 1, Essays on Merlin (Scriptorium Press, Spring 2000), pp. 95-97.

[6] Berthelot, *Merlin*, p. 71-72. 'Merlin never goes out of his way to seduce women: they come willingly to him ... exchanging magic for maidenhood.' p. 73.

[7] Berthelot, p. 73: Merlin 'takes great care to teach magic only to women with whom he has first slept, so that he is sure they are not "blanches" anymore.'

[8] Alan Lupack, *Vivien*, in The Camelot Project, https://d.lib.rochester.edu.

[9] In *Lancelot*, for example, the Lady of the Lake is presented as 'completely innocent and worthy,' who truly loves Merlin, and has a 5-month long relationship with him until she becomes pregnant and he rejects their baby. Berthelot, p. 66.

[10] Gordon Haight, *Tennyson's Merlin*, p. 550: Nimue is 'apparently the same benevolent lady who gave Arthur his sword Excalibur, protected Sir Pelleas all his life, and ... served as Launcelot's foster-mother.'

[11] S.E. Holbrook, *Nymue, The Chief Lady of the Lake*, p. 762, quoting the Caxton text of Malory, as reprinted by Oskar Sommer in 1889.

Malory that Tennyson even renames her – to Vivian.

II. The Beguiling of Merlin

Perhaps the most powerful visual representation of the traditional Malory-French Cycle version of Nimue is Sir Edward Burne-Jones's *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1877), (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin*, 1872-77. Oil on canvas, 186 × 111 cm. Merseyside, UK: Lady Lever Art Gallery. © Wikipedia Commons

Edward Burne-Jones was born in 1833, and went up to Oxford in 1853 with the intention of taking Holy Orders. There he met his lifelong friend William Morris, and after becoming agnostic and leaving Oxford, he went to London where he met Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman-Hunt, both of whom were hugely influential on Burne-Jones personally and artistically.[12] Although he married Georgiana Macdonald in 1860, he had a long-term love affair with one of his models, Maria Zambaco. It is Zambaco who modelled for the *Head of Nimue* (below) and it is because of this contemporaneous painting that we know the lady in *The Beguiling of Merlin* is Nimue.

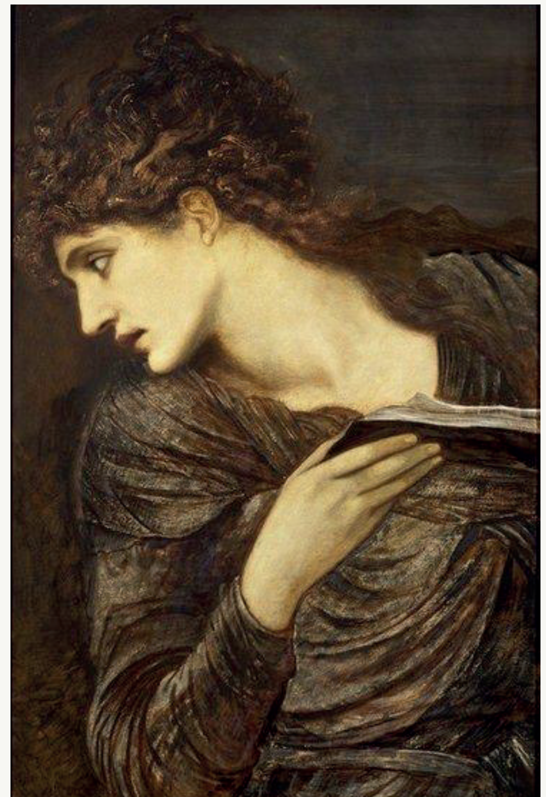

Figure 2: Edward Burne-Jones, *Head of Nimue*, 1873. Watercolor on paper mounted on wood, 76.2cm × 50.8cm. Delaware: Delaware Museum of Art. © Wikipedia Commons

The Beguiling of Merlin is a spectacular oversized (over six feet tall) painting which was first displayed in 1877 in Grosvenor Square to great acclaim, and instantly established Edward Burne-Jones as one of the greatest painters of his generation. This is a significant accomplishment, considering that Burne-Jones is part of the second generation of Pre-Raphaelite painters who worked primarily in the late Victorian age, along with such talents as William Morris, Arthur and Edward Hughes, Frank Dicksee, Frederick Sandys, and John Waterhouse. Burne-Jones was thus keenly familiar with both Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and the considerable output of his artistic predecessors and contemporaries, particularly on the then *au currant* topic of Arthurian legend. Readers of *VIDES* may recall that in the middle of the nineteenth century, paintings of Camelot were chosen to grace the old Oxford Union.

The first thing to notice about this painting is that the central female is *not* named. Both the painting's *name* and *narrative* focus on Merlin. Showing Burne-Jones' talent for blending medieval legend with classical mythology, Nimue is wearing flowing Greek robes to visually raise her to a higher plane of Greek goddesses and Platonic ideals such as Love. There is not the slightest connotation of malevolence in Edward Burne-Jones' Nimue. She is beautiful, literate, and Merlin is transfixed by her.

Second, while no medieval romance can lack a strong undercurrent of sexuality, and the Merlin-Nimue sub-plot mirrors the larger Camelot saga of Lancelot and Guinevere, Merlin is *not* staring at Nimue's body, but gazing directly into her intelligent eyes, and he is *mesmerized*. He does not look 'bewitched,' but *in love*. Nimue, with her oversized book, has fascinated Merlin with her beauty, literacy, and intelligence.

Third, Merlin is *not* an old man who doesn't know what he is doing. His gaze is strong and intelligent, his hands are young and capable. They are unlined, unmarked, and sensitive. Yes, he is older than Nimue, but certainly still a sexual being who appears unlikely to require strong magic to find Nimue attractive. We can also see how Nimue can find this interesting man attractive, which makes the entire scene charged with sexual energy.

Finally, it is crucial to note that Merlin is *not* constrained by the tree. The setting is an idyllic woodland backdrop, transporting us into the mental space of fertile nature and sex and Merlin's roots as a pagan wild-man. But Merlin's hands and arms are free. He is reclining, calmly gazing at Nimue, one leg casually thrown over the other, and he is entirely free to leave at any time. In this telling, Nimue has 'captivated' Merlin with her kaleidoscope of (entirely human) attractions, but she has certainly not ensnared or restricted Merlin in any visible way.

In fact, in the underlying Malory narrative, Merlin left Camelot with Nimue and 'went

[12] Joseph Kestner, *Edward Burne-Jones and Nineteenth-Century Fear of Women*, in Biography, Vol 7. No. 2 (Spring 1984), p. 97. Biographical background is summarized from Fiona McCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

with her evermore wheresomever she yeode.'[13] Merlin is held by the bonds of love and sexual intrigue – as are we all. But there is nothing malevolent or sinister about this bucolic daytime scene, or about the common human experience of being 'in love.'

III. Tennyson's Vivien

In striking contrast to this innocent view of Nimue, Alfred Lord Tennyson concocted an almost unrecognizable character – Vivien. Tennyson originally called her Nimue, and wrote a poem about her in 1856, which was published the following year under the title *Enid and Nimue: The True and the False*, 1857.[14] Tennyson then added his poems *Guinivere* and *Enid* in Spring and Summer of 1858, and published *The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King* in 1859, with Nimue now called Vivien.[15]

Vivien was in fact the very *first* poem Tennyson wrote for what would become his crowing epic, *Idylls of the King*, and it must be understood in the order and context in which it was written. The *Idylls* are twelve loosely interrelated stories published between 1859-1885 (re)telling the story of Camelot from the Coming of Arthur (Idyll 1) to the Passing of Arthur (Idyll 12), often through the lens of various relationships within Camelot, the center of which is the passionate sexual liaison between King Arthur's wife, Queen Guinivere, and his Knight of the Round Table, Lancelot, that 'supersensual sensual bond'[16] which weaves throughout the twelve tales. The other poems are refractions of this main tragic storyline of forbidden love, often focusing on frustrated, unrequited, or otherwise star-crossed lovers.

The first four of the Idylls are all about such tragic love affairs: *Guinevere* concerns the central relationship rupturing Camelot, the Queen's love affair with Lancelot; *Elaine* tells of her futile love for Lancelot, who is hopelessly in love with Guinivere; *Enid*, later broken up into *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, tells the story of long-suffering Enid in a difficult marriage. The simple structure is Good vs Evil, with Enid and Elaine representing good 'true' women, while Guinevere and Vivien represent 'false' women whose sexual antics bring down the kingdom.

Tennyson started this quartet with *Vivien*, and put it in the centre of his epic (it is the sixth of twelve idylls). Thus, Tennyson conceived of the Merlin-Vivien story as central to his overall narrative about the illicit affair that brought down Camelot. This is particularly striking because *Vivien*, the 'little acorn' from which the 'mighty oak' of the *Idylls* grew, was such a minor component of Tennyson's urtext, Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

With this in mind, let us consider how Tennyson presents Merlin's Final Girl. In Tennyson's version, Vivien follows Merlin out

[13] Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Norton Critical Ed. (NY, Norton, 2004), p. 78.
[14] Gordon Haight, p. 554.
[15] Catherine Phillips, "*Charades from the Middle Ages*," p. 242.
[16] Alfred Tennyson, *The Major Works*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 390, line 106. All references to *Idylls of the King* are to this OUP edition of Tennyson ('TOUP').

of Camelot, and wanders in Brittany with him, chatting, bickering, and gossiping together like any old married couple. Yet in the very first stanza, Tennyson already colours Vivien negatively: 'At Merlin's feet the wily Viven lay.'[17] 'There lay she all her length and kissed his feet/ As if in deepest reverence and in love.'[18] Merlin treated her like a feisty kitten, and 'would flatter his own wish in age for love, and half believe her true ... and *so the seasons went*.'[19]

Partway through the poem, Vivien starts coaxing Merlin to tell her a particular charm, as proof of his love and trust in her. 'So trust me not at all or all in all.'[20] He demurs that he thought she had already used this charm on him (playfully suggesting he is already enthralled with her) but he is afraid Vivien will use the spell on him 'not so much from wickedness, as some wild turn of anger, or a mood of overstrained affection, it may be, to keep me all to your own self, – or else a sudden spurt of woman's jealousy.' To which Vivien's modern sardonic reply is: 'My daily wonder is, I love at all.'[22]

After another dozen pages of argument, 'Vivien, gathering somewhat of his mood, and hearing "harlot" muttered twice or thrice, leapt from her session on his lap' and 'called him lord and liege, her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve, her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love of her whole life.'[23] Finally, 'Merlin, overtalked and overworn, had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.'[24] It seems a surprisingly simple denouement for such a mighty wizard.

IV. Possible Explanations

Tennyson's reliance on the Morte ... is never more slender than in his initial portrait of Vivien, which owed so little to Malory's Nimue.[25] Why does Tennyson so distort the harmless Nimue source material and leave us with Vivien as a parody of malignant female manipulation? One scholar relates: 'Burne-Jones apparently pleaded with Tennyson not to call his wily and wicked Lady of the Lake by the name of Nimue, and Tennyson obliged by naming her Vivien instead.'[26]

Another suggests that too many trial readers mispronounced Nimue's name (with only two syllables instead of three), 'destroying the rhythm of his carefully wrought lines.'[27] Hence, Tennyson 'placed a diacritical mark above the final *e*,' and ultimately changed her name to the more common name Vivien. This seems

[17] Ibid., p. 389, line 5.
[18] Ibid., p. 393, lines 216-7.
[19] Ibid., p. 392, line 174 and p. 392, lines 182-5.
[20] Ibid., p. 398, line 395.
[21] Ibid., p. 401, lines 517-522.
[22] Ibid., p. 401, line 533.
[23] Ibid., p. 409, lines 839-40 and p.412, lines 950-53.
[24] Ibid., p. 412, lines 962-3.
[25] Thomas Hoberg, *Duessa or Lilith: The Two Faces of Tennyson's Vivien*, in Victorian Poetry, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), p.
[26] Tama Lea Engelking, *Renee Vivien and The Ladies of the Lake*, in Nineteenth Century French Studies, Vol. 30, No. 3/4 (Spring Summer 2002), p. 367.
[27] Gordon Haight, p. 557.

unlikely, as there are many versions of the name Nimue (Nenyve, Niniane, Niviene, Nimanne, Nineue, etc.)[28] that could take as many syllables as Tennyson needed for rhythm, and in any case this casts no light on the reasons for the dramatic shift in her *character*.

Even more obliquely, another scholar speculated that 'Tennyson disapproved of the Arthur of Geoffrey [of Monmouth]'s book [twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*], or him of Malleor's' (quoting line 42 of Tennyson's *Epilogue: To the Queen*) so to distance himself from prior versions, '*Vivien* became the consecrated English form.'[29] Not only is the logic tenuous, but this seems a very roundabout way of creating Tennyson's own version of centuries of received legends, when the names of the *main* characters (Arthur, Guinivere, Lancelot, Merlin) *all* remain the same.

Another possibility is that in the context of his harshly moralistic Victorian age, Tennyson felt compelled to split the Lady of the Lake into two separate characters:[30] one who is definitively 'good,' Nimue, the 'good fairy' of Malory and his French Vulgate predecessors; and Vivien, her evil twin, who is as Swinburne described, 'the most base and repulsive person ever set forth in serious literature.'[31]

Perhaps as poet laureate, Tennyson was mirroring his Victorian age's intense focus on the family, and its attendant distrust of single, free, enticing, distracting young women.[32]

Tennyson may have been echoing his own or his age's fear that love makes fools of men. After Vivien finally coaxes the charm out of an exhausted Merlin, she shrieks out 'O Fool!' and 'the forest echoed "fool."' That resounding 'Fool!' is the final line of the poem.[33] Tennyson conceived of himself as Merlin,[34] so this suggests a potentially autobiographical slant, but since '[n]one of the great Victorians was more reticent about his private life than Lord Tennyson,'[35] we can only speculate.

V. Conclusion

Ultimately, as intriguing as the various suppositions above are, we do not really know why Tennyson renamed Nimue Vivien, or why he made her the epitome of female evil. Certainly his version of Nimue both reflects and reinforces the nineteenth century 'fear of

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[28] 'Few names in the Arthurian matter occur with more bewildering variants.' Haight, *Tennyson's Merlin*, p. 557. See also Berthelot, p. 59; Nitze, p. 326, 328.

[29] William A. Nitze, *An Arthurian Crux: Viviane or Niniane?* in Romance Philology Vol. 7, No. 4 (University of California Press, May 1954), p. 326 n.2, quoting E. Vinaver, Malory (Oxford, 1929), p. 114.

[30] J. M. Gray, *Two Transcendental Ladies of Tennyson's Idylls: The Lady of the Lake and Vivien*, in Tennyson Research Bulletin, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Nov 1970), p. 104; Berthelot, pp. 58-59.

[31] Thomas Hoberg, *Duessa or Lilith*, p. 17: Swinburne 'regarded Tennyson as a prig and the *Idylls* as a sanctimonious perversion of the "real" Arthurian legend.' Swinburne also sneered: 'the story is rather a case for the divorce-court than for poetry,' quoted in James Adams, *Harlots and Base Interpreters: Scandal and Slander in Idylls of the King*, in Victorian Poetry, Vol. 30, No. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 1992), p. 422.

[32] *See, e.g.*, Joseph Kestner, *Edward Burne-Jones and 19th Century Fear of Women*, pp. 95-122.

[33] Tennyson, *The Major Works*, p.412, line 971.

[34] Adams, *Harlots and Base Interpreters*, p. 438 n.17 ('Tennyson's choice of "*Merlin*" as the signature over which he published two poems on contemporary affairs....')

[35] Haight, *Tennyson's Merlin*, p. 549.

women,'[36] and highlights elevated Victorian unease about the 'attractive nuisance' of bright, free, strong-willed females. Neither Sir Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* nor the French Vulgate cycle presented Nimue as a malignant being, so Tennyson distorted his sources and essentially fabricated 'Vivien,' much like Dr. Frankenstein manufactured his monster. Ironically, Tennyson's punitive *Fatal Attraction* version of Nimue is the one most known to us today. This is a striking example of how myths continually morph to reflect the time and cultural circumstances of their retelling.

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[36] Kestner, pp. 95-122.

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Representation

REBECCA AHMED-GEERE

Ob-Scene Encounters: The Shifting Phenomenological Dynamic Between Nineteenth Century Viewer and Object

The Industrial Revolution set the stage for inquiry into the nature of consciousness, perception, and experience, so it is unsurprising that the long nineteenth century's development of a technology to 'capture' reality proved philosophically significant. However, despite being a perfect replica of visual reality in many ways, photography – the 'mirror with a memory' – was still limited by being only *visual as it placed a dimensional threshold on perception through the production of a temporally-static image which denied the viewer an embodied human experience.*[1] *Through examination of the entangled, chiasmatic bonds facilitated by two artefacts, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's watercolour* St George slaying the Dragon *(1863) and* Position 18 *(1904), an Underwood & Underwood stereograph of Jerusalem, this essay will illustrate how late nineteenth century perspectives on perception and experience moved away from the Cartesian model, dissolving the boundaries between the observer and observed, particularly in light of the quest for Britain's imperial identity.*

Western artistic tradition in the early nineteenth century adhered to a strict classical canon which prioritised idealised beauty, symmetry, and harmonious composition, whilst the recently established Royal Academy's curriculum, rooted in Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, emphasised meticulous draftsmanship, the careful arrangement of subjects within a hierarchical structure, and a restrained colour palette. This conventional approach fostered a viewer-object dynamic where art was to be observed for its conformity to established rules, thereby prioritising a scholarly appreciation of technical mastery and compositional order over emotional or sensory engagement.

Although twenty-first century associations of photography seem contrary to this, in its infancy the process required long exposure times which led to carefully staged and static compositions. William Henry Fox Talbot needed thirty minutes to capture his image of the window in 1835; although the technology had significantly improved by the 1870s, taking a photograph could still require several minutes.[2]

This necessitated its living subjects to

[1] Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs*, 11th ed. (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1906) p. 9.
[2] Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature*, 1830-1890 (London: Longman, 1993) p. 218.

remain motionless, constraining photographers to create compositions emphasising clarity, formality, and meticulous arrangement and so mirroring the era's artistic conventions of order and control. Spontaneity and the capture of fleeting moments were sacrificed for precision and a controlled aesthetic presentation, creating a distinct separation between observer and observed and, much like the expectations placed on the art-viewer, promoting an analytically detached engagement.

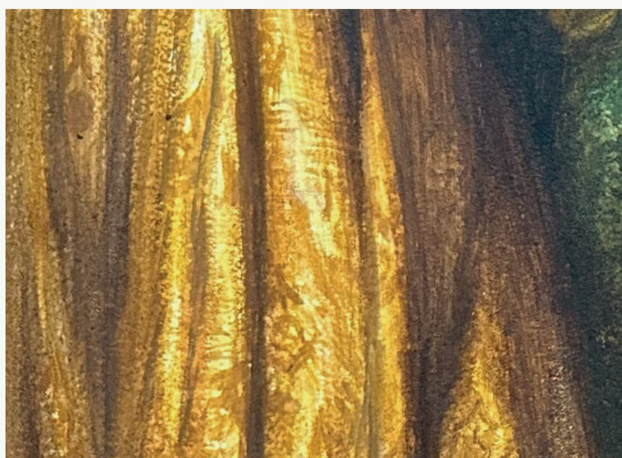
Figure 1: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1818-1881), *St George slaying the Dragon*, 1863. Watercolour and bodycolour on off-white paper, 35cm x 44cm, Ashmolean Museum. Presented by Miss H. M. Virtue-Tebbs, 1944. Photograph: author's own

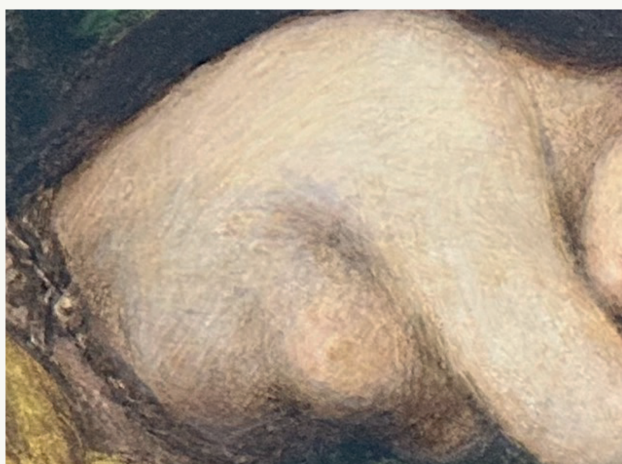
However, as the nineteenth century progressed, the viewer-object dynamic underwent a transformative shift. The art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a founding figure of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), threw off 'the dead weight of the classical rules on which [he] had been force-fed at the Royal Academy Schools' and in doing so challenged the prevailing Cartesian model.[3] *St George Slaying the Dragon* (1863) a watercolour and bodycolour reproduction of his own stained glass window constructed with the Morris Firm, is rich in symbolic complexity and emotional depth and so demands particularly active engagement from the viewer, inviting them into a relationship that transcends mere observation: it blurs the lines between observer and observed, engaging the viewer in a dialogue with the artwork. Even without knowledge of the painting's narrative, a viewer could not but help be drawn to the contemporarily alien painting techniques in use.[4] The multiple, heavy layers of dry colour used in St George's tunic and Princess Sabra's skirts result in a visual intensity which becomes even more sensory when it is realised that the thick layers also create a physical texture which would likely mimic the feeling of embroidered cloth. In contrast, the delicacy of the multicoloured cross-hatching used for the skin tones begs the viewer to step in for closer examination and so begin to pick out Sabra's faintly visible veins: acting as a subtle ocular reminder of her

[3] Ibid. p. 208.
[4] Christiana Payne, *Pre-Raphaelite Drawings and Watercolours* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2021) p. 38.

feminine fragility and perilous situation; these also further assert St George's chivalric status as her rescuer.

Although Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* – with his very specific emphasis on the role of the body in human experience – was not published until 1945, he was drawing upon Edmund Husserl's writings from the late nineteenth century





Figures 2&3: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1818 -1881), *St George Slaying the Dragon* 1863. Watercolour and bodycolour on off-white paper. (detail showing dry colour technique and cross-hatching). Ashmolean Museum. Presented by Miss H. M. Virtue-Tebbs, 1944. Photograph: author's own.

which were in turn heavily influenced by G. W. F. Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[5] Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'embodiment' posits that the body is not merely an object in the world, but a subject through which we both act in and perceive it, fundamentally intertwining the subjective and objective.[6] The particularly active engagement from the viewer required by Rossetti's painting can, in this light, therefore be perceived as a phenomenological relationship and – despite being an entirely different visual medium and technology – the advent of the stereoscope also gave rise to this new, phenomenological relationship between the viewer and image. Stereoscopy, the seemingly overnight mass-popularity of which was spurred by Queen Victoria's interest in it at the Great Exhibition of 1851, requires the viewer to physically engage with a device which firstly deprives them of all other visual stimulus and then immerses them in a three-dimensional rendering of what is otherwise two-dimensional photography.[7] This scientific development dovetailed neatly with the Victorian public's fascination with the vision of the orient, driven by efforts to survey Britain's empire through cartography and photography. In a veritable sea of 'stereoscopic tours', which sprang up in the 1860s and remained popular until the early twentieth century, those of the Holy Land invited viewers to step into

[5] David Woodruff Smith, 'Phenomenology', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, 2013)
[6] A. D. Smith, 'The Flesh of Perception' in *Reading Merleau Ponty: On Phenomenology of Perception* ed. by Thomas Baldwin, (London: EBSCOhost, 2007) p. 4.
[7] Or even four dimensions: in *Picture World* (2020) Rachel Teukolsky argues that the nineteenth century stereoscopic image 'enabled corporeal fantasies across space and time'.

the landscapes; they facilitated a chiasmatic relationship where the boundaries between the self and the 'other' became entwined. The symbolic nature of the object will be examined further on, but the viewer's physical experience of stereoscopy was quite literally immersive: stereoscopy 'required the user to look into a device that closed off the field of view and replaced the visual world with a new, detailed and deep one'.[8]

church in the near ground, with the valley of the Brook Kedron filling the middle ground and acting as a zone of separation before the walls of Jerusalem. However, the distant view is the chaotic intensity of the city itself and so, when seen through the stereoscope, the newly-three-dimensional space begins to establish a relationship with the viewer: as Jonathan Crary (1992) states, there is a tangible 'in front of' and 'in back of' amongst the disorder.[9]

Figure 4: Underwood & Underwood (1881- c.1920), *Position 18: Jerusalem, the City of the Great King, from the Mount of Olives* c.1904. Photographic prints attached to card stock. Author's collection.

What a viewer is initially confronted with is a space so object-filled that it is overwhelming. *Position 18*, produced at a time where the tricks of the stereoscopic trade were already firmly established, has the obtrusive Russian

But what is of even greater interest is the stage after the establishment of this basic chiasmatic dynamic, when the viewer is encouraged into deeper interpretation of the images as their eyes invariably roam 'from foreground details to their wider contexts'.[10]

Crary maintains that there is no moment

[8] Sean F. Johnston, 'Scientific Imagery and Visual Novelty', in *Holograms: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 19.

[9] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1999. 9th edition) pp. 124-127.

[10] Sean F. Johnston, 'Scientific Imagery and Visual Novelty', in *Holograms: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 21.

of unification in the image but instead the viewer experiences a patchwork of localised zones of three-dimensionality, all seen with 'hallucinatory clarity' but which 'never coalesce into a homogenous field.'[11] It is this that he perceives as the quite literal ob-scene element of stereoscopy: a term he borrows from Françoise Gaillard's *Ob-Scénité de l'Objet Photographié* (1983), in which the 'obscenity' is not merely about the explicit or vulgar; rather it is the way photography confronts viewers with raw, unmediated reality.[12] Photography had the potential to challenge societal norms and artistic conventions by presenting subjects in their most naked and truthful form, and Crary sees the stereoscopic image as one which removes any mediation between the eye and image. Oliver Wendell Holmes' discomfort arose from this obscenity: 'there is such a frightful amount of detail, that we have the same sense of infinite complexity which Nature gives us. A painter shows us masses; the stereoscopic figure spares us nothing'.[13]

Rossetti's emphasis on intricate detail and symbolic depth in painting shares a phenomenological kinship with the experience of viewing stereoscopic images. Much like the viewing experience of *St George slays the Dragon*, seeking meaning in *Position 18*'s chaotic claustrophobia is what shifts the dynamic from static to chiasmatic. By requiring a participatory effort from the observer, the two artefacts can be seen to exemplify a new paradigm in Victorian visual culture: one that emphasised embodied experience over detached observation. Both mediums demand dynamic engagement from the viewer, challenging passive modes of observation so fostering the chiasmatic relationship. Merleau-Ponty's concept of chiasmus – the intertwined relationship between the perceiver and the perceived – offers a philosophical foundation to understand the depth of engagement afforded by stereoscopy and Rossetti's art.[14]

Whilst Charles Baudelaire would not necessarily have been enamoured of Rossetti and the PRB's efforts to 'look back' stylistically and thematically, his belief that true artistry lay in capturing the essence of the moment to elicit a profound emotional response from the viewer clearly resonates with the phenomenological emphasis on direct, personal experience.[15]

However, in his essay *The Salon of 1859*, Baudelaire criticized stereoscopy for its mechanical nature and, referring back to his own description of the transcendental experience of art as 'windows to infinity' in *The Salon of 1846*, by 1859 the image had become 'thousands of pairs of greedy eyes [...] glued to

[11] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1999. 9th edition) p. 126.
[12] Françoise Gaillard, 'Ob-Scénité de l'Objet Photographié', *Bulletin Du Centre de Recherche Français À Jérusalem* (2013)
[13] Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs*, 11th ed. (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1906) p .21.
[14] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Andy Clark (Routledge, 2002) p. 236.
[15] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life,' in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne, (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 1-40.

the peepholes of the stereoscope, as though they were the windows of the infinite'.[16]

The shift from window to peephole could not be more damning: rather than engaging with the metaphysical, the stereoscopic experience is lowered to that of simple voyeurism. Yet this implies that stereoscopy was just an extension of scientific photography, whereas, as Gilmour (1993) suggests: 'photography becomes an art, one could say, when a basically naturalistic medium is so shaped by the vision of the photographer that a unique fusion of subject, medium and imaginative temperament takes place.' Despite Holmes' protestations that stereoscopic images were more honest than photography as any efforts to doctor an image would appear to 'float' when viewed through the stereoscope, 'by separating the two lenses of the stereo camera a number of feet, [stereoscopic] manipulations produced more sweeping valleys and more powerful waterfalls than were apparent to actual eyesight' (Teukolsky, 2020).

In light of these views, the superficiality Baudelaire complains of is somewhat short-sighted. *Position 18* is taken from a collection of one hundred images which were first published c.1904 with the guide *Traveling in the Holy Land Through the Stereoscope*, in which Jesse L. Hurlbut states that the printed viewing cards 'serve as two windows through which we look, and beyond which we see the representation of the object or place'.[17] Hurlbut is unequivocal in his belief that each card is more than simply two identical 3x3 inch simulacrums: the science of binocular vision firstly means that we look at the surface of the images to (re)create a life-size version of what they depict, but then the gaze moves beyond to consider the metaphysical, or what Baudelaire would have called the 'infinite'. In his eyes, the cards have the 'power to teach and influence' the viewer, not just about the then-present Palestine in a geographical or historical framework, but also about the Holy Land's biblical history and geography:

> *And as history takes place on the earth, not in the air, the foundations of [the Bible] are laid not only in human history, but also in geography. If the history of the children of Israel be mythological, false – if the land is not a reality, if the Jordan and the Mountains of Judea do not exist – then the prophecy, the doctrine, "the exceeding great and precious promises" all fail us.*'[18]

This chiasmatic relationship could not be any more pronounced: the view is given meaning through the knowledge and experience that the (almost certainly Bible-literate) viewer brings, and the viewer is given 'a vivid realisation of actuality in the Bible narrative'.[19] Additionally, Holmes' observations

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[16] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Salon of 1859,' in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Trachtenberg, Alan (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp. 83-9.

[17] Jesse L. Hurlbut, *Traveling in the Holy Land through the Stereoscope* (New York: Underwood & Underwood c.1904) pp.9-10, emphasis my own

[18] Ibid. p. 13.

[19] Ibid. p. 14.

about immersive depth and the sensation of proximity to objects within the stereoscopic image further reveal this nuanced relationship between the viewer and the depicted scene.[20] His discomfort with elements seemingly invading the viewer's space further highlights the stereoscope's ability to blur the lines between their physical space and the space within the image, but the tone of his writing is reminiscent of Romantic 'awe' inspired by the sublime.

This essay's two artefacts require – and reward – the viewer's active participation, not just as a consumer of images but as co-creator of their meaning. As previously identified, this shift can be seen as emblematic of the broader cultural movement which took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century: away from the Cartesian dichotomy of subject and object and towards a recognition of the complex, mutable nature of perception. Embracing the phenomenological perspective promotes the subjective experience and recognises that the act of viewing is not a passive reception of visual information but rather a dynamic, interpretive process that is shaped by the viewer's own perceptions, experiences, and emotions.

However, dynamic does not necessarily mean equal. The late nineteenth century in Britain was still a time of significant imperial expansion, which was not merely territorial but also cultural as the empire sought to document the lands and peoples within its grasp. An examination of both *St George and the Dragon* and the stereoscopic card must therefore also delve into the nuanced concept of colonial dominance, tied to the British imperialist ethos of the era and characterised by an expanding interest and control over the East. Both artefacts offer a complex interplay of visual dominance and the reclamation of the 'other.' Rossetti's technical mastery can be seen as a form of control over the painted subjects, capturing the essence of the narrative with an almost obsessive precision and containing it through claustrophobic composition. When engaging with its symbolism, the painting's viewer can in turn take possession of the visual narrative with its medieval iconography evoking chivalric might and the 'goodliness' of defending the defenceless from the threat of the oriental 'other'. There is not the space to explore the myriad possibilities of the triadic relationship portrayed here, but what is unequivocable is the muscular Christianity of the patron saint of England as he violently battles the with the dragon to rescue Sabra, who is half naked and has her eyes closed to emphasise her disempowered state and so, again, reinforce the vigour of St George.

Similarly, stereoscopic tours of the East invariably fed the narrative of the 'civilised' West casting a benevolent gaze out across the more barbarous lands, but *Position 18* goes one step further. The city, previously mentioned as a focal point of religious and historical significance, became a symbol

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[20] Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs*, 11th ed. (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1906) p. 21.

of the Holy Land that the British sought to reclaim not only through physical presence but also imaginative possession. Palestine's visual identity for the British was a Western collective imagining which 'expressed the values of Evangelical Britain and requirements of Empire.'[21] Jerusalem's 'reclamation' was therefore imbued with a sense of divine right and manifest destiny, with nineteenth century visual representations of Jerusalem playing into broader narratives of Christian superiority and the political and moral 'civilising mission' of the British Empire. Stereoscopic technology can be seen as feeding the imperialist appetite for exploration and domination, presenting the East as a space to be visually consumed and controlled and so allow nineteenth century armchair-crusaders to take *virtual* possession of the city.

This experience of virtual conquest was further enhanced by the stereoscope's ability to make viewers feel as if they were physically traversing the city's sacred sites, despite the geographical and cultural distances. The sensation of depth and the tactile engagement with the stereoscope itself – the act of holding the viewer and adjusting the focus – underscored a material connection to the distant land, making the imperialist project palpably real to the British audience. Arguably, this medium was even more powerful than the Palestine Exploration Fund's surveying photos or 'gods-eye view' survey maps, despite them both being seen 'as participating in the modern commodification of space, providing the means by which it is made into "property" both physically and ideologically.'[22]

The stereoscope-specific act of removing all other visual stimuli offers its viewer a different kind of experience from the others' panoptic detachment, despite all three requiring an abstraction. By making the relationship stereoscopic rather than *dialogic*, the viewer has sole dominion over not only the place contained within the image but also over any external attempts to take ownership.

It is no wonder, then, that both Rossetti's art and stereoscopic technology were perceived by some contemporaries as pushing at the boundaries of obscenity. Through the lens of phenomenology, the late nineteenth century witnessed a pivotal transformation in the way visual culture was produced, consumed, and understood; the conventional modes of perception were challenged by a more immersive, interactive, and emotionally resonant engagement with visual artefacts. This transition not only redefined the aesthetic landscape of the time but also set the stage for future philosophical explorations of the relationship between viewer, object, and the act of seeing itself.

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[21] Gabriel Polley, '*Palestine Is Thus Brought Home to England': The Representation of Palestine in British Travel Literature*, 1840-1914, (University of Exeter, 2020) p. 7.

[22] Yvonne Pelletier, *Mapping, Mobility, and Selfhood in Nineteenth-Century Narrative: Sir Richard F. Burton, Herman Melville, and Charles Dickens* (unpublished Thesis, University of Toronto 2003) p. 5.

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STEPHEN PITCHERS

‘A figure cut in alabaster’: Dynastic Concerns Depicted in a Portrait of Arbella Stuart (1577) and ‘The Duchess of Malfi’ (1612)

For portraiture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, among the aristocracy and monarchies of Europe who were the predominant commissioners, the primary motivations were dynastic.[1] *Thus portraits of this time specifically invite us to pay attention to how dynastic concerns influence the nature of the commission, the function of the portrait as a material object. Using this approach, this essay will initially examine a portrait of Arbella Stuart; then, by considering Webster’s* The Duchess of Malfi *of 1612, this essay will explore the opportunity for analogical readings that the play offers in reflecting the life of Arbella Stuart, as well as the limitations of such a process. By viewing these artefacts side by side, and comparing the methodologies available within art history and literary criticism, this essay will then seek to examine what these artefacts come to tell us about dynastic control at the time.*

By its very nature, a portrait ‘calls attention to the process of its production.’[2] Through what the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer identified as the ‘occasionality’ of art, we can see that portraits perform and claim meaning through the context and circumstances surrounding their creation.[3] This ‘call to attention’ highlights a primacy in the intention behind portraiture and makes, what a literary critic would see as a historicist approach to their study irresistible; it creates a more distinct awareness of the occasion that surrounds the work and a possible process of idealisation at play. This methodology, within the discipline of art history and in particular, for portraiture, encourages scrutiny of and engagement with the contemporary context surrounding these works of art.

The below unattributed portrait is one of only three portraits that can be confidently authenticated as being of Arbella Stuart, daughter of Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox (1555-1576), and Elizabeth Cavendish (1554-1582).[4] Critical and scholarly writing on the

[1] Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), p. 45.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘The Ontology of the Work of Art and Its Hermeneutic Significance’, in *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (London, 1989), pp. 101 – 69.

[4] Roy Strong, *National Portrait Gallery: Tudor & Jacobean Portraits*, vol. 1 (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office: London, 1969), p. 303.

painting has often been limited to discussions of individual features of the composition and aesthetic evaluations of the work. By focusing on the 'occasionality' and evaluating the combined impact of its commission and composition, this essay will examine what else the painting can offer to help understand its dynastic pre-occupations.

Figure 1: British (English) School (Unattributed), *Lady Arabella Stuart, later Duchess of Somerset* (1575 – 1615), aged 23 months, 1577. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, size 75.1 × 61.5 cm, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, NT 1129175. Photograph courtesy of Hardwick Hall, National Trust. © National Trust Images

The famous possible successor to Queen Elizabeth I is presented at twenty-three months old in a work identified as from the British school and dated 1577, with its provenance supported by the 1601 inventory of Hardwick hall – the home of Arbella Stuart's maternal grandmother, Bess of Hardwick, and Arbella's primary residence for most of the her life while she remained her grandmother's ward.[5] Presumably commissioned by her mother or maternal grandmother, the Dowager Margaret Lennox, while Arbella was initially under their care, the portrait was painted very soon after the death of her father in 1576 and at a time when the two women were arguing that Arbella should be entitled to inherit the Lennox earldom despite James VI's refusal.[6] Given that Arbella's maternal grandmother, Bess of Hardwick, also took up the same argument, it is unsurprising that the painting ended up at Hardwick, following Arbella as she became the responsibility of her grandmother. Evidence of the insistence on Arbella inheriting the title can be seen in the inscription in the top left which identifies the sitter as 'Arabella Cometissa Levenox'. Given

[5] Roy Strong, *National Portrait Gallery: Tudor & Jacobean Portraits*, vol. 1 (Her Majesty's Stationery Office: London, 1969), p. 303.
[6] Ian McInnes, *Arabella: The Life and Times of Lady Arabella Seymoud 1575-1615* (W. H. Allen: London, 1968), p. 67-68.

the portrait's proclaimed date, this inscription must have come after James's announcement of the title becoming extinct and, given the correspondence in this year, was either added while waiting for a response to the Dowager's letter of protestation, demanding that the earldom was reinstated and conferred upon the young Arbella, or was added despite and in response to the Regent Morton's confirmation that the title would be revoked.[7] This decision and the very commissioning of the portrait underline the primary function of the painting in asserting dynastic status as was common in portraiture of the time.

Presented in the expensive fashion of the time as would suit the daughter of an Earl, Stuart's dress and the accompanying jewellery attempt to reflect her wealth and social status. The intricate brocade, the tailored fit, the inlaid pearls and precious stones in her headdress, her necklace and on her dress – all these reflect her family's wealth. Yet this was at a time when the financial security of the Lennox family was under threat: her father died in financial trouble and there loomed the possibility that Stuart's wardship might be sold by the Crown.[8] The link between dress and social status carried particular significance during this time with the sumptuary laws set out between 1559 and 1597. While it is debated to what extent these laws were enforced, the restrictions and punishments reflect a desire to maintain appropriate levels of decorum among a society of increasing mobility.[9] It is of particular note in relation to the form of the portrait, with the dynastic function that portraiture of the time served, that the nobility and gentry would have additional supplies of a 'rich and preciouse kinde of apparel', which would 'innoble, garnifhe, & fet forthe their byrthes, dignities, functions and callings.'[10] Stuart's costume in this portrait certainly reflects this expectation. While the jewellery and luxurious fabric demonstrate the wealth of the sitter, the dress design also confidently asserts that this girl is from a family aware of current fashion trends seen at court. The use of puffed sleeves and protruding shoulder wings, demonstrate the swollen, more rounded shape of the female silhouette at this point – specifically between 1575-1580.[11] The delicate design of the jewellery was also in vogue and mirrors the popular fashion found in English and continental European courts.

Key features of material culture on display in the painting provide additional evidence of wealth and social status and reinforce the idea that this young girl would be a suitable addition to a court in the near future. The fashion doll that she clutches has often been

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[7] The order of these letters are outlined in *The Life and Letters of Lady Arabella Stuart, Including Numerous Original and Unpublished Documents*, ed. by Elizabeth Cooper, vol. 1. (London: Savil and Edwards, 1866), pp .42-43.
[8] David N. Durant, *Arbella Stuart: A Rival to the Queen* (London, Weidenfeild and Nisolson), p. 15.
[9] Jane Ashelford, *Dress in the age of Elizabeth I* (London: Batsford, 1988), p. 108; Phillip Stubbes, Philip Stubbes's Anatomy of the Abuses in England in Shakspere's Youth, A.D. 1583 (London: New Shakspere Society, by N. Trübner & co, 1877), p. 33.
[10] Ibid., p. 33.
[11] Jane Ashelford, *Dress in the age of Elizabeth I* (London: Batsford, 1988), p. 26-27.

commented upon and is certainly a focal point within the composition.[12] It is believed that these dolls which circulated in England and the continent were more than toys; they acted as cultural vehicles, disseminating information about fashion trends, and it is presumed that they were passed on to children to be used as expensive toys.[13]

For some historians, particularly of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who held particularly sympathetic views of Arbella, the doll symbolically works against the excessive costume and enforced staging of the portrait, suggesting that this 'solemn little baby'[14] has been forced into adult clothes – oppressed and controlled by her two grandmothers who despite opposition, still believed Arbella to be destined for monarchy; yet, still she clutches on to her doll, not allowing herself to be parted from it: 'a silent dogged little figure patiently enduring all the squabbles and intrigues that surged about her childhood and girlhood.[15] Through this interpretation, the dynastic concern and aspirations that surround the portrait, and which inspire its composition, are viewed as cruel and calculating, in contrast to Arbella's innocence and disinterest. Yet, such an approach fails to consider the doll as an additional symbol of the portrait's preoccupation with presenting Arbella as a highly eligible, culturally well-positioned, young girl waiting to transform into the mature, refined and regal woman of the court, embodied in the doll. For the commissioners, this doll supports the dynastic intentions, yet viewers who know what becomes of Arbella see a poignant innocence framed by political manoeuvrings.

When similar points have been made about the pathos in the painting, achieved through the infantine elements in the face and doll, some have also drawn attention to the fact that although the costume might attempt to culturally assert itself as highly contemporary and on trend for court life at the time, the hood, in fact, being of the French, Mary Stuart style, is more 'of a fashion becoming a woman of sixty.'[16] Whether or not the resultant contrast is deemed 'ludicrous', and even if all the elements of the painting 'deform' the young girl, the concern for dynasty is undeniable. Viewers have come to see the doll and the innocence depicted in the painting of her face as elements that humanise and connect the viewer with Arbella as an impressionable young girl, naive to what is occurring around her and what will come to pass. Yet all this was

[12] Blanche Christabel Hardy, *Arbella Stuart; a biography* (London: Constable, 1913), p. 23; Elizabeth Cooper (ed.) *The Life and Letters of Lady Arabella Stuart, Including Numerous Original and Unpublished Documents*, vol. 1, (London: Savil and Edwards, 1866), p. 45.

[13] Jane Ashelford, *Dress in the age of Elizabeth I* (London: Batsford, 1988), pp. 74-75; and Janet Arnold, Jenny Tiramani, and Santina M. Levey, *Patterns of Fashion 4: The Cut and Construction of Linen Shirts, Smocks, Neckwear, Headwear and Accessories for Men and Women c.1540-1660*, (Hollywood: Quite Specific Media Group, 2008), p. 158.

[14] Blanche Christabel Hardy, *Arbella Stuart; a biography* (London: Constable, 1913), p. 23.

[15] Blanche Christabel Hardy, *Arbella Stuart; a biography* (London: Constable, 1913), p. 23.

[16] Elizabeth Cooper (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Lady Arabella Stuart, Including Numerous Original and Unpublished Documents*, vol. 1 (London: Savil and Edwards, 1866), p. 45.

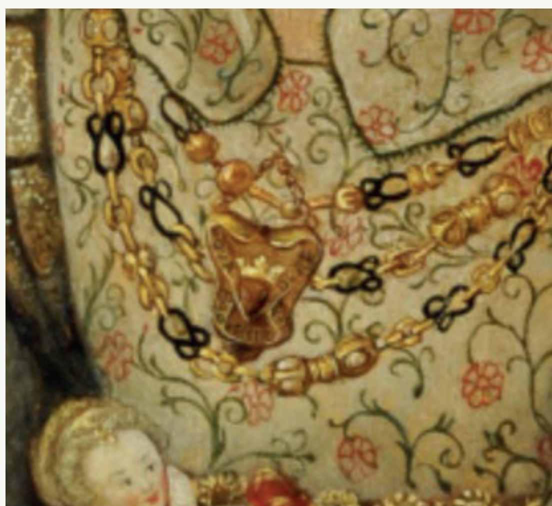

Figure 2: British (English) School (Unattributed), *Lady Arabella Stuart, later Duchess of Somerset (1575 – 1615), aged 23 months*, 1577. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 75.1 × 61.5 cm, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, NT 1129175. Photograph courtesy of Hardwick Hall, National Trust. © National Trust Images (detail)

Figure 3: Unknown, *The Darnley Jewel or Lennox Jewel*, c. 1571-8, Gold, enamel, Burmese rubies, Indian emerald and cobalt-blue glass, 6.6 × 5.2 cm (whole object), RCIN 28181, Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2024 <https://www.rct.uk/collection/28181/the-darnley-jewel-or-lennox-jewel>

not known by the painter and is far removed from the concern of the commissioners.

The final element of the painting which fits within the semantic field of dynastic control is the pendant (see Figure 2). This hangs from the dress surrounded by multiple golden chains and contains the device of a crowned heart framed by a scroll with the motto 'POUR PARVENIR J'ENDURE' (to arrive at my ends I stay the course). The central placement in the painting of this known Lennox or Stuart device and motto that accompanies its regal symbols reinforce the primary function of the painting in asserting dynastic status and firmly attach such associations to this new, hopeful member of the Stuart and Lennox family. A useful parallel can be drawn with the Darnley or Lennox jewel (c. 1571-8; see figure 3) which offers a more detailed impression of the strongly held beliefs and aspirations of her grandmother, Dowager Margaret Lennox. This highly decorative locket commissioned by Arbella's grandmother around the time of the portrait[17], bears the same device of heart and coronet; it contains further references to the Lennox coat of arms and is surrounded in white enamel with

[17] Cristina Piacenti Aschengreen and John Boardman, *Ancient and Modern Gems and Jewels in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen* (London: Royal Collection, 2008), p. 184.

a similar yet more elaborate motto in old Scots 'QVHA. HOPIS. STIL.CONSTANLY. VITH PATIENCE SAL. OBTEAIN. VICTORIE. IN YAIR. PRETENCE' (Who hopes still constantly with patience shall obtain victory in their claim).[18] The pairing of such a sentiment, albeit in the more concise form found in the painting, with the young Arbella, suggests that the 'patience' and 'constancy' required by this family in order to 'endure' is tied firmly to the hopeful claim embodied by Arbella: she represents the hope, or even, more boldly, the veiled expectation that this dynasty would go on to inherit the throne. When the significance of the pendant is combined with the known context regarding the inscription, pointedly asserting her rightful inheritance as the Countess of Lennox, there is little subtlety in discerning the inference and purpose of this portrait in firmly establishing Arbella as in line for greater things and ready to be thrust into the politics and manoeuvering required for such an ascent.

Using what a literary critic might deem a historicist lens, the approach employed thus far in interpreting the significance of dynasty in this portrait has been rooted in a study of the contemporary context including the social, political and cultural factors that can be uncovered. The limitation of such an approach is that it does not engage with the shifting significance of the work of art as it comes to be viewed amid new contexts, affected by factors that charge it with different meaning and create a different impact on the viewer. For those who view the painting with knowledge of the life and death of Arbella Stuart, the portrait arguably carries a greater poignancy and creates a distinct pathos. In particular, this knowledge inevitably comes to colour the way that dynasty is viewed within the portrait.

In order to explore this interplay between the sitter and the viewer of the portrait, a comparative study of Webster's play The Duchess of Malfi emerges as useful for our understanding of dynastic concern in works of art at the time. The contexts surrounding how both the portrait and the play were conceived, the relevance of authorial intention and public reception not only reveal shared values and ideas, but they also challenge and complicate preconceived notions of how dynastic affairs were viewed by the public. The idea of the play as an analogy to the case of Arbella Stuart has been put forward by many.[19] In particular, it is explored in detail by Steen in her study of the 'Crime of Marriage' committed by both women[20]. As Steen argues, 'responses to Stuart suggest a more complex historical interpretation [of the play] is in order, one

[18] Cristina Piacenti Aschengreen and John Boardman, *Ancient and Modern Gems and Jewels in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen* (London: Royal Collection, 2008), p. 184. Also for, image, see *The Darnley Jewel or Lennox Jewel* c. 1571-8, accessed at <https://www.rct.uk/collection/28181/the-darnley-jewel-or-lennox-jewel>.

[19] Charles Forker, *Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 299-300; Muriel West, 'The Devil and John Webster', *Jacobean Drama Studies*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut fuir Englische Sprache un Literatur, 1941), p. 240-41; Joyce E. Peterson, *Curs'd Example: The Duchess of Malfi and Commonwealth Tragedy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 41-42.

that more fully acknowledges the tensions within the early seventeenth-century codes of gender and morality.'[21] While comparing the two women at the centre of both these artefacts can help illuminate the context shared between them, Steen and others do not engage in as much detail with the significance of the literary form of the play as a revenge tragedy and the additional factors at work that challenge an analogous reading of the play, in particular, the Duchess of Malfi's status as a widow. The interdisciplinary process that Steen uses blends historical analysis of source material, including the historiography linked to Arbella Stuart, with a study of the literary history behind the play. Portraiture can be equally insightful in what it offers by way of comparison and it is by bringing these two works together and considering aspects of form that we can further understand the significance of dynasty in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century society.

First published in 1623 and presumed to have first been performed in 1613–14, John Webster's play bears many parallels with the life of Arbella Stuart and the context of its conception leaves seemingly little doubt that Webster was capitalising on a contemporary topic known by the public.[22] As a woman of high rank and dynastic standing, the Duchess is burdened by expectations regarding decorum. Like Arbella as depicted in the portrait, with the symbols, inscription and composition already discussed, the Duchess is placed within the context of the court, bound by dynastic expectations. Yet she dismisses these in the play, marrying a man clandestinely and in spite of the threats from her brothers. Her attempts to keep her marriage and subsequent children hidden fail as she is captured and imprisoned in a turn of events which also mirrors Arbella's own transgressions, marrying and attempting to flee with William Seymour, only to be recaptured and eventually dying in captivity, punished for her choice in marriage. Dynastic concern is at the heart of the perceived slight carried out by the Duchess in her violation of degree, in choosing her steward, Antonio as her husband. Explicit reassurances given by the Duchess to her brothers mirror the forced deference that Arbella is known to have shown to King James as she sought freedom from his restrictive edicts relating to her marriage prospects.

Webster directs his attention and exerts control in guiding the audience towards a position where they are invited to judge the consequences of this infringement of social order and contravention of dynastic expectations. While the occasionality of the portrait holds Arbella for the viewer within

[20] Sara Jayne Steen (ed.), *The letters of Lady Arbella Stuart by Stuart, Arabella, Lady, 1575-1615* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 95; and Sara Jayne Steen, "The Crime of Marriage: Arbella Stuart and The Duchess of Malfi." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1991, pp. 61–76. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2542016>.

[21] Ibid., p. 62.

[22] John Russel Brown (ed.), *The Duchess of Malfi, John Webster*, (London: Methuen), p. xviii; Sara Jayne Steen (ed.), *The letters of Lady Arbella Stuart by Stuart, Arabella, Lady, 1575-1615* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 95.

the political circumstances in which it was commissioned, unlike Webster, it does not show signs that it was intended to invite such a conscious moral evaluation. As analysis of the portrait has shown, the portrait was intended to invite viewers to recognise Arbella's claim to the earldom of Lennox and the injustice of treating her as anything other than the Countess. Nonetheless, because of the popular narrative that surrounded Arbella's life, her attempted marriage and death, any viewer of the portrait from 1610 onwards is placed within a similar position to the audience of the play, which seems to encourage wider moral considerations of how she is presented and the potential for pathos emerges.

As a revenge tragedy, it is no surprise that the play focuses on documenting the cause, the consequence and the moral implications of the transgressions committed by the Duchess and the differing forms of revenge that appear throughout. The moral quality, however, is perhaps the most 'vigorous point of contention' for critics.[23] From the outset of the play, it is clear her brothers 'would not have her marry again.'[24] They directly warn her not only of the consequences but also of the sinful motives that would encourage such behaviour within her. Widows who marry twice are described jointly by the brothers in hyperbolic terms as women led by sexual desires: they are deemed 'luxurious'[25], with 'spotted'[26] livers, craving 'lustful pleasures.'[27] External dangers are highlighted in the court and the brothers attempt to use a veil of familial protection to prevent the Duchess from being a victim of potential suitors. The familial protection, however, is described more overtly in terms of dynastic control and class insecurity as they fear such a marriage would 'sway'[28] her 'high' or 'royal' blood[29]. The strategies of the potential suitors are described as a 'kind of honey-dew that's deadly' as they may try to use their 'youth, high promotion, eloquence' and 'honour' to 'poison' the Duchess's reputation.[30] This suggestion of an external danger is, however, quickly reframed in terms of the personal responsibility that the Duchess must take for her own innate weaknesses as a 'lusty widow' – according to them she inhabits this stereotype and thus carries expectations that she will be too tempted by her hyper-sexualised tendencies.'[31] Their warnings are stark and point towards fatal consequences: if she attempts such subversive behaviour, her 'darkest actions' and 'privat'st thoughts will come to light', with such a wedding being better described as 'executed than celebrated'

[23] Champion, Larry, "Webster's The White Devil and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 16 (3) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), p. 447.
[24] John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, (London: Methuen Drama, 1964), I. 1. 249.
[25] Ibid., I. 1. 290.
[26] Ibid., I. 1. 291.
[27] Ibid., I. 1. 318.
[28] Ibid,. I. 1. 290.
[29] Ibid., I. 1. 290.
[30] Ibid., I. 1. 288, 300.
[31] Ibid., I. 1. 332.

and an ‘entrance into some prison’.[32]

The tyranny and dynastic paranoia found in the brothers’ warnings and quest to preserve reputation and uphold decorum reflects a similar preoccupation found in the Arbella portrait. The concerns of both dynasties are attached to these female figures precisely because of their ability to marry and this in turn impacts on the ways in which they are presented in each work. In the play, the Duchess unnerves her brothers with fear that she may marry again; her position as a widow of status and wealth adds further to their anxiety that she is emboldened socially and sexually to make ill-advised decisions. In the portrait, as has been seen in its commission and composition, Arbella is appropriated to represent the Lennox and Stuart line and as a future lady of the court, awaiting a suitable match; thus the presentation of her body can be seen as the fundamental driving force enabling the painting to assert dynastic dominance.

The heirlooms that feature in both works, in the pendant found in the portrait and the poinard used to threaten the Duchess, further underline the powerful nature of dynastic control in what they outwardly seek to demonstrate. Both these items are used by the painter and writer as public symbols of dynastic power, reasserting and enforcing the values inherited by members of the family. In the painting the pendant appears centrally hanging from Arbella’s dress on her chest, a responsibility that she carries and a signal to others of her inheritance. In the play, the poniard appears at a dramatic climax as Ferdinand produces it on stage informing his sister that it was their father’s and lamenting, that he would ‘loth to see ‘t look rusty, cause ‘twas his’[33]. Here the pretence or warped interpretation of familial protection is made clearer as the audience comes to recognise that remarriage by the Duchess would carry fatal consequences for her and that Ferdinand views his responsibility as inherited from their father, seeking to maintain loyalty and obedience no matter the cost or who the miscreant is. Even the Duchess’s firm assertion that she will not marry does little to appease the brothers’ concern as they respond by reminding her that ‘so most widows say’, yet their mournful and chaste status is temporary and cannot be trusted.[34] The brothers’ firm belief in their sister’s moral frailty is proven in their hiring of Bosola, the play’s malcontent, to act as an intelligencer, spying on the Duchess, acting like a ‘politic dormouse’ in her private lodgings to ensure that her ‘privat’st thoughts’ do indeed ‘come to light’[35]. It is through this threatening setting that Webster establishes a social order and dynastic control within which the Duchess’s behaviour and actions can be judged and scrutinised by the audience.

[32] Ibid., I. 1. 332.
[33] Ibid., I. 1. 324.
[34] Ibid., I. 1. 295.
[35] Ibid., 1. 275, 308-9.

As Oakes explains, this is one of the major critical debates about the play: 'How is one to react to and judge the Duchess' behaviour as a widow?' echoing a similar question explored by Steen's study of the play alongside Arbella Stuart[36].

In one of the critical early moments in the play, the Duchess is seen to switch quickly from an effusive public promise before her brothers that she will obey ('I'll never marry'[37]) to a concealed, private and consciously subversive declaration that she will do as she pleases ('Let old wives report/ I wink'd and chose a husband'[38]). It is in this initial behaviour of compliance, deference and social conformity, with the expectations and hopes of her family in mind, that the Duchess presents herself in line with the portrait of Arbella Stuart – both are the 'figure[s] cut in alabaster'[39] that the Duchess will come to lament as she reveals her true desires, breaking free from this restrictive position and revealing to her true love, Antonio, that she is in fact 'flesh and blood.'[40] The intimate form of the later soliloquy where she discloses her plan to marry, invites the audience into the private knowledge that Bosola and, in turn, the brothers will seek out. Thus the audience is intimately brought into the Duchess's 'privat'st thoughts' and pushed into the moral dilemma that will commence from here.

Although similar questions and effects arise out of the portrait and the play, the limitations found in the fixed 'occasionality' of a formal and public portrait prevent viewers from engaging sympathetically, without the wider context of Arbella's private correspondence and knowledge of her suffering in the Tower of London and death. The play is able to offer such insight through the Duchess's soliloquies and her private scenes with Antonio, her brothers, and Bosola – as well as her torture and death. Together, however, and through the use of methodologies found in art history and literary criticism, both artefacts help to illuminate the motivations and effects of dynastic control in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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[36] Elizabeth Oakes. "'The Duchess of Malfi' as a Tragedy of Identity" in *Studies in Philology*, vol. 96, no. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 51; Sara Jayne Steen, "The Crime of Marriage: Arbella Stuart and The Duchess of Malfi." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1991, pp. 61–76. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2542016>.

[37] Ibid., I. 1. 295.

[38] Ibid., I. 1. 340-1.

[39] Ibid., I. 1. 446.

[40] Ibid., I. 1. 445.

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HELENA QUINEY

‘Transgression, Resistance, and Agency’: Explorations of the New Woman and Lesbian Desire in *A London Plane-Tree, and other Verse* (1889) and *The Little Foot-Page* (1905)

A London Plane-Tree, and other Verse, a short collection of poems by Amy Levy, and ‘The Little Foot-Page’, an oil painting created by Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale, are pieces which arguably challenge the place of women within late Victorian and Edwardian society. Against the backdrop of the changing position of women in society and the figure of the New Woman, Fortescue-Brickdale and Levy asserted independent positions in society. This paper will offer a novel reading of these two works, exploring how each might be read as a depiction of Lesbian identity.

Within Victorian Britain, there were two clearly defined, binary spheres: the masculine and the feminine. These spheres were both physical and psychological; a woman’s sphere was ‘domestic, conserving and nurturing’, found within the household, whereas the man’s place was within the ‘public realm of conflict, compromise and action... dutifully protecting his lady and country.’[1] Nevertheless, throughout the Victorian era, female writers and artists ‘challenged the idea that women are naturally passive, restricted to the home and children.’[2] The increasing visibility of independent and politically active women gave rise to the cultural construct of the ‘New Woman’, which was first coined in 1865 to describe literary heroines:

> ‘The New Woman, as we read of her in recent novels, possesses not only the velvet, but the claws of the tiger. She is no longer the Angel, but the Devil in the House.’ *Westminster Review*, October 568

In this first use, the ‘New Woman’ is juxtaposed with the ‘Angel in the House’, a passive and domestic ideal of woman first created in Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem. Discussions in the late nineteenth century of gender and sexuality came to be ‘dominated by the figure of the ‘New Woman’;[3] Upper Class women in the later nineteenth century defied conventional feminine roles, attending university, and

[1] Victor Shea and W. Whitla, ‘Gender, Women and Sexuality’ in *Victorian Literature: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 54.

[2] Ibid., p.54.

[3] Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex between Women since 1500* (Oxford, England: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), p.57.

encroaching on the 'masculine' sphere of public life.[4] These women were satirised as masculine; in 'the satirical journal *Punch*, [the 'New Woman'] was frequently depicted as a manly woman or Amazon, who affected such masculine pursuits as smoking or riding bicycles… cartoonists in *The Cornhill* represented the New Woman as a figure in manly dress, adopting an air of aggressive independence and strong opinions'.[5] Masculinity not only connotated a specific physical appearance but also 'economic and political power'[6] – more precisely, the 'New Woman' represented a threat that could disrupt the status quo. Rebecca Jennings highlights the paradoxical nature of the New Woman, being both 'unfeminine and hyperfeminine'.[7] In other words, the 'New Woman' is ridiculed for not being a man by men, but also criticized for stepping into the masculine sphere.

However, whilst the 'New Woman' encroached upon the public, masculine sphere, same-sex desire between women was shrouded in secrecy. In 1885, the Labouchere Amendment extended the Buggery Act of 1533. Under this, men could be convicted for acts done in private without a witness; letters and poetry could be used as evidence for such acts. Whilst the Buggery Act outlawed sexual activity between men, same-sex acts between women, which were unacceptable according to conventional morality, were not explicitly banned. In effect, it has been argued, the ruling classes minimised legal conversations on the topic so as not to publicise the matter to their wives and daughters,[8] leading thus to a history 'associated with silence, invisibility and denial.'[9] In effect, legislators perhaps believed they were doing their duty to 'protect' their family members, by hiding this immoral vice from them. Terry Castle's formative work specifically focuses on this; the lesbian figure in history is an 'other': 'in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wandered in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night.'[10]

This silence and denial create challenges for defining lesbian history and art associated with it. As Vicinus notes, 'we lack any general agreement about what constitutes a lesbian.'[11] Whilst post WW1, lesbianism meant 'genital contact',[12] within the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the definition could be expanded to

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[4] Ibid, p. 83.

[5] Ibid, p. 72.

[6] Anna Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7:1 (1996), 23–50, p. 48.

[7] Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex between Women since 1500* (Oxford, England: Greory of Britain, p. 72.

[8] Caroline Derry, 'Lesbianism and the criminal law of England and Wales', Open Learn, 10 February, 2021, https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/law/lesbianism-and-the-criminal-law-england-and-wales

[9] Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain*, p. xi.

[10] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 2.

[11] Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity', *Feminist Studies*, 18: 3 (1992), 467–97, p. 468.

[12] Jennings, p. xv.

include those who 'chose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively'.[13] Cook's definition certainly downplays the sexual element of such relationships, but does highlight the 'emotional support and affection'[14] offered between women. Inherently, within both definitions is the rejection of men; however, this rejection is not solely of them physically but also of the 'sphere' of masculinity. By exploring lesbianism through this lens, one can start to think about it not just through a lens of silence, but instead through one 'of transgression, resistance, and agency'.[15] Farwell thus successful adopts this idea when discussing the pre-war period:

'The lesbian subject functions as a powerful disrupter of the narrative because... the term "lesbian" has been stretched to mean more than a woman who is sexually attracted to other women; instead, the term has acquired larger implications, in some cases functioning as a metaphor for the feminist woman or for an autonomous female sexuality or body.'[16]

If we therefore utilise Farwell's approach, similarities can be seen between the definitions of the New Woman and Lesbianism, with the New Woman offering 'a range of possibilities for the expression of desire between women.'[17] Amy Levy (1861-1889) and Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale (1872-1945) both adhere to the definition of the 'New Woman'; they were born into Upper-Middle Class families and had access to education and the contacts afforded to this class. Fortescue-Brickdale attended the Royal Academy Schools from 1896; she was able to attend classes open to men and women (women were only able to study the Nude from 1894 at the RA[18]). Levy was likewise born into a wealthy, academic family; she was the first Jewish woman to study at Newnham College, Cambridge, and engaged with a coterie of academic women, including Vernon Lee. Levy was 'active in radical and feminist organisations' with 'politically controversial'[19] views that were shared with her coterie, leading to her being described as a 'New Woman' poet. Both women were unmarried and independent. Fortescue-Brickdale's work and social group was more conservative than Levy's – she 'eschewed the modernism of Bloomsbury' and was decidedly part of the 'liberal trend for appreciation of the English country life and rural traditions.'[20]

This article will present an interpretation of Levy's last collection of poetry, *A London Plane Tree, and other Verse* and Fortescue-Brickdale's painting *The Little Foot-Page* as depictions of lesbian identity in a period which these desires were rarely publicly articulated. Levy's poetry

[13] Blanche Cook, 'The Historical Denial of Lesbianism', Radical History Review, 20 (1979), 60–65 https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1979-20-60, p. 64.
[14] Jennings, p. xv.
[15] Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature, Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity*, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1991), p. 523.
[16] Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p.16.
[17] Jennings, p. 58.
[18] Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *A Pre-Raphaelite Journey: The Art of Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 13.
[19] Paul and June Schluter, *Encyclopedia of British Women Writers* (New York: Garland, 1988), pp. 294-5.
[20] Ibid., p.16.

has previously been investigated through this lens, with her poetry exploring Sapphic love, and her romantic relationship with Vernon Lee. In contrast, I have not found any academic criticism on *The Little-Foot Page* through this lens. To be clear, this article does not aim to examine whether Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale was a lesbian (her sexuality is unknown, and she never married), but rather to explore how each of these works explores the codes of this identity in the late Victorian and Edwardian era.

Amy Levy

Levy's last collection of poetry, *A London Plane Tree*, and other Verse, was written in the last year of Levy's life; she worked on the collection until a week before her death.[21] It explores the seclusion and isolation that the poet felt within the city, yet it would be wrong to paint the whole collection as an exploration of melancholy and sadness: within the collection, Levy also articulates the complexity of women's place within the city which has been 'habitually conceived as a male space.'[22]

The collection explores the limitations of being a woman in the city whilst also expressing Levy's transgressive and radical feminism. The first poem in the collection depicts the eponymous Plane Tree. The speaker observes the tree from the interior, 'here from my garret-pane, I mark/ The plane-tree bud and bow'. Here Levy is separated from the natural world of the London Square, being limited to only viewing the tree through the 'pane', with the world 'pane' mimicking 'plane'. This poem cements Levy as a poet and as a Londoner; a 'garret' alludes to the stereotypical writing space of a poet, particularly one with intense emotions. In addition, the Plane Tree is a tree synonymous with London; it is most likely a hybrid between the American sycamore and the majestic Oriental plane. The plane tree makes up nearly 50% of trees in London currently, owing to its ability to survive in the smog. Perhaps, the symbol of the Plane Tree is an allusion to the population of London, and the melange of cultures that have always been found in the city; it is therefore unsurprising that Levy, who explores the isolation she feels as an outsider in the city, utilised this tree to explore her collection of poetry about her experiences of the city. Levy feels herself cemented to the world of London; she describes the plane as a 'she', thus linking her own experiences to that of the tree.

Yet, the speaker does not remain in the 'garret' throughout the collection; in the poem 'Ballade of an Omnibus', Levy challenges the passivity and interiority of the feminine space. The poem juxtaposes the traditional form of the Ballad and the modern form of transportation. The speaker is content travelling the city on this mode of transportation: 'An Omnibus suffices me'.

[21] Amy Levy, and M. New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, 1861-1889 (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 35.
[22] Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

The speaker elevates the humble omnibus, describing her experience of sitting on the upper seats: 'I mount in state/ The topmost summit'. Levy's speaker, if female, is daring here: the uppermost seats on the bus were dedicated to men, and Levy was known for sitting there herself. The speaker is also perhaps unaccompanied. The speaker thus is rejecting the feminine sphere and exhibiting an 'autonomous' female body which challenges the expectations of her position in society. This poem could be read as a depiction of an independent woman, but also perhaps subtly (for the poem does not depict same-sex desire), a depiction of same-sex identity through its 'transgressive' rejection of the dichotomy of masculine and feminine spheres.

Arguably, the poem which most explicitly explores same-sex desire is 'London in July'. The speaker adopts the position of the flaneur/ flaneuse, observing the city, and reflecting on her love: 'My Love, she dwells in London Town/ Nor leaves it in July'. Here, the speaker's love is female; however, it is ambiguous whether Levy is adopting a male or female persona. If Levy is adopting the position of the flaneuse, like in 'Ballade of an Omnibus', Levy is rejecting the feminine sphere- this reading appears more valid as there is no other evidence in Levy's poetry of them adopting a male persona, yet clear indications of lesbian attraction is found in other works such as 'To Vernon Lee'. The flaneur has traditionally been male with 'the privileges of a man of means.'[23] Yet, prior to writing 'London in July', Levy had already subverted this expectation. Levy's uses the term 'flaneuse' in her essay 'Women and Club Life', which advocates for the importance for women or having a space outside of the home: a 'haven of refuge...where we can write our letters and read the news, undisturbed by the importunities of a female circle'[24]. This is the first recorded use of the term, clearly showing Levy's radical challenge to the traditionally masculine figure of the flaneur.

Whilst the poem has a romantic focus, 'London in July' is also a poem marred in sadness and imagery of obscurity. The city has become labyrinthine 'o vast and intricate maze'; in these 'squares' and 'streets' the two are able to meet. Beckman has argued therefore that this poem is not about 'romantic love' but rather 'the frustrated desire to bring together parts of the psyche that are at odds'.[25] However, I would argue that whilst the figurative imagery of the city as a 'maze' might typically suggest confusion and fear (for example, Stevenson describes the nightmarish Hyde as haunting a labyrinthine city in his novella, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, written 12 years before Levy's collection), in this poem, Levy is instead drawing on the idea of the seclusion of the maze- it is a space in which she would be able to engage in immoral desires without

[23] Ibid., p. 4.
[24] Amy Levy, and M. New, 'Women and Club Life', *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, 1861-1889 (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 533.
[25] Linda Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 195.

judgement. Levy would be unable to explicitly state same-sex desire in a poem, or in public; however, I would argue that the speaker is conforming to Castle's definition here: 'in the shadows, in the margins... a pale denizen.'[26]

Although perhaps 'London in July' does end on a moment of peace: 'that is enough for me', it is undeniable that this poem, alongside the whole of the collection, is steeped in melancholy and isolation. Throughout the collection, the speaker feels isolated from the population; she is either physically isolated, confined to the 'garret' ('The London Plane Tree' and 'The Piano-Organ'), obscured from others by the 'smoke' of the city ('Out of Town') or unable to speak to her fellow creatures, perhaps the objects of her desires 'you passed and smiled that day' ('Between the Showers'). Levy thus in this collection depicts the challenges faced by a woman who seeks to transgress the expectations placed upon her by society and feels isolated from the expected position she is supposed to occupy. It is also, in part, about the difficulty of making queer connections and finding community outside the female domestic sphere.

Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale

Like Levy, Fortescue-Brickdale was undoubtedly a pioneering figure; it remained unusual in the early 20th century for women to have artistic careers.[27] Prior to the 20th century, Nochlin has argued that visual art was a male-dominated field in comparison to writing due to the lack of availability of painting nude models afforded to female students[28]; Fortescue-Brickdale was among the first female pupils to attend life-drawing at the RA schools.

Her early work (such as *The Little Foot Page*) has been described as 'neo-pre-Raphaelite', often being 'meticulously detailed, closely observed, and faithfully naturalistic'.[29] Her work, like that of other painters drawing from the traditions of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, is suffused with 'literary subjects'[30]; The Little Foot-Page draws inspiration from 'Child Waters' a folk-ballad from Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The poem depicts Ellen, a maid who is devoted to her cruel lover, Child Waters. Ellen serves him as a page, and to do this, dresses as a boy and cuts her hair short.

Percy's poem was a noteworthy choice by Fortescue- Brickdale, rarely chosen by Pre-Raphaelite artists. In the poem, Ellen is clearly devoted to her cruel lover- Child Waters has rejected her to find a new woman, but she asks to go with him as his 'foot-page.' Crucially, it is Ellen's suggestion to take on this masculine role. For her to do this, Child

[26] Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, p. 2.
[27] Gerrish Nunn, *A Pre-Raphaelite Journey*, p. 11.
[28] Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* https://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf
[29] Donald Hoffman and Deborah Mancoff, 'Brickdale's "Idylls" Re-Viewed' *Arthuriana*, 26.2 (2016), 25–39, p. 25.
[30] Ibid., p. 25.

Waters commands that she must wear men's clothing and cut her hair short: 'you must cut your gowns of greene, An inch above your knee: /Soe must you doe your yellow lockes, An inch above your ee:'[31]

Figure 1. Eleanor Fortescue- Brickdale, *The Little Foot-Page*, 1905, Oil Paint on Canvas, 90.8 cm x 57 cm x 11.7 cm, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Image obtained from Wikipedia Commons

Thus, Fortescue-Brickdale's painting depicts this moment. Ellen has discarded her wimple and dress, which lie at the forefront of the painting. She now wears the attire of a male foot-page, including hose which reveal the shape of her legs, and a belt with a knife. Ellen is frozen in this moment, about to cut off her hair and fully transform from the feminine, beautiful Ellen, to the foot-page. Surrounding the figure are flowers, which seem to be encroaching on her, perhaps highlighting her entrapment through her devotion to Child Waters.

Hoffman and Mancoff interpret this masculine attire as an insight into Fortescue-Brickdale's political leanings. Whilst they admit that little is known about Fortescue-Brickdale's political and social views that might have 'informed her interpretations,' they highlight her position as a an 'independent, unmarried woman'[32] – in other words, a 'New Woman.' Thus, while Fortescue-Brickdale's 'images do not explicitly critique' traditional gender roles, they do 'offer a far more contemporary perspective.'[33] Certainly, showing a woman in male attire would be subversive; in the early twentieth century, a woman wearing 'men's

[31] Thomas Percy, 'IX Child Waters', *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* IX. CHILD WATERS. Reliques of ancient English poetry, consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets (chiefly of the lyric kind) together with some few of later date. 2nd Ed., London: Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/books/ix-child-waters/docview/2147669712/se-2, pp. 54-61.

[32] Hoffman and Mancoff, 'Brickdale's "Idylls" Re-Viewed', pp. 25-6.

[33] Ibid., p. 33.

clothing', particularly revealing the legs as in the painting of Ellen, would be 'improper, indeed, unthinkable.'[34] Ellen's clothing is not merely trivial; fashionable garments which restricted women's movements 'symbolised [women's] restricted roles'[35] in the eyes of women's rights activists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who noted that 'Her tight waist and long trailing skirts deprive her of all freedom ... No wonder man prescribes her sphere.'[36] Furthermore, hair was a physically identifiable way of separating the male and female sphere; Charles Berg expounded that having 'short hair' is a 'civilised act'[37] and 'part of discipline',[38] noting that long hair was used to 'conceal the nakedness of emotions'. He therefore notes that it is unsurprising that women, who he suggests are more emotionally volatile, 'are allowed by society to grow their hair'.[39] Marsh and Gerrish however, highlight the influence of this painting on the hair of Edwardian women, suggesting that 'it seems appropriate that a few years after this striking picture's exhibition, modern female art students in the capital were cutting their hair in 'page boy' style.'[40] Therefore, whilst The Little-Foot Page is presenting a fictional character, through this painting it can certainly be suggested that Fortescue-Brickdale was engaging with radical questions about the position of women in society.

Whilst a feminist interpretation of the painting has been offered by critics, to my knowledge, nothing has previously been written about the allusions to same-sex identity within this painting. Yet by 1905, correlative thought linked women in male attire to same-sex desire. Havelock-Ellis' influential scientific treatise, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), noted a correlation between lesbian desire (which he describes as sexual inversion) and masculine attire: 'the chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity'.[41] Specifically, he notes a 'very pronounced tendency among sexually inverted women to adopt male attire when practable'.[42] Havelock Ellis suggests that 'modern movement of emancipation' has also led to 'an increase in homosexuality'.[43] Furthermore, cutting hair short has often been read as a rejection of femininity and an allusion to lesbian desire.[44]

Eleanor Medhurst argues that, stemming from the tradition of 'female husbands' in

[34] Patricia Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850–1920: Politics, health, and Art* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003), p.31.
[35] Ibid., p. 43.
[36] Ibid. p,. 44.
[37] Charles Berg, *The Unconscious Significance of Hair*, (London: Allen, 1951), p.75.
[38] Ibid., p. 74.
[39] Ibid., p. 77.
[40] Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p. 153.
[41] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex- Vol.2 Sexual Inversion*, (F.A. Davies Company: Philadelphia, 1908), p. 140.
[42] Ibid., p.141.
[43] Ibid., p.147.
[44] Eleanor Medhurst, 'The Lesbian History of Short Hair', *Dressing Dykes*, 20 January 2022 https://dressingdykes.com/2022/01/20/the-lesbian-history-of-short-hair/

the 18th and 19th centuries, women who were aiming to show their 'inner feelings about sexuality' may perform cross-dressing, with 'those truly committed to the cross-dressing life [...] go[ing] to the extremes of a short haircut.'[45] Thus, Ellen in this painting has two depictions of lesbian identity- dressing like a man and cutting off her hair.

Whilst some may argue it is too far a stretch, and anachronistic to read the painting in this light, I argue that with Farwell's and Castle's definitions in mind, it is a valid interpretation. Again, it is important to reiterate that this is not questioning whether Fortescue-Brickdale was herself a lesbian. However, this painting does certainly question gender roles; this is an autonomous female body which is rejecting the spheres of domestic femininity in their attire. The depiction of Ellen is radical and transgressive in its depiction of a women's body without being explicitly about same-sex desire.

Overall, both Levy and Fortescue-Brickdale's work challenges traditional assumptions about women's position in society. Both women's work inherently challenges the dichotomy of male and female spaces, and more subtly, contains the codes of lesbian identity. Through this article, I hope that both Levy and Brickdale's work can be appreciated in this new light.

[45] Ibid.

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STEPHEN JONES

Celebration or Assimilation? A Critical Reading of Joshua Reynolds' *Portrait of Mai (Omai)*

The 2023 acquisition of Sir Joshua Reynolds' Portrait of Mai (Omai) *secured for the nation a work of art which is regarded as being one of the artist's finest canvases, and also a painting that demonstrates Britain's enlightened and benevolent relationship with her Empire. This imposing likeness shows Mai, the first Polynesian to visit Britain, dressed in what is considered to be traditional indigenous attire. However, when compared to surviving examples of costumes from the region, we can see that Reynolds' depiction shows distinct and important differences. By undertaking a close visual analysis of both Reynolds' painting and an example of Tahitian ceremonial dress that was brought to Britain on the same journey as Mai, this essay will highlight these variations and ask how they might have affected people's attitudes towards Mai both at the time of his visit and through subsequent generations.*

On 25 April 2023, the National Portrait Gallery in London announced it had purchased, jointly with the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Portrait of Mai (Omai)*, c.1776 (Figure 1).[1] The acquisition of this canvas, described as 'one of the most important, influential paintings in the history of British art',[2] was the culmination of a decade-long campaign to secure the work for the nation. The large-scale canvas features a magnificent portrait of Mai (c. 1753-1799), believed to be the first person from Polynesia to visit Britain.

During his two-year visit, from 1774 to 1776, he became something of a celebrity and was presented to George III and Queen Charlotte and met many important figures in London society (including Samuel Johnson and the novelist and diarist Frances Burney). Mai was also featured in many articles in both the London and regional press and even became the subject of a popular pantomime titled *Omai: or a trip around the world* (1785) which was performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.[3]

[1] 'Joshua Reynolds' Portrait of Mai Jointly Acquired by National Portrait Gallery and Getty', news release, National Portrait Gallery, 25 April 2023 <https://www.npg.org.uk/assets/uploads/files/press/2023/Omai-Acquistion-Release.pdf> .

[2] Mark Brown, 'Joshua Reynolds' Portrait of Omai Acquired by National Portrait Gallery', *The Guardian*, 25 April 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/apr/25/joshua-reynolds-portrait-of-omai-jointly-acquired-by-the-national-portrait-gallery-and-getty>.

[3] Michael Alexander, *Omai: 'Noble Savage'* (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1977), pp. 133, 102 & 88, 126, & 128

Figure 1: Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of Mai (Omai)*, c. 1776. Oil on canvas, 236 × 145.5 cm. London: National Portrait Gallery and Los Angeles: Getty. Image: author's own.

Reynolds' painting of Mai, which now forms the centrepiece of a collection of eighteenth-century portraits at the newly renovated National Portrait Gallery, has become the most celebrated image of this Polynesian visitor. Proudly standing in a suitably tropical setting and dressed in an ample robe made from what is often referred to as *tapa* – a traditional Polynesian bark cloth[4] – Mai certainly cuts an impressive figure. Consequently, the portrait has been used by art critics and historians alike to demonstrate Britain's supposed enlightened attitudes to her ever-growing Empire.[5] Indeed, the explanatory gallery label which accompanies the painting today highlights this as 'the first British portrait to represent a person of colour with grandeur, dignity and authority.'[6] By comparing Reynolds' portrayal of Mai with an authentic example of the type of clothing shown in the painting, this essay will contest the narrative as presented by the National Portrait Gallery's label and will propose that Reynolds' famous portrait of Mai may not be as celebratory as has been argued.

Physically, *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* is an authoritative canvas. Measuring 236 cm. x 145 ½ cm. (93 in. x 57 ¼ in.) it is one of Reynold's largest portraits,[7] in addition to being one of the largest paintings in the National Portrait Gallery's room dedicated to the people who dominated the arts during the eighteenth century.[8] The painting depicts Mai standing in an Arcadian landscape adorned with exotic looking trees and bisected by a meandering river. The

[4] Mai (Omai)', National Gallery online catalogue entry <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw304993/Mai-Omai?LinkID=mp11723&role=sit&rNo=1>.
[5] Brown, ibid.
[6] Gallery label, National Portrait Gallery, London, October 2023.
[7] David Mannings & Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
[8] See <https://www.npg.org.uk/visit/floor-plans/floor-3/regency-romantics-reform-portraits-on-display#Room18>

figure dominates the composition; he stands in a classical *contrapposto* pose, with his weight borne by his right leg and his left arm gently resting on an ample fabric sash tied around his waist. His right arm is portrayed in a non-threatening – almost welcoming – gesture as his open palm indicates a lack of weaponry. On his hands and right forearm, almost hidden from view under the folds of fabric, are the tattoos that were often associated – though not always accurately – with the residents of islands such as Raiatea, where Mai was born.[9] The figure is then enveloped in the ample garment made from *tapa*, a type of bark cloth produced in Polynesia and usually worn by a person of high status.[10] On his head, Mai wears a large turban-like covering which appears to be made from the same type of fabric that encases the rest of his body.

Similarities can be drawn between Mai's appearance and depictions of the human figure from classical antiquity. Indeed, the statue known as the *Apollo Belvedere* (c. 120-140 CE) (Figure 2) was, during the eighteenth century, one of the most famous works of art in the world. Writing at the time, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the influential art historian, stated that the *Apollo Belvedere* was the most sublime of all the classical statues to have survived.[11] As President of the Royal Academy, Reynolds would have been familiar with the use of classical sculpture as a study resource for artists. Indeed, as Sarah Lea has noted, 'When the Royal Academy was founded

Figure 2: Attributed to Leochares, *Apollo Belvedere*, c. 120-140 CE. Roman marble copy of Greek bronze original, 224 cm height. Vatican City: Vatican Museums. Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons.

[9] Harriet Guest, 'Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Differences in Eighteenth-century British perceptions of the South Pacific', in *Written on the Body*, ed. by Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 84.

[10] National Portrait Gallery online entry: <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw304993/Mai-Omai?locid=1041&wPage=1&rNo=25>

[11] Mary Beard & John Henderson, *Classical Art From Greece to Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 111.

in 1768, classical art was the guiding light for its artist members in the quest to elevate the status of their profession, and to establish Britain as an artistic centre to rival the admired traditions of mainland Europe, particularly France.'[12]

There are strong visual parallels between both *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* and the *Apollo Belvedere*: both are depicted using the *contrapposto* stance, with both showing their weight being carried by the right leg, both are shown looking off into the distance (out to the right of the picture plane), both display an open and engaging stance with at least one arm outstretched in a welcoming and non-threatening gesture, and both figures are adorned by a garment constructed from abundant and ample folds of cloth. Even the Arcadian nature of Mai's surroundings sees parallels in the natural form of the tree trunk next to Apollo.

To fully consider the pictorial language of Reynolds' depiction of Mai, it would seem important to also discuss the painting in conjunction with a visual analysis of an authentic garment collected from Tahiti and brought to Britain on the same journey as Mai, that of James Cook's second voyage to the South Pacific which took place between 1772 and 1775. A mourner's costume (Figure 3) made from a type of bark cloth similar to that which Mai is said to be wearing in Reynolds' painting was brought back to Britain by the naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster and his son, Georg, and subsequently donated to the University of Oxford and is now in the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum. This costume consists primarily of a full-length outfit made from bark cloth and embellished with symbolic and decorative elements. These include a shorter red-coloured tunic on top of which sits a pale bark cloth chest plate decorated with discs fashioned out of coconut shells. Around the waist is a decorative band made from a complex woven coconut fibre

Figure 3: Polynesian Mourner's Costume, bark cloth, pearl shells, coconut fibre, bird feathers, c. 1776. Accession number 1886.1.1637. Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

[12] Sarah Lea, 'Sites of Power: Portraits and Presence', in *Entangled Pasts: 1768-NOW* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2024), p. 53.

cord, and around the neck an elaborate apron is made up of dozens of pieces of pearl shells cut into slivers and then assembled to make a flexible, shimmering collar. Several whole pearl shells are also used to construct a face mask, together with a headdress made from the feathers of exotic birds.[13]

The main component of this outfit is *tapa*, a traditional material made throughout the Pacific region and produced using the bark of indigenous trees; in the area from which Mai originated, Mulberry trees are the most popular source material. Pieces of tree bark are soaked, before being beaten into a pulp and worked into a thin sheet, fine enough to be wearable when dried but without becoming so thin that it could tear easily.[14] Surviving examples of *tapa*, such as the mourning costume at the Pitt Rivers Museum, together with a visual examination of other examples of bark cloth at the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris, indicates that the finished material appears to be a thicker and stiffer fabric than that depicted in Reynold's portrait, which itself looks to be more consistent with cloth produced by weaving techniques. Once the desired quality has been achieved, the resulting material is then dyed and decorated by hand, being either painted, stencilled, or printed as local customs dictate.[15] Given the amount of labour and the degree of skill involved in the harvesting of the raw materials, the production of the cloth, the decoration of the fabric, and finally the assembly of the finished garment, the resulting costume has been assumed to be reserved for those holding a degree of status within the society that produced it.[16]

Each element of the costume played a specific role and was often unique to individual island societies.[17] Some features, like the reflective pearl shells, would have produced dramatic optical effects when caught by the light, and others, like the exotic bird feathers which formed part of the face mask and headdress, would not only have increased the height of the person wearing the costume, making them a more imposing figure, but would also have symbolised status as the feathers had to be imported from other islands in the archipelago.[18] The overall effect would have been to create an impressive spectacle during an important event for the local population. This is confirmed by contemporaneous descriptions in Forster's manuscripts noting exactly how these costumes were used. 'These magnificent dresses were worn by the chief mourner when he led a large group of youth in a warlike procession, apparently designed to symbolically avenge any injury received by the deceased.'[19] Thus, the outfit was specifically

[13] For a more detailed descriptions of the materials and methods used, see <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/conservation-case-study-tahitian-mourners-costume#listing_597191_0>.
[14] Ibid.
[15] 'Techniques', *Tapa: Situating Pacific Barkcloth in Time and Place*, https://tapa.gla.ac.uk/ [accessed: 17 February 2024].
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Johann Reinhold Forster <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online#/item/prm-object-46023>.

designed to portray a sense of power and status, a quality which is arguably visually absent from Reynolds' painting.

The artist's depiction shows Mai wearing an outfit made up of ample quantities of tapa draped and wrapped over and around his body. Unlike the example in the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Reynolds' costume has almost no additional elements of decoration or embellishment, except for a slight variation in colour in the section of cloth around the waist when compared with the cloth used for the rest of the body. The fabric depicted by Reynolds also differs in that it is much more voluminous and seems to have a greater degree of flexibility in its drapes and folds than surviving examples would suggest is possible. Thus, from visual analysis alone it would appear that Reynolds did not depict Mai wearing Polynesian dress from life, even though, as in the case of the mourner's dress, physical examples would have been available in Britain at the time. Was this a deliberate choice or done for more practical reasons?

Part of the answer might be found in scrutinising the studio practice of Reynolds and other eighteenth-century portrait painters. Reynold's was trained under the tutelage of Thomas Hudson (1701–1779), one of the most successful portrait painters in London during this period, and, as M. Kirby Talley has written, the younger artist would have learnt from Hudson the standard studio practices of the time, including the use of drapery artists.[20] These were painters who were employed specifically for the purpose of painting fabric and cloth, allowing experienced portraitists to concentrate on more important aspects of a painting such as the face.[21] Thus, it seems possible that Reynolds may have followed standard practice at the time and entrusted the painting of Mai's costume to an artist more accustomed to painting Western dress, an artist who would probably never have seen any examples of indigenous clothing from the South Pacific and was certainly more adept at painting the ample folds of fabric that made up eighteenth-century female dress at the time.

Portrait of Mai (Omai) set the standard for other portraits of the Polynesian visitor, as further examples from the period, including a painting by William Parry and a drawing by N. Dance, also depict Mai in the same pale flowing robes. This factor becomes even more telling when it is considered that for much of his time in London, Mai wore western-style clothing, as can be noted from the following diary entry by Frances Burney: 'As he had been to court, he [Mai] was very fine. He had on a suit of Manchester velvet, lined with white satin, a bag, lace ruffles, and a very handsome sword which the King had given him. He is tall and very well made, much darker than I had expected to see him, but a pleasing countenance... You may think that I speak in a high style; but I assure you there was one opinion about him.'[22]

Thus, what becomes even more striking

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[20] M. Kirby Talley, '"All Good Pictures Crack": Sir Joshua Reynolds's practice and studio', in *Reynolds*, ed. by N. Penny (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), p. 56.

[21] Sarah Murden, 'Fashionable Blues of the 18th Century, *All Things Georgian*, online: <https://georgianera.wordpress.com/tag/drapery-painters/>

[22] Alexander, p. 88.

about Reynolds' depiction of Mai is the extent to which the artist does not include any of the elements which would have given Mai status either in the context of his own society or in that of contemporary Western society. Absent is the colour or pattern that is present in other examples of this type of cloth, as well as the symbolic elements of decoration which would reflect part of Mai's national identity. These omissions become particularly noticeable when we compare *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* with another portrait of the period by Reynolds and one which hangs directly next to Mai in the National Portrait Gallery in London. *John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute* (1773) (Figure 4) is a painting of similar scale and depicts a man in a pose very similar to that of Mai. However, in this painting the subject's power and importance is indicated by the *inclusion* of various symbols and items of regalia. John Stuart was Prime Minister of Great Britain between 1762 and 1763 and here is shown wearing the robes of the Order of the Garter, the oldest and most senior Order of Chivalry in Britain.[23] Like Mai, Stuart is swathed in ample folds of fabric, but unlike the Polynesian visitor, the prime minister's robes are richly coloured and highly decorated with lace, embroidery, and a gold chain – all symbolic signs of the man's high status and his membership of the highest rank in society.

Figure 4: Sir Joshua Reynolds, *John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute*, 1773. Oil on canvas, 236.9 × 144.8 cm. London: National Portrait Gallery. Image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.

What might account for the difference in these two similar, yet very different, portraits? Was Reynolds trying to *celebrate* Mai by painting him on the same epic scale as the Prime Minister, or was he trying to *assimilate*

[23] Royal Family online entry: <https://www.royal.uk/the-order-of-the-garter>.

the visitor by depicting him not in his culturally appropriate indigenous dress, but in the more acceptable and familiar (to European eyes at least) style of dress associated with the great classical civilisations of Greece and Rome? Part of the answer might lie in the Enlightenment thinking that was prevalent in Europe during the latter part of the eighteenth century. In 1750, Jean-Jacques Rousseau published his *Discourse on Arts and Sciences* in which he proposed that humanity had declined since the 'primitive' state of its earliest incarnation, and that scientifically and artistically 'underdeveloped' nations were morally superior to their sophisticated Western equivalents.[24] As Michael Alexander has pointed out, Rousseau eventually moved away from this championing of a totally primitive society and instead concluded that the ideal lay somewhere between the primitive and the advanced.[25] In this sense, Reynolds' *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* could be argued to be a romanticised version of a supposedly idyllic society, portraying a man that has been divested of the unfamiliar (and therefore potentially threatening) devices and symbols of his native land, and swathed instead in the ubiquitous folds of the clothing of classical antiquity.

Much of the recent art historical scholarship examining depictions of race in the Western canon has been focused on reasserting the presence of the Black figure. This valuable work has all too often concentrated on identifying the individual stories of Black subjects or even rediscovering Black subjects which were physically painted out of their original compositions.[26] In the case of *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* neither of these aspects is applicable as Mai was already a well-known and well documented figure in eighteenth-century Britain. Instead, an interdisciplinary approach, as has been shown, allows for different academic methodologies to inform the study and understanding of material culture. The result is, arguably, a more complete understanding of how the visual language employed by Reynolds – for example, the *way* his subjects are portrayed, and the *choices* the artist made about *what* to include, and more importantly, what *not* to include – can construct for the viewer a particular narrative which subsequently dominates the interpretation of a painting for generations. As has been argued, Reynolds' portrayal of Mai does not truly depict him with the degree of 'grandeur, dignity, and authority' that the gallery wall text asserts, especially when much of the cultural symbolism that was important to Mai's Polynesian society has been omitted. From this examination of both the painting and contemporary Polynesian dress, it seems that Joshua Reynolds' *Portrait of Mai (Omai)* seeks to assimilate Mai into Western society rather than celebrate his status as the first Polynesian to visit Britain.

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[24] Robert Wokler, *Rousseau: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 26
[25] Alexander, p. 70.
[26] See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/14/video/belizaire-frey-children-portrait-met.html>.

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NINA HUNT

Abolition, Race, and Religion in Victorian Britain

In November 1828 Mary Prince made her way to the offices of the Anti-Slavery Society in east London to seek help. Suffering chronic ill-health after some 40 years of slavery, this woman from Bermuda found herself destitute and alone in London. Her story, The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, published 1831, gives us a valuable insight into the lives of enslaved people and the complex issues around abolition. Three decades later, in 1862, John Bell exhibited his life-size bronze sculpture A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic, at The International Exhibition. The abolitionist movement had gained momentum but some of the key social issues remained unresolved. This paper will consider the two artefacts, specifically looking at what they suggest about race and religion in Victorian Britain, to glimpse an understanding of why manumission was so hard won.

'This is slavery. I tell it to let English people know the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God, and call loud to the great King of England, till all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore'.[1] These are the final words of *The History of Mary Prince*, 1831, the first autobiography published by a black woman and, although only a slim volume, the book's impact was significant. Three decades later, at The International Exhibition of 1862, John Bell exhibited his life-size bronze sculpture, *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic*, expressing the hope that the sculpture would 'aid in directing a sustained attention to the greatest injustice in the world'.[2] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, artefacts such as these became agents of change and flashpoints of contemporary debate,[3] working as tools for the abolitionist cause. Literature and art continue to have a powerful role in how we view the past, and these two artefacts are valuable sources for their commentary on slavery from entirely opposing perspectives: one the black female, West Indian, slave, and the other the white, male, English sculptor. With different approaches to the common cause of abolition, the works of Mary Prince and John Bell illuminate the interlinked ideas of race, and religion, specifically the prejudiced perception

[1] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004) p. 38.

[2] John Bell on *A Daughter of Eve*, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/cragside/daughter-of-eve>.

[3] Sarah Lea, 'Beauty and Difference, Prints, Poetry, Sculpture and Photography', in *Entangled Pasts 1768 – Now, Art, Colonialism and Change*, (Royal Academy of Arts, 2024).

of black females and the racial religious undercurrent in the Victorian arts.

The road to freedom was tortuous. After decades of campaigning, the 1807 the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was signed into law by King George III, abolishing trade in enslaved people in the British Empire. However, freedom did not extend to the colonies until the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act, which took effect on 1 August 1834. For a further four years there was a period of apprenticeship, when little changed, until emancipation in 1838, after which slavery continued illegally in the British Empire. It is estimated that between 1808 and 1869 the Royal Navy seized over 1,600 slave ships and freed some 150,000 Africans but, despite this, it is thought that a further one million slaves were transported in the nineteenth century.[4] No provision was made to support the previously enslaved, so many were left destitute with no means of returning home. Conversely, compensation of twenty million pounds was paid to 46,000 British enslavers for loss of property, under the 1837 Slave Compensation Act. It is during this protracted campaign that Mary Prince and John Bell offered their works to the abolitionist cause.

The History of Mary Prince and *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic* were both accessible to the public thanks, in part, to the industrial revolution and advances in printing and reproduction in the nineteenth century. *The History of Mary Prince* was so successful that it ran to three editions in its first year of publication. The sale price of the book at one shilling (or six pence each, if twenty five or more are ordered) of the Cheap Edition was 'to facilitate the circulation of this tract by Anti- Slavery'.[5] The Anti- Slavery Society was an influential religious and moral group of men and women, who campaigned robustly for abolition by giving talks, petitioning, and circulating pamphlets, including *The History*

Figure 1: John Bell, *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic,* 1862, bronze, silver and gold plate, 152.5cm x 40cm x 36cm. Cragside, Northumberland. © National Trust Images/James Dobson

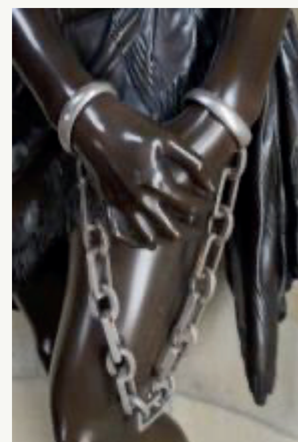

Figure 2: Detail of *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic*, © National Trust Images/James Dobson

[4] Slavery, National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/slavery/>.
[5] *The History of Mary Prince*, <http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/ten-minute-book-club/prince-history-of-mary-prince>.

of Mary Prince, to rally public support and pressurise Parliament.

A Daughter of Eve was first exhibited in white plaster, at the 1853 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition when Bell was already a sculptor of some renown, with Queen Victoria among his patrons.[6] However, in 1862 Bell exhibited *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic* in bronze for the first time, at The International Exhibition. Covering twenty-three acres in South Kensington, and hosting 29,000 international exhibitors, The International Exhibition was double the size of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The sculpture was crafted in polychrome electroplated bronze, an innovative production technique at the time. Access to the public was unprecedented, as the sculpture would have been seen by many of the six million who visited The International Exhibition between May and October.[7] This number was close to one fifth of the population of the United Kingdom at the time.[8] Minton & Co., manufactured a white Parian (plaster) version for mass production in 1862, entitled The American Slave. Both *The History of Mary Prince* and *A Daughter of Eve* were widely known to Victorians, and as artefacts produced for the Victorian market, they shed light on the complexities around abolition.

Prince and Bell's opposing approach to the female slave is illuminating. Speaking in the first-person Prince's narrative is emotional and defiant. From her birth in Bermuda in 1787, or 1788, into an enslaved family, Mary gives a personal, visceral account of slavery, and her suffering throughout is 'raw'. She talks of her 'flesh ragged and raw with licks'[9] (licks meaning lashes with whips), and witnessing the abuse of fellow slaves, such as old Daniel, who was 'beaten with a rod of rough briar till his skin was quite red and raw'.[10] Prince details the horrors of slavery, sparing little for the sensitivities of the nineteenth century reader, but there is real fight in Mary and there are several examples of her resistance. She relates one occasion when she physically defended her master's daughter from his drunken blows.[11] Mary's strong sense of injustice and her bravery are engaging qualities, which would have resonated with the increasingly literate population across Britain, some struggling themselves in positions of service and economic hardship. However, not all readers were sympathetic, and Prince's autobiography provoked some hostile responses. James Mc Queen, editor of the Glasgow Courier, published an article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, in 1831, in which he challenged the veracity of Prince's account and inveighed against abolitionists in general.[12]

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[6] The Queen had bought an earlier Bell bronze, Andromeda, shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851.
[7] The Exhibition Building of 1862, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp137-147>.
[8] Office for National Statistics, UK population estimates.<http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/004356ukpopulationestimates1851to2014>.
[9] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 15.
[10] Ibid., p. 21.
[11] Ibid., p. 24.
[12] Sara Salih, 'Introduction', in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. x.

John Bell chose to portray his slave as a passive beauty with a statement accompanying his work. He was quoted in the *Manchester Guardian* 27 August 1853; 'the poor slave girl, represented in bronze, does not struggle with her fate; but that very resignation should plead the more against the injustice and degradation of that position to which the colour of her skin condemns her'.[13] She is there to be appreciated aesthetically, and to invoke pity. Charmaine Nelson argues that the Eurocentric dynamic of colonial power demanded an artistic articulation of the differences of the Other,[14] and for the white male these differences were embodied in race and gender. Indeed, to Nelson's point, in the nineteenth century, there was a burgeoning genre of shackled semi-naked black females in sculpture, and as much as there was a distaste for the institution of slavery in Victorian society, it could be argued there was hint of a taste for the erotic, predicated on mastery and pleasure.[15] With her nubile young figure, Bell's female is barely a woman, unscarred by the lashes and cruel realities of slavery. She is chained, powerless and commodified, and her eyes are downcast and submissive. She could be seen to be sexually appealing, and this uncomfortable erotic interpretation is due to the artistic choices Bell made. Bell produced several similar sculptures in this genre, and while he did challenge social constructs with this portrayal, it seems, he is aware he is spicing the debate with a little sexual tension. It could be argued that Bell is complicit in the white male exploitation of black female bodies.

The way in which Prince and Bell approach race is striking and explicit. Mary asserts that 'Slavery hardens white people's hearts toward the blacks'.[16] However, it is notable that throughout her book, she makes repeated references to 'flesh', not the colour of skin. She says, 'my master used to strip me naked-to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open'.[17] The use of the word 'flesh' here invokes sympathy and distaste in the reader, but also draws parallels with animals, auctioned for flesh. Prince made several direct comparisons between enslaved people and animals; indeed, she was offered 'for sale like sheep or cattle'.[18] There was a strong link between abolitionists and animal rights activists and a growing popular sensibility in Victorian Britain, in relation to sentient beings, which this imagery would tap into[19]. However, flesh is also common to all humans, and with repeated use of the word, it could be read that Mary is appealing to humankind's commonalties, rather than the distinction of black or white.

Conversely, the dark colour of *A Daughter*

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[13] *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic* <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1228372>.
[14] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (UK: Penguin Classics, 2019).
[15] Charmaine Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*, (New York, London Routledge, 2010), p. 107.
[16] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 11.
[17] Ibid., p. 15.
[18] Ibid., p. 11.
[19] Brycchan Carey, 'Abolishing Cruelty: The Concurrent Growth of Anti-Slavery and Animal Welfare Sentiment in British and Colonial Literature', in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 2020-06, Vol.43 (2), pp. 203-220.

of Eve immediately distinguishes the enslaved female as 'the Other'. George Wallis, curator of the South Kensington Museum, described *Daughter of Eve* in the *Midland Counties Herald*, June 1862, as 'touching an appeal against the blasphemous hypocrisy which attempts to justify human bondage on the ground of external physical differences ... embodied in a singularly suitable material'.[20] The suitable material Wallis speaks of is patinated bronze, evoking the colour and sheen of African skin. The sculpture is otherwise classical in form, echoing the myriad white marble statues made across the centuries, and mass-produced for the Victorian market, which conform to the white European aesthetic of female virtue and beauty, with their straight Roman noses and Greek bodies.[21] From the late eighteenth century themes of piety, purity, and race were explored and racialised religious symbolism was notable in the arts. In 1789, William Blake wrote his poem *The Little Black Boy*, in which his poetic voice is that of a black child, 'I am black, but O! my soul is white'.[22] Mary Prince is called 'a black devil' by Mrs Wood in her narrative.[23] There was a conflation in the arts of white with good, and black with evil, and Bell's use of the classical form sits uncomfortably with his portrayal of the young, black commodified, female slave. Bell would have been aware that black females were associated with sexual activity in the nineteenth century by some Victorians.[24]

In response to Prince's book, in 1831, Joseph Phillips wrote to Thomas Pringle on interracial relations, stating that 'such connections are so common, I might almost say universal in our slave colonies, that ...they are considered, if faults at all, so very venial as scarcely to deserve the name of immorality'.[25] There is a particularly bitter irony at play here, since the realities of slavery meant that many female slaves were sexually abused from a very early age. Mary Prince talks about the master who was 'too indecent, with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh'.[26] White men were the masters and black women their property, so these 'connections' were not required to be consensual. Quite legitimately Bell could be challenging these issues and highlighting the wrongs of slavery from a moral angle, nevertheless this sculpture is a whitewashed palatable version of slavery, following the Eurocentric classical form, designed for British Victorian taste. Bell's sexualisation of the slave girl cannot be

[20] George Wallis, 'The Art Manufacturers of Birmingham and the Midland Counties', *Midland Counties Herald* June 1862, quoted in *Catalogue of Some of the Principal Pieces Exhibited by Elkington and Co., Manufacturers of Artistic Works in Silver, Bronze and other Metals: London International Exhibition, Class 33*, pp. 11-12.

[21] Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender and the Making of Modern Science*, (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey 2013), p. 181

[22] William Blake, *The Little Black Boy*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43671/the-little-black-boy>.

[23] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 31.

[24] Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 181.

[25] Joseph Phillips in a letter to Thomas Pringle, 18 January 1881, in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, 1831, (printed in Great Britain by Amazon), p. 33.

[26] Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 24.

ignored and the prurient appeal to the white male suggests contradictions in Victorian society.

Bell's choice of title, *A Daughter of Eve*, is a direct call to the Christian language of the abolitionists, reflecting the Bible's message that all people are descended from Adam and Eve and equal in God's creation, whatever their race or skin colour. The abolitionist movement owed much to a growing religious and moral concern for enslaved people. The subtitle of the work, *A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic*, places the sculpture squarely in the debate on slavery, suggesting the girl is about to leave Africa for America. However, while the Victorian relationship with slavery was complicated by notions of piety, purity, race, and sexual promiscuity, there were also the economic realities of wealth and patronage. *Daughter of Eve* was sold to William Armstrong, whose money came from arms dealing, and whose abolitionist sympathies remain unclear.

Mary Prince invoked God repeatedly in her book, and religion provided her with a support structure after her baptism in the English (Anglican) Church in 1817. She learned to read the Bible at the Moravian church and 'was admitted a candidate for the holy Communion'.[27] Members of the Anti-Slavery Society, to whom Mary turned for charity and support, scribed and published her story. Mary's piety was impressed upon the reader in the narrative, and 'it was important for the Anti-Slavery Society to present Prince as sexually pure'.[28] It was later reported that some of the details of her past relationships were not recorded by Susanna Strickland, who wrote down Mary's words. However, Mary's trust in God seemed genuine and affecting, and after all she suffered, she explained simply 'I still live in hope that God will find a way to give me my liberty'.[29] Despite her piety, by the nature of her skin colour, Mary would have been seen by some in Victorian society as impure, and immoral, though it was conceded in *The Anti- Slavery Reporter* that she was not 'as black in character as in complexion'.[30] The social constructs of black and white, good and evil, and promiscuity, were not easily overcome by the moral code of religion.

'All slaves want to be free – to be free is very sweet' are the unequivocal words of Mary Prince.[31] However, the issues and prejudices around manumission were complicated, and the abolition movement owed much to the arts in shaping the dialogue and influencing ideas. Mary Prince and John Bell made a lasting impact on how slavery was understood in the nineteenth century and their works continue to inform our views today. As we have seen, Bell made artistic choices and the female figure he presented was shackled,

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[27] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 29.

[28] Sara Salih, 'Introduction', in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. x.

[29] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 37.

[30] Mr Phillips account in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* No. 74, in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, 1831, (printed in Great Britain by Amazon), pp. 37-38.

[31] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, (Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 38.

symbolising her lack of freedom and enslaved status, but he chose to portray the slave looking nubile and appealing, bearing no signs of anguish and none of the scars of abuse, and these choices are uncomfortable to the twenty first century eye. However, by casting the black enslaved female in the classical oeuvre, Bell did challenge Victorian ideas around race, piety, purity, and sexuality. Prince can rest knowing that 'English people know the truth', and her story aided the cause of the abolitionist movement, over the many decades of political lobbying, and a growing social and religious conscience. *The History of Mary Prince*, and *A Daughter of Eve: A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic* are both fascinating artefacts which give us an insight into the complex issues around abolition. Studying the two together promotes a deeper understanding of the interlinked issues of race and religion in nineteenth century British society, which goes some way to explain why freedom was so hard won.

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Exploration

MARK TAYLOR

About Time: Anne Boleyn's Wedding Gift and William Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode*

Henry VIII's wedding gift to Anne Boleyn in 1533 was a fine example of an early domestic clock, a chamber clock, one of the most prestigious gifts the King could give. The invention of the pendulum subsequently revolutionised timekeeping, but the accurate long pendulum required a protective wooden case and by the 1690s, longcase clocks were the fashionable new technology. In Marriage A-la-Mode *(c. 1743), William Hogarth used an English domestic clock, a lantern clock, as a symbol of wretchedness and miserliness, the opposite of a prestige symbol. Together, the two artefacts narrate a story of English decorative arts, scientific progress, and shifts in societal concepts of time. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Anne's clock was acquired by Horace Walpole, author of the first Gothic novel, and the Gothic trend increased the demand for lantern clocks as furnishing accessories, until they were rescued by early twentieth-century antique dealers.*

On January 25, 1533, Henry VIII married Anne Boleyn at Whitehall. With his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, still living, this event marked a definitive rupture between the English Crown and Rome, representing a major step in the English Reformation. Henry's wedding gift to his new bride was a gilt-bronze wall-hung clock (Figure 1).[1] It is a fine example of the earliest form of domestic clock, known as a chamber clock, the forerunner of the English lantern clock. This clock was one of the most prestigious, rare, valuable, and fashionable gifts with which the King could impress his new queen. Just over two centuries later, in the last painting of his series, *Marriage A-la-Mode* (Figure 5), William Hogarth also used a domestic clock in connection with a marriage. However, in Hogarth's work, the now-obsolete lantern clock becomes a symbol of wretchedness and of the miserliness of the father to whom the dying bride has returned, the opposite of a prestige symbol. Together, these two artefacts narrate the evolution of two centuries of English decorative arts, scientific progress, and societal concepts of time measurement. The invention of the pendulum in 1656 revolutionised clock

[1] George White, *English Lantern Clocks* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1989), p. 25.

accuracy. The long pendulum, invented towards the end of the century, improved accuracy even further but required a tall wooden case for protection. Highly accurate longcase clocks then became the fashionable new technology. Anne Boleyn's clock, however, played a crucial role in saving the obsolete lantern clocks from the melting pot. It became the property of Horace Walpole, the author of the first Gothic novel, who built the first neo-Gothic mansion, ushering in the English taste for the Gothic that gained momentum in the nineteenth century. Walpole proudly displayed the clock among his collection of 'Gothic' artefacts. The new trend in decorative arts increased the demand for old brass lantern clocks as fashionable furnishing accessories until they could be rescued by the antique dealers of the early twentieth century.

As well as being a prestigious gift, the Boleyn clock is symbolic of the royal marriage. The top finial bears the royal coat of arms, while the weights are engraved with the intertwined initials letters 'H' and 'A', with one weight bearing Henry's motto, 'Dieu et Mon Droit', and the other Anne's, 'The Moost Happi'. With the two weights working together to drive the going movement and the striking movement in synchrony, the clock suggests harmony in union. As an instrument of time, however, the clock also reminds us that marriage is a temporal or earthly union: 'till death us do part'. It was also a prescient memento mori for Anne, measuring only a thousand or so days of her life.

Figure 1: The Ann Boleyn Clock and its weights, gilt-bronze, brass, iron, lead and silver. Royal Collection, London. Image obtained from Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2024

Domestic clocks like this, with iron movements, were first made in Germany in the early sixteenth century and were the inspiration for English domestic clocks. The English clocks were made of brass, acquiring the name 'lantern clock' as a corruption of 'latten', an early form of brass alloy, or possibly because their small, square form resembled a lantern. Hitherto, the English relied on sundials for timekeeping, or on public turret clocks such as the one built at Salisbury Cathedral in 1386, which originally did not have a dial but simply 'toll'd' the time on a bell. Indeed, the term 'clock' derives from the Anglo-Norman word for a bell, similar to the German 'gloche' or French 'cloche'. The new, domestic clocks displayed the time as well as sounding it, and by the late sixteenth century,

the clock dial (and often, synecdochically, the whole clock) was referred to as a 'watch'.[2] The first, imported domestic clocks were primarily status symbols as they were notoriously unreliable, temperamental, and generally high maintenance. Shakespeare thus used them in *Love's Labour's Lost* as the perfect metaphor in Berowne's lament at finding himself in love, as published in the 1598 quarto:

> What? I loue, I sue, I seeke a wife,
> A woman that is like a Germane Clocke,
> Still a repairing: euer out of frame,
> And neuer going a right, being a Watch:
> But being watcht, that it may still goe right.[3]

Another Early Modern example of a German chamber clock being used as a prestige symbol is in Holbein's portrait of Thomas More and his family (Figure 2). The central position of the clock, directly above More, suggests a vanitas symbol, reflecting the temporal power and wealth of this 'man for all seasons'.

By the last quarter of the sixteenth century, however, the increasing prosperity of the English middle class created a wider demand for domestic clocks and, beginning with immigrant Huguenot clockmakers from Flanders, the new clock industry began to establish itself in London. Further impetus was provided by the outbreak of the Thirty Years War in 1618, limiting trade with Northern Germany and the Netherlands via the ports of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The Clockmakers' Company was founded to regulate the industry in 1631, and the manufacture of lantern clocks increased steadily throughout the century, driven also by developments and improvements in the production of brass, which was both less expensive and easier to work with than iron.[4]

Figure 2: Rowland Lockey, *Portrait of the Family of Sir Thomas More*, 1592 (after Holbein the Younger, c. 1527), oil and tempera on canvas, 249 cm × 343 cm, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire. Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons

[2] 'Watch', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/watch_n?tab=meaning_and_use#15014831>
[3] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, Act III Sc. 1, TLN 955-959, Quarto 1, 1598, available at: <Love's Labor's Lost (Quarto 1, 1598) :: Internet Shakespeare Editions (uvic.ca)>.
[4] George White, *English Lantern Clocks* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1989), pp. 46-54.

In terms of design aesthetics, the architectural influence on early chamber clocks, such as the Boleyn clock, is clear. The domed bell mounting, with its straps and top finial, suggests the dome and cupola of a Renaissance cathedral, while its four columns are features absorbed from

Figure 3: Duomo of Florence Cathedral, Filippo Brunelleschi, 1436 (top); the five orders of classical architecture, engraving from *Vignola's Regola delli cinque ordini d'architettura*, 1562 (left); the Boleyn Clock (right). Images obtained from Wikimedia Commons and Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2024

contemporary engravings like those in Vignola's architectural textbook (Figure 3).

Figure 4 shows the typical design of an English lantern clock that became standard from the 1630s. It is a modification of the earlier clocks, such as the Boleyn clock, in both its architectural features and in the finials, which resemble a classical vase. The stylised tulip engraving on the dial of the English clock and the sea creatures or dolphins in its fret are features only found in English clocks, however, and recall the tulip mania of the 1630s and the popularity of prints of supposed sea monsters

Figure 4: an anonymous late seventeenth-century English lantern clock (left); and The Boleyn Clock (right), Metropolitan Museum, New York. Images obtained from Wikimedia Commons and Metropolitan Museum, New York. Image released under CC0.

during the seventeenth century (although tulip mania originated in the Netherlands and interest in imaginary sea creatures was pan-European).

The development of the English domestic clock marks a definitive point in the societal conception of time. Early turret clocks employed a foliot escapement – a bar that oscillates horizontally on a pivot, allowing a small amount of power from the weights to 'escape' and move the mechanism slightly with each oscillation. Early turret clock escapements

were adjusted at sunrise and again at sunset to go faster or slower in order to measure exactly twelve equal daylight units and twelve equal night-time units – so-called temporal hours. This was done by moving weights on the foliot bar inwards or outwards to increase or decrease the period of oscillation so that the clock struck six at both dusk and dawn. Thus, temporal daylight hours would be longer than night-time temporal hours during the summer, and the converse would be true in winter, following the seasonal variation in daylight. Modern, equinoctial hours are measured as the average or mean-time throughout the year, dividing each day of the year into 24 equal parts.

The first turret clocks were constructed and maintained by the church, and in Mediaeval Europe, the Catholic Church adhered to canonical hours, which varied with the season, denoting prayer times such as lauds at dawn and vespers at sunset. Moreover, in a rural economy, it was necessary for the work day to be longer during the summer growing season and harvest – an imperative that survives in the English idiom of 'working long hours' or 'working into the small hours'. At Greenwich at the summer solstice, June 21, there are around 16.5 daylight hours according to our modern equinoctial measurement, or twelve daylight temporal 'long hours' of about 83 modern minutes, and twelve nighttime temporal 'small hours' of about 37 modern minutes. It was this idea of a 'long hour' as measured by a turret clock that Shakespeare may have had in mind when Falstaff falsely boasts of having slain Hotspur: 'I graunt you I was downe, and out of Breath, and so was he, but we rose both at an instant, and fought a long houre by Shrewsburie clocke':[5] at the Battle of Shrewsbury on July 21, 1403, the local daylight 'long hour' would have been about 80 modern minutes long.

While time is an abstract concept, there is evidence that humans form a mental timeline that translates time to imagined space when thinking about time.[6] A spatial mental daily timeline divided between day and night – punctuated by dawn, noon and dusk – is easy to imagine; but, without implicit recourse to the measurement of time by a clock, one based on the abstract concept of the average daylight throughout the year would have been difficult, if not impossible, especially in a largely pre-literate, pre-numerate society. However, the addition of dials to turret clocks – so that an hour could be visualised as the movement of the clock hand rather than of the sun—paved the way for equinoctial hours to replace temporal hours as the societal measure of time. Clocks were eventually no longer adjusted twice daily to allow variable hours, but were calibrated to measure 24 equal hours between noon on consecutive days, using a sundial to benchmark noon. The Salisbury Cathedral clock of 1386 has no dial, so this shift took place in England

[5] William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 1*, Act V Sc. 3, TLN 3116-3120, Folio 1, 1623, available at: <Henry IV, Part 1 (Folio 1 1623) :: Internet Shakespeare Editions (uvic.ca)> .

[6] Ulrich W. Weger and Jay Pratt, 'Time Flies Like an Arrow: Space-Time Compatibility Effects Suggest the Use of a Mental Timeline', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 15 (2013), 426–430.

some time between the late fourteenth century and the appearance of chamber clocks in the early sixteenth century, by which time the shift was complete. The latter must be true because, although the earliest chamber and lantern clocks employed a foliot escapement that was a miniature version of the original turret clock escapements, they were not made to be easily adjusted to vary the length of the hours, although this would have been possible. Indeed, Japanese lantern clocks of the Edo period (1603-1868) were constructed to measure temporal hours by switching automatically from one foliot escapement to another at dusk and at dawn, and Japan continued to use temporal hours until its adoption of mean-time and the Gregorian calendar in 1873, as part of the Meiji reforms.[7] In England, however, the absence of any such adjustment mechanisms on the new domestic clocks implied that the shift to equinoctial hours was complete by the turn of the sixteenth century.

In the early seventeenth century, Galileo Galilei recorded the constant period of oscillation of a pendulum: the laws of physics determine exactly how long one swing takes, in direct proportion to the square root of the length of the pendulum. In 1656, the Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens applied this notion and invented the pendulum clock.[8] Because a pendulum has a natural period of oscillation governed by physics, while the foliot does not, pendulum clocks increased accuracy from about 20 minutes or so per day to within a few minutes. The Anglo-Dutch clockmaker Ahasuerus Fromanteel almost immediately brought the new technology to England, and English clocks soon began to be made with a short or 'bob' pendulum of around six inches, hidden behind the clock.[9] However, from about 1680, in a further technological innovation, English clockmakers started using the long or 'Royal' pendulum of 39.1 inches with a new form of escapement invented by Robert Hooke.[10] This was even more accurate than the bob pendulum and also allowed a seconds hand to be fitted, as the Royal pendulum takes exactly one second to swing in each direction. However, the new long pendulums hanging below wall-mounted lantern clocks were easily brushed against in the confinements of the home, stopping the clock. From the end of the seventeenth century, therefore, English weight-driven clocks were housed in free-standing wooden cases to protect the pendulum, and had minute and often seconds hands. While lantern clocks continued to be made in the provinces, particularly in East Anglia, by the mid-eighteenth century, when Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode* sequence was painted, they had long been obsolete in the metropolis.

Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode* series of six paintings was created around 1743, as the basis for a series of engravings. It is a moralising

[7] M.P. Fernandez and P. C. Fernandez, 'Precision Timekeepers of Tokugawa Japan and the Evolution of the Japanese Domestic Clock', *Technology and Culture*, 37 (1996), 221-248; Arnold Pacey, *Technology in World Civilization: A Thousand-year History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), pp 88-90.

[8] David Landes, *Revolution in Time* 2nd edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 127-129.

[9] White, *English Lantern Clocks*, p. 189.

[10] White, *English Lantern Clocks*, p. 190.

satire on the upper and middle classes, telling the story of a transactional marriage arranged for financial gain and social advancement. The central characters are a spendthrift nobleman in need of money and the daughter of a wealthy City of London merchant seeking to gain status by marrying her into the aristocracy. The marriage becomes a sordid chronicle of greed, lust and infidelity. Although the daughter becomes a countess on the death of her father-in-law, she takes a lover, Silvertongue, who is hanged for murdering her husband, Earl Squanderfield, and she returns, penniless, to her father's chambers in the City, where she takes an overdose of laudanum. In the sixth painting, Hogarth trenchantly depicts the squalor and wretchedness of the final scene (Figure 5).

Only the back of the doctor, the preserver of life, is seen on the far left as he resignedly departs, sniffing the vinaigrette at the top of his cane in disgust. He is disappearing as the shadow of the father who, in a pose that ironically mimics taking a pulse, coldly removes a jewelled ring from his dying daughter's finger. The merchant wears three coats, suggesting his chambers are unheated, and while his alderman's ceremonial robe hangs on the wall, he still pretentiously sports his chain of office. The apothecary (identified by the vial and syringe in his pocket) strikes the dim-witted servant who fetched

Figure 5: William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode*: *6. The Lady's Death*, c. 1743, oil on canvas, 69.9 cm × 90.8 cm, National Gallery, London. Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons

the laudanum, the latter wearing an over-sized coat as livery, presumably the hand-me-down of the miserly merchant or a previous servant. The empty vial of laudanum and the handbill of her lover's hanging lie at the daughter's feet, and her child, being lifted by the anile nurse to kiss goodbye, has a dark skin mark and is wearing callipers to correct lameness – signs of congenital syphilis (Figure 6).

Everything depicted in the room, between its bare floorboards and its damp ceiling, suggests the miserliness of the merchant and, ironically, is the very opposite of 'à la mode'. The overturned, unfashionable mid-seventeenth-century backstool has been crudely repaired with a wooden fillet. A starving dog steals an unappetising pig's head from the table. There is a tavern-scene painting of a man lighting his pipe from the red nose of a Bardolph-like fellow toper, suggesting the burning ambition of the merchant as well as his low birth and manners, in contrast to his social aspirations. The nearby still-life picture, depicting abundance, is overlaid with another of a man urinating. The three paintings caricature the style of the seventeenth-century Flemish artist David Teniers the Younger, known for his candid depictions of the seamier side of peasant life (Figure 7). Together, they form their own allegory: the opportunity for advancement and

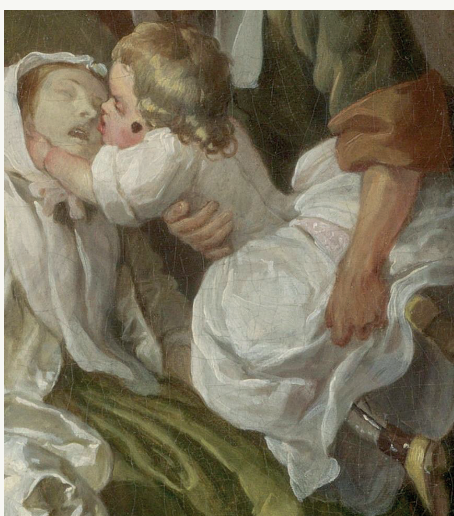

Figure 6: William Hogarth, details from *Marriage A-la-Mode: 6. The Lady's Death*. Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons

Figure 7: William Hogarth, details from *Marriage A-la-Mode: 6. The Lady's Death*. Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons

affluence has been –in the appropriately vulgar English idiom – 'pissed against the wall', i.e. squandered.[11]

In the centre of his painting, crowning this scene of wretchedness, Hogarth places a lantern clock – the only known contemporary painting of an English lantern clock (Figure 8). The outmoded, obsolete, single-handed clock has not been converted to the long pendulum and has been shorn of its decorative brass frets and finials, which were presumably deemed superfluous and sold for scrap. The Boleyn clock was a thoughtful and symbolic wedding gift, but it was also one of the most prestigious gifts the most powerful man in England could give. In Hogarth's painting, the symbolism of the wall-mounted domestic clock has now shifted diametrically, to become the ultimate symbol of miserliness and outmodedness. In Thomas More's family portrait, the clock serves as a central vanitas symbol by combining temporal luxury with the passage of time; now, the clock is the opposite of a prestige symbol and is a stark memento mori.

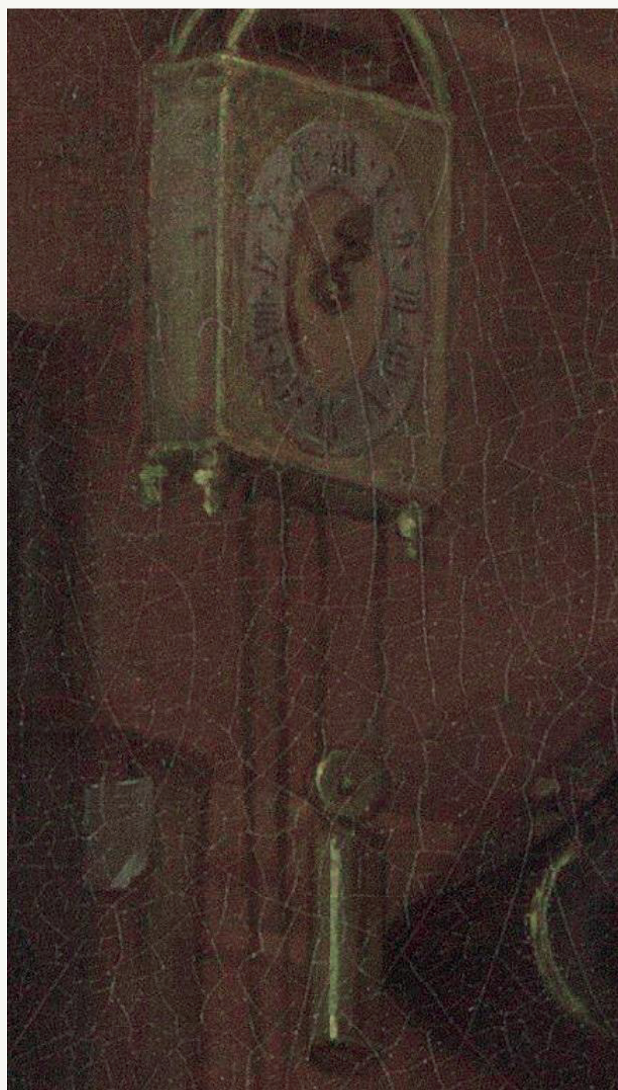

Figure 8: William Hogarth, detail from *Marriage A-la-Mode: 6. The Lady's Death.* Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons

By placing a lantern clock at the zenith of his painting, Hogarth demonstrates that popular esteem for these clocks had reached its nadir, and many were destroyed for scrap during this period. However, a shift in fashion saved a significant proportion from the melting pot. This shift had a strong link to Anne Boleyn's clock, which was acquired by an early antiquarian, Lady Germain, and subsequently gifted to Horace Walpole. Walpole was an important early figure in the English Gothic Revival. He was the author of the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and he built and furnished a home at Twickenham, Strawberry Hill House, in the Gothic style, beginning the new architectural and decorative arts trend that was to gather pace in the nineteenth century. Walpole proudly displayed the clock as a 'Gothic' artefact in his library at Strawberry Hill House. In a letter of 1760 to George Montagu, for example, he lewdly mentions showing it to

[11] Piss against the wall', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/piss_v?tab=meaning_and_use#30389580>.

the Duke of York: 'I showed him [...] Harry the Eighth's "measure", moulded into a weight to the clock he gave Anne Boleyn.'[12]

Chamber clocks thus became fashionable furnishing accessories. This trend is illustrated in Henry Shaw's influential neo-Gothic decorative arts book, which features a chamber clock on its title page (Figure 9);[13] authentic chamber clocks were rare, but the closely related and easily available English lantern clocks were a good substitute for them. As the taste for the Gothic declined, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the clocks were appreciated as antiques rather than as functional timekeepers or decorative furnishing accessories and were preserved in many private and public collections, saving them for posterity.

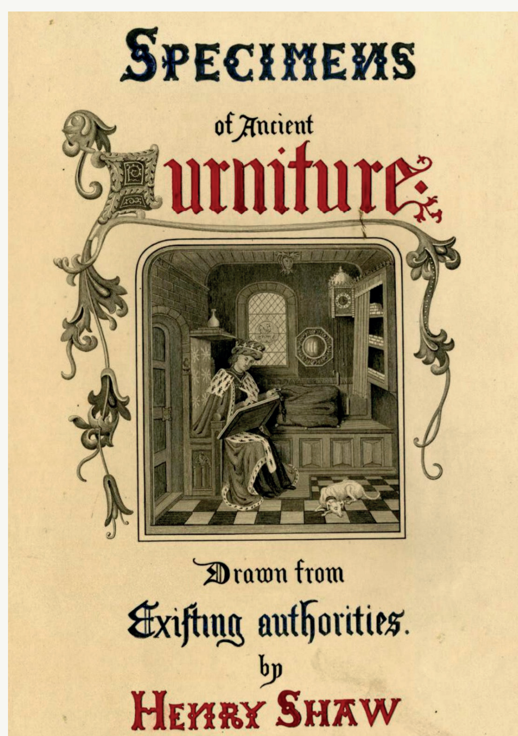

Figure 9: Title page for Henry Shaw, *Specimens of Ancient Furniture, Drawn from Existing Authorities* (London, 1836). Image obtained from Wikimedia Commons

Anne Boleyn's wedding gift and Hogarth's painting together tell a captivating tale of English decorative arts, scientific and technological progress, and societal concepts of time spanning over two centuries. The narratives of their own survival are also not without colour. Hogarth listed his *Marriage A-la-Mode* series for sale by auction by noon on June 6, 1751; however, it garnered interest from only two bidders, with one individual acquiring the set for 120 guineas. Subsequently, the series was sold again at Christie's for one thousand guineas in 1796, before finding a permanent home in the National Gallery in 1824.[14] After Walpole's death without issue in 1797, Strawberry Hill House passed by descent to a series of increasingly profligate relatives. The last of these orchestrated the 'Great Sale' of 1842, during which the majority of Walpole's collection was sold over the course of a week.[15] Queen Victoria acquired Anne Boleyn's clock at the auction on May 13, 1842, for 105 guineas, and it is now displayed in the Royal Collection.[16]

[12] Quoted in Cedric Jagger, *Royal Clocks, the British Monarchy and its Timekeepers 1300-1900* (London: Robert Hale, 1983).
[13] Henry Shaw, *Specimens of Ancient Furniture, Drawn from Existing Authorities* (London, 1836).
[14] National Gallery, 'Marriage A-la-Mode', <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/william-hogarth-marriage-a-la-mode-6-the-ladys-death#painting-group-info> .
[15] Strawberry Hill House official website, 'Strawberry Hill House History', <https://www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk/the-house/history/ .
[16] Royal Collection Trust, 'Anne Boleyn Clock', https://www.rct.uk/collection/30018/anne-boleyn-clock>.

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DEBRA WINTER

'Metal More Attractive': Shelley's Arctic Frame and Nineteenth-Century Polar Exploration

Drawing parallels between early nineteenth century historical accounts of Arctic expeditions, notably Sir John Barrow's advocacy for exploration in the Quarterly Review, and Shelley's portrayal of the Arctic as a sublime yet perilous landscape, this article aims to illuminate the intertwined themes of colonialism, scientific inquiry, and Romantic sensibility towards nature. The era's exploration efforts, fueled by a mix of scientific ambition and nationalistic pride, significantly influenced Shelley's narrative, where the Arctic represents both the ultimate challenge and a reflection of human ambition and isolation. Reports such as Barrow's writings shaped public perception of the Arctic as a realm of scientific potential and British national prestige, while Shelley's Frankenstein offers a critical perspective on the consequences of human overreach and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. Through an examination of Barrow's promotion of Arctic exploration and Shelley's nuanced representation of the region, the text highlights the complex relationship between the period's enthusiasm for discovery and its manifestations in culture and literature.

The British foray into Arctic exploration can be traced back to the late sixteenth century with the voyages of Martin Frobisher in 1576, which aimed at finding a northwest passage to Asia.[1] These early attempts laid the groundwork for a centuries-long fascination with the Arctic, culminating in a surge of expeditions during the early and mid-nineteenth century. By this time, the quest to chart unknown territories, pursue scientific research, and claim national glory had captured the British public's imagination, making Arctic journeys a popular and symbolic aspect of Britain's adventurous spirit in the era. Newspapers and journals satiated public curiosity by publishing accounts of the Arctic's strange terrain and explorers' perilous voyages, such as geographer and civil servant Sir John Barrow's (1764–1848) in the *Quarterly Review*. This type of Arctic inspiration was likely the case when Mary Shelley (1797-1851) included a frame narrative

[1] Thomas H. B. Symons, and others, editors, *Meta Incognita: A Discourse of Discovery – Volume 2: Martin Frobisher's Arctic Expeditions, 1576-1578* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), via Internet Archive https://archive.org/details/metaincognitadis0000unse/page/8/mode/2up [Accessed 01 Feb 2024], p. 7.

with scenes of Arctic exploration in her novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), as the topography captured the explorative fervour of the moment.[2] An examination of Barrow's article 'On the Polar Ice and Northern Passage into the Pacific' in the *Quarterly Review* (October 1817), alongside Captain Walton's letters, which scaffold the Arctic frame in *Frankenstein*, illuminate how the themes of colonialism, scientific inquiry, and misguided ambition in Arctic exploration culture influenced Shelley's work as well as the Arctic in the British imagination.[3]

The Enlightenment fostered a rigorous pursuit of knowledge, with scientific societies and institutions burgeoning across Europe. In Britain, the Royal Society (1660) and the Admiralty, of which Barrow was the second secretary, became pivotal in sponsoring voyages to discover new trade routes, chart unknown territories, and advance natural history. The search for the Northwest Passage, a direct sea route from the Atlantic to the Pacific, became a national obsession, driven by the promise of commercial and strategic advantages.[4] Parallel to this scientific impetus was the Romantic movement, which revered nature's power and mystery. The Arctic's desolate terrain and formidable dangers embodied the sublime, an aesthetic concept that evoked the awe and terror of nature's grandeur and immensity. This, combined with imperialism's unquenchable thirst for land and knowledge, made the Arctic an excellent location to draw creative inspiration for *Frankenstein*.

Barrow played a direct role in shaping public perception of the Arctic and directly influenced the trajectory of British Arctic exploration. As second secretary to the Admiralty, he was instrumental in promoting and organising expeditions to the Arctic. Barrow's anonymous writings in the *Quarterly Review* reported on these ventures and advocated for British engagement in the Arctic, framing it as a realm of scientific potential and national prestige.[5] Barrow's authorship, however, was thinly disguised, and in 1818, *The Edinburgh Review* published a vehement anti-Barrow piece, which was widely circulated. Nevertheless, Barrow leveraged the literary legacy of adventure that the Arctic attracted. He demonstrates this in his writing:

> [...] to ascertain the existence of the Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific is peculiarly a British object. It engaged the attention and obtained the encouragement of the first literary characters and the most respectable mercantile men in the earliest periods of British navigation.[6]

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[2] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, edited by Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[3] John Barrow, 'On Polar Ice and Northern Passage into the Pacific', *Quarterly Review* (Feb 1817), pp. 199–223, (p. 222).
[4] Shelley, Introduction by Nick Groom, p. xxviii; Groom notes that by the time Frankenstein was published there was a government bounty of £20,000 available for traversing the passage'; Barrow also wrote about this bounty in his article as well (Barrow p. 213).
[5] Kim Wheatley, 'The Arctic in the Quarterly Review', *European Romantic Review* 20.4 (2009), p. 465. Wheatley writes 'Barrow used the anonymity of the Quarterly to advance his imperialistic agendas and conducting a feud against the explorer John Ross'.
[6] Barrow, pp. 212–13.

Barrow writes with notable authority despite his polar experience being limited to a summer Greenland expedition at 16 years old. His serial articles helped shape public perception of the Arctic, portraying it as a field for heroic, British-national self-fashioning.

In contrast, Shelley, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, depicted the polar region with imagery of forbidding ice and the untold secrets of nature. The Arctic symbolised the ultimate challenge to the era's navigational and scientific prowess, as well as serving as a portal of catharsis for her characters. She famously began writing *Frankenstein* while visiting Lord Byron at Lake Geneva with her soon-to-be husband, Percy Shelley, in the unusually cold, wet summer of 1816. The story underwent many revisions to become the book published in January 1818. Shelley's diary notes point to her having read the *Quarterly Review* on many occasions, along with other old voyages.[7] Shelley's choice of the epistolary format in her Arctic frame aligns with the many first-person accounts of harrowing expeditions and risky travel, mimicking the serial instalments by Barrow and others found in newspapers and journals. Shelley's novel, with its many themes including: creation, colonialism, ambition, and the natural world's overpowering force, reflects the period's scientific curiosity combined with Romantic sensibility.

Barrow's article opens with a brief scathing review of Lieutenant Chappell's book *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay* before abruptly shifting focus to what he refers to as 'metal more attractive' – namely, British global expansion and finding a Northern Arctic passage.[8] While he presents a seemingly science-based survey of the Arctic, with temperature charts and Arctic maps noted with 'probable directions of icebergs', the article is equally laden with the era's high explorative and colonial aspirations, noting 'that parliaments tendered a reward of 20,000L for effecting a discovery interesting to humanity, to science, and commerce'.[9]

Barrow painstakingly builds the case for renewing polar explorations based on a mix of scientific and geographic quests, such as remedying the maps of the regions with a more scientific precision as well as national interests. He is uninhibited by previous arctic failures, instead using them as a call to action. Barrow writes, 'It is a humiliating fact that the last four expeditions [are] out for discovery in this quarter session to [build] the knowledge of the geography of the seas and items, which had been acquired 200 years before'.[10] He uses subtle admonishment combined with a sense of urgency to evoke a sense of duty to continue Arctic exploration for the nation's sake. Much of the exploring was left to private industries, particularly fur, whose interests in exploration were dictated by profit. For example, Barrow

[7] Janice Cavell, 'The Sea of Ice and the Icy Sea: The Arctic Frame of Frankenstein', *Arctic* 70.3 (2017) pp. 295–307 (p. 295).
[8] Barrow, p. 199; A popular phrase during this period, originally from William Shakespeare, 'Hamlet', *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919) Act 3. Scene 2. Line 116.
[9] Barrow, p. 213.
[10] Barrow, p. 213.

criticises the Hudson Bay Company's charts as being 'reserved for their own exclusive use' and points to the competition and secrecy among companies vying for control and profit in these regions.[11] In addition, he notes that the Admiralty charts of Hudson Bay were defective and desired to correct these with accurate knowledge to improve navigation and geographical understanding. However, Barrow's interests reached further than geographical improvement; he exemplified British Imperial aims to control the land, the sea, and their resources and commanded an impressive amount of interest through his platform offered by the *Quarterly Review*.[12]

While both works explore individuals driven by the pursuit of a northern passage, the narrative forms convey this interest differently. Barrow leverages his professional status within the journal nonfiction format, which amplifies his scientific authority. At the same time, Walton simply recounts his meagre work experience, self-educated history, and weakening emotional state through letters he writes to his sister, Margaret Saville. The letters unfold in a series of nested narratives in which Walton portrays himself as a disillusioned poet who is now the captain of a ship. After only six years of training with whalers, he is on a voyage to the Arctic in pursuit of knowledge and discovery. The letters introduce the reader to the central narrative of scientist Victor Frankenstein, who conveys the story of his creation (the Creature). Frankenstein's obsessive pursuit of knowledge mirrors Walton's, reflecting the early nineteenth century's fascination with Arctic exploration, which was deeply intertwined with colonial ambitions. He writes, 'I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man'.[13] Largely uncharted by Britain and perceived as a blank space on the map, despite the known indigenous populations, the Arctic represented the ultimate frontier for European imperial powers and could be seen as a new colonial frontier.[14] Walton imagines that, if successful, he will have provided an 'inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind', echoing Barrow's previously mentioned writings on rewards for 'discovery interesting to humanity, to science, and commerce.' While Walton focuses on the prize of glory, fame, and scientific inquiry, Shelley inserts a counterargument to colonial aspirations in Victor's narration:

> [...] If no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and

[11] Barrow, p. 199.

[12] Jessica Richard, '"A paradise of my own creation": Frankenstein and the improbable romance of polar exploration', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 25.4 (2003), p. 300.

[13] Shelley, Letter One, p. 8.

[14] Laurie Garrison, 'Imperial Vision in the Arctic: Fleeting Looks and Pleasurable Distractions in Barker's Panorama and Shelley's Frankenstein', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 52 (2008), https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ravon/2008-n52-ravon2573/019804ar/, para. 1.

> the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed.

This powerful sentiment is further punctuated by Victor apologising for 'moralising' and Walton's portrayal as uninterested, prompting Victor to say, 'your looks remind me to proceed'.[15] Mirroring Arctic exploration enthusiasts like Barrow, Shelley's Arctic narrative strategy illuminates how scientific curiosity somehow justified colonial aspirations, and how these ideologies permeated the early-nineteenth-century literary imagination.

With much unknown in the early nineteenth century, the science in both writings takes on a magical quality. For instance, Barrow is concerned with the 'magnetic needle', noting the following:

> [It] will point to its unknown magnetic pole or fly round from the point of the bowl in which it is suspended, and that which indicated north will now be south; the east will become the west, and the hour of noon will be that of midnight.[16]

In parallel, Walton writes of his interest in ascertaining 'the secrets of the magnet', stating, 'I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle and may regulate a thousand celestial observations that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent forever'.[17] Aligned with the era's focus on the earth's magnetic properties and the importance of empirical observations to prove this, Walton intends to perform celestial observations to comprehend the magnetic forces at the pole, as Barrow hopes to unlock these mysteries as well.

Analogous to this, Shelley utilises the mystery of the polar region to invoke feelings of alienation and desolation in her characters. The isolation provokes Walton to feel intense loneliness, thus impelling him to forge an instant bond with Frankenstein when the latter is rescued from a 'large fragment of ice.' Shelley mentions ice over forty times: 'the irregular plain of ice', 'being surrounded by ice', 'lost among the distant inequalities of the ice', conveys an abiding interest in ice – specifically, melting ice, as indicated by his copious quotations from eyewitness accounts of large swathes of moving icebergs.

Similar to Shelley's fictional account of the Arctic ice as a force that can surround and isolate, Barrow's detailed Arctic descriptions create intrigue while demonstrating his well-developed storytelling capabilities by referencing the 'ill-fated Norwegian or Dutch who colonised Greenland' four hundred years prior who were sealed up by impenetrable ice and cut off from civilisation and weaving the mystery throughout the article. He speculates that, now that the ice is melting, 'some remains may be found, some vestiges be traced, which may throw light on their condition, after the fatal closing of the ice upon them', suggesting that further Arctic exploration could shed light on the mystery.[18] The result is a nonfiction article, utilising

[15] Shelley, p. 36.
[16] Barrow, p. 222.
[17] Shelley, Letter One, p. 8.
[18] Barrow, p. 211.

novelistic forms to raise tension and stakes for the reader, hopefully capturing their interest to support future Arctic expeditions.

Despite the hopeful imagining of colonial opportunities and scientific discovery, both men demonstrate varying levels of misguided obsession. Walton's letters convey a deep yearning for discovery and exploration, embodying the era's fascination with the unknown and sublime. He dreamily hopes to discover a northern passage to the Pacific, driven by a romanticised notion of the Arctic as a place of wonders and paradisiacal qualities despite the dangers and challenges inherent in such an endeavour. He expresses it as a place 'where snow and frost are banished', envisioning an expedition filled with discovery and splendour. Walton writes, 'I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight'. He further imagines '[...] sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe ... What may not be expected in a country of eternal light?'[19]

Despite his predecessors' Arctic voyage narratives suggesting a cold, inhospitable polar environment, Walton envisions an ice-free Arctic – a heavenly utopia. This idealised view underscores Walton's obsession with finding a paradise in the unlikeliest places, driven by a longing for glory and knowledge.

Similarly, Barrow displays an insistent belief in a navigable water passage through the Arctic throughout his *Quarterly Review* article and the subsequent instalments. His misguided obsession is evident by his persistent promotion of perilous expeditions despite numerous failures and losses in the past and conflating the observations of melting ice with an open sea while ignoring prominent maritime captains and scientists who published opposing views.[20] Barrow's fixation on this geographical myth led to the significant misallocation of resources and loss of human life in pursuit of national glory, often overshadowing the ethical considerations and practical implications of such endeavours.[21] Barrow urged men onward to find the open polar sea to garner public support for the missions;[22] Meanwhile, with Walton, we witness diminishing ambition despite Frankenstein's volleying cry to push onward.[23] After being trapped in ice, Walton concedes failure as he turns the ship around, and this could be considered as an indication of Shelley's political perspective against colonial enterprise. Walton's decision to abort their mission ironically mirrors past failed expeditions that Barrow narrates with such disdain. Through the different narratives, one fictional and one historical, Walton and

[19] Shelley, Letter One, p. 8.
[20] Constance Martin, 'William Scoresby, Jr. (1789-1857) and the Open Polar Sea - Myth and Reality' *Arctic*, pp. 41, 39-47 (p. 44).
[21] Fergus Fleming, *Barrow's Boys: A Stirring Story of Daring, Fortitude, and Outright Lunacy*. (New York: Grove Press, (1998) p. 423; similar sentiment in Wheatley, p. 469.
[22] Wheatley, p. 465.

Barrow share a misguided obsession with the Arctic, viewing it through a lens of idealism rather than the harsh reality the Arctic location and freezing climate represent.

By situating her tale within the context of Arctic exploration, Shelley underscores the significance of the Arctic as more than a setting; it reflects the period's exploratory zeitgeist demonstrated in the interplay between historical facts and the fictional epistolary narrative in her work. *Frankenstein* highlights contemporary accounts of exploration and conquest, framing Walton's journey as part of a larger discourse on colonialism, scientific inquiry, and misguided obsession. The dream of an open polar sea in the mind of Walton and Barrow is one of their imaginations – a location never to be reached, as the 'metal more attractive' remains ever elusive.

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[23] Shelley, p. 165.

NIAMH SMITH

‘These Sad Relics’: Victorian Responses to the 1845 Franklin Expedition

This article will explore two diverging interpretations of the 1845 Franklin Expedition, through analysis of Edwin Landseer’s 1864 painting Man Proposes, God Disposes *and a sign from the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891. The sign, part of a display sanctioned by the Navy, glorifies Franklin and his crew as heroic martyrs who successfully discovered the Northwest Passage, depicting them as exemplars of British values. Landseer challenges this prevailing narrative with a pessimistic vision of the voyage’s horrific aftermath, with national confidence and naval heroism literally torn to pieces. By exploring these objects and their contextual backgrounds, the article will illuminate how historical events were constructed and contested during the Victorian period.*

On 19 May 1845, thousands of people witnessed the departure of the ships Erebus and Terror from Greenhithe.[1] Led by the famed explorer Sir John Franklin, the objective was to complete the charting of the Northwest Passage by venturing into unexplored regions of the Arctic. As time passed, no news arrived from the expedition and concern began to grow. Between 1847 and 1859, a total of thirty-six search parties were dispatched to the Arctic, firstly led by the Admiralty and subsequently organised by Lady Franklin, whose public appeals created great sympathy and galvanised interest in the ill-fated voyage.[2]

The expeditions sent to discover what had befallen the 129 crew members of Erebus and Terror returned with a diverse series of ‘fragmentary and weathered items’, ranging from a copy of Oliver Goldsmith’s novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* to a metal tin used to store pemmican (a mixture of tallow and dried meat commonly eaten on Arctic voyages).[3] These items were dubbed ‘relics’ upon their return to Britain and became an embodiment

[1] Logan Zachary, ‘A Franklin Expedition Guide to London’, *Illuminator Dot Blog*, 2021 <https://www.illuminator.blog/p/london-guide.html>.

[2] Huw Lewis-Jones, ‘‘Heroism displayed’: revisiting the Franklin Gallery at the Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891’, *Polar Record*, 41 (2005), pp. 185-203 (p. 196).

[3] Katie Murray, ‘Memorials of Endurance and Adventure: Exhibiting British Polar Exploration, 1819-c.1939’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2017), p. 120; ‘The Vicar of Wakefield’, *Royal Museums Greenwich*, n.d. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-2153>; ‘Pemmican tin’, *Royal Museums Greenwich*, n.d. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-2195>.

Figure 1: Edwin Landseer, *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, 1864, oil on canvas, Royal Holloway, University of London. Photo: Royal Holloway, University of London. Licensed under Creative Commons.

of the missing crew, with the intense publicity surrounding them indicative of the almost mythological status that the expedition was afforded by the Victorian public. However, mixed in with this veneration was a fear about what might have occurred in the Arctic to make these piecemeal objects the only remnants of what was a well-financed and extremely well-equipped expedition.

Sir Edwin Landseer's *Man Proposes, God Disposes* imagines a horrifying scene of hungry polar bears feasting on the remains of Franklin's crew (fig. 1). The painting was likely to have been inspired by the testimony of John Rae, a surgeon and explorer who had 'met with Esquimaux in Pelly Bay' and discovered evidence 'that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last resource – cannibalism – as a means of prolonging existence'.[4] Despite not directly portraying cannibalism, Landseer's allusions to Rae's notorious report, and his inclusion of telling details such as a ripped British ensign flag, undermined the national self-confidence that British 'science, industry and character could conquer the world'.[5] Conversely, the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition sought to sanitise Rae's highly controversial narrative and portray Franklin and his men as heroic patriots. A sign from one of the displays (figs. 2 and 3) is 'the most outstanding remnant of the 1891 Franklin Gallery to have survived to the present day', and is an excellent example of what Huw Lewis-Jones refers to as 'late-Victorian maritime hagiography'.[6] Immortalising the '129 souls' whose 'Fate and Achievements were [...] written for ever in their Country's History', the sign offers an insight into how this historic voyage was used to promote the Navy at a time of increasing international competition, and to instil British values such as 'Courage, Discipline,

[4] 'The Fate of Sir John Franklin', *Illustrated London News*, 28 October 1854, p. 421.
[5] Sophie Gilmartin, "'The cravings of nature': Landseer's *Man Proposes, God Disposes* and the Franklin Expedition', *Royal Holloway, University of London*, 2008 <https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/en/publications/the-cravings-of-nature-landseers-emman-proposes-god-disposesem-an>.
[6] Logan Zachary, 'These Sad Relics: A Franklin Expedition Guide to the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition', *Illuminator Dot Blog*, 2022 <https://www.illuminator.blog/p/1891-franklin-gallery.html>; Lewis-Jones, p. 186.

Figure 2: Framed notice relating to the Franklin Relics from the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Photo: Royal Museums Greenwich. Image licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND.

Figure 3: Framed notice relating to the Franklin Relics from the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Photo: Royal Museums Greenwich. Image licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND.

and Devotion to Duty' in those visiting.

Unlike the sign, which was purposefully created to feature in a gallery of objects related to the Franklin Expedition, Landseer's *Man Proposes, God Disposes* was first unveiled to the public as part of the 1864 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition held at Trafalgar Square.[7] The 62-year old Landseer saw his work given a key position within the East Room, surrounded largely by a diverse array of paintings by a new generation of young artists.[8] Despite the inclusion of several avant-garde works, including a series of frescoes by Albert Moore and James McNeill Whistler's aesthetic composition *Purple and Rose: Lange Liezen of the Six Marks*, *Man Proposes, God Disposes* became the most controversial work in the Exhibition.[9] Lady Franklin, who attended the opening soiree, naturally found the painting 'offensive'.[10] Contemporary newspapers such as *The Illustrated London News* (which had incidentally featured John Rae's report on the fate of the expedition) and *The Athenaeum* criticised the 'choice of subject' and its 'harrowing' imagery.[11] However, others

[7] *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts MDCCCLXIV (1864), the Ninety-Sixth* (London: William Clowes, 1864), p. 11.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Barbara Bryant, '1864', *The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle, 1769-2018*, 2018 <https://chronicle250.com/1864>.
[10] Ken McGoogan, *Lady Franklin's Revenge* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), p. 396.
[11] Jeannie Chapel, *Victorian Taste: The Complete Catalogue of Paintings at the Royal Holloway College* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1982), p. 103.

were more positive, praising the painting's 'tragic grandeur' and 'sublimity of sentiment'; in his account of the Exhibition, William Michael Rossetti described the work as 'first for popularity', suggesting that it had also found favour with the public.[12]

This general interest in the Franklin Expedition could be seen on a larger scale twenty-seven years later, at the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition, where an entire gallery was devoted to artefacts recovered by the various Arctic search parties, as well as related artworks, and recreations of a sledging party and the Ross Cairn (a key location on King William Island where the famous Victory Point Record was discovered in 1859).[13] Held in a temporary structure located in the grounds of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, the Exhibition lasted for five months, beguiling over 2.3 million visitors with its historical galleries, panoramas, mock sea battles, displays of engineering and weaponry, and even a life-size model of HMS Victory (complete with a wax tableau of the death of Nelson).[14]

Figure 4: The Franklin Gallery and the Seppings Gallery at the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition. Photo: Royal Museums Greenwich. Image licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND.

The Franklin Gallery (fig. 4), located just inside the entrance to the main building, was described in the Official Souvenir Guide as '[helping] the visitor to realise the great Arctic tragedy associated with that explorer's honoured name'.[15] Located in a central case were 'the scanty gleanings of the great quest', objects labelled 'these sad relics' by a framed, double-sided sign that can be seen in situ in contemporary photographs and illustrations (fig. 5).[16] Along with the rest of the Exhibition, the sign, and the relics it referred to,

[12] Gilmartin; Diana Donald, 'The Arctic Fantasies of Edwin Landseer and Briton Riviere: Polar Bears, Wilderness and Notions of the Sublime', *Tate*, 2010 <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/13/arctic-fantasies-of-edwin-landseer-and-briton-riviere-polar-bears-wilderness-and-notions-of-the-sublime>.

[13] Lewis-Jones, p. 192.

[14] 'Royal Naval Exhibition 1891 at Chelsea', *Royal Museums Greenwich*, n.d. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-553494>; Pieter van der Merwe, 'Views of the Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 3.1 (2001), pp. 146-156 (p. 147).

[15] *Royal Naval Exhibition 1891: The Illustrated Handbook and Souvenir* (London: Pall Mall Gazette, 1891), p. 7.

[16] Ibid., p. 6.; 'Framed notice relating to the Franklin Expedition relics from the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition at Chelsea', *Royal Museums Greenwich*, n.d. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-6553>.

Figure 5: Sketch of The Franklin Relics from *The Queen* (30 May 1891). Photo: National Library of Scotland. Image licensed under https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode.

functioned as propaganda tools for the Royal Navy, becoming what Huw Lewis-Jones calls 'piecemeal but crucial building blocks in the formation of heroic myths'.[17]

The Royal Naval Exhibition can be seen as part of a sustained publicity campaign by the Admiralty throughout the 1890s, 'aimed at raising awareness of, and reforming, the perceived weaknesses of the Royal Navy' in the face of expansion and technological advances by foreign navies in France, Russia and Germany.[18] Diagrams featured on the wall of the Exhibition's entrance lobby compared British naval expenditure to that of these European rivals, arguing for the necessity of investment in naval services to avoid what W. T. Stead of *The Pall Mall Gazette* called an 'Imperial calamity'.[19] Furthermore, foreign exhibits were entirely excluded, with an intense focus on British values, such as chivalry, integrity and patriotic heroism, and the heroes that were seen to embody them.[20] John MacKenzie compares the Exhibition's glorification of Sir John Franklin and other Victorian seamen to the 'canonisation' process of the Catholic Church, wherein new saints are created every generation to '[maintain] the energy of the Church, solidifying the loyalty of old adherents and inspiring the faith of the new'.[21] MacKenzie's parallel with Catholicism is especially interesting in relation to the Franklin Relics sign, which displays several characteristics of what Mike Horswell terms Victorian Crusader Medievalism, a nineteenth-century revival in medieval, and specifically crusading, imagery and rhetoric.[22] For example, the sign evokes the aesthetics of medieval illuminated manuscripts; the text is presented in an elaborate Gothic script, surrounded by an illuminated golden border featuring curled scrolls of paper, and a heraldic crown encircles the stem of the letter 'T' in a similar way to medieval historiated initials

[17] Lewis-Jones, p. 198.
[18] Van der Merwe, p. 146.
[19] Lewis-Jones, p. 187.
[20] Ibid., p. 188.
[21] John M. MacKenzie, 'Introduction', in *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 1-24 (p. 15).
[22] Mike Horswell, *The Rise and Fall of British Crusader Medievalism 1825-1945* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 3.

(perhaps a reference to the royal patronage of the Exhibition).

An intense interest in the Crusades throughout the Victorian period saw these 'penitential war-pilgrimages' repeatedly harnessed as a parallel to the numerous campaigns conducted by the British armed forces.[23] General Charles Gordon, an army officer who had served in illustrious campaigns in Crimea, China and Sudan, was one such military hero who emulated the ideal of the crusading warrior. In particular, the reaction to his death at the Siege of Khartoum exemplified the phenomenon of 'muscular Christianity', a term coined by T. C. Sandars in 1857 to describe 'an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself'.[24]

Gordon, renowned for his piety, was posthumously lauded as a 'knight' and 'the Youngest of the Saints', proving to be a useful figurehead for army recruitment.[25] The use of a quote by Gordon on the Franklin Relics sign ('England was made by her adventurers') seeks to locate Franklin and his men within this 'crusading' lineage. The ensuing search to discover what had happened to the Franklin Expedition was also frequently referred to in crusading terms, with Leopold McClintock, who led perhaps the most successful search party in the late 1850s, describing it as a 'holy cause'.[26] Interestingly, McClintock's wife Annette has been theorised as the writer of the Franklin Relics sign, as several of the featured phrases, such as the General Gordon quote and the triad of 'courage, discipline, and devotion to duty', are also present in a pamphlet she authored entitled *The Story of the Franklin Search, illustrative of the Franklin Relics brought together and exhibited in the Royal Naval Exhibition 1891*.[27]

Reading this short twelve-page booklet, Annette McClintock's motivations become apparent – much of the narrative is taken up by her husband's search party, who are characterised as 'valiant' and 'triumphant', bringing back 'the most interesting and the greatest portion of the Franklin Relics in this Exhibition'.[28] As a result, the sign can be seen as not only a tribute to John Franklin and his crew, but also an attempt to immortalise Leopold McClintock. The sign describes the virtues of the original expedition as being 'emulated by their Brother Seamen', and definitively lists 1859 as the date that the 'Fate and Achievements [of Franklin's crew] were clearly ascertained', showing McClintock in an extremely favourable light and overstating his importance in relation to others involved in the

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[23] Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 13.

[24] Donald E. Hall, 'Muscular Christianity: reading and writing the male social body', in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. by Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 3-16 (p. 8).

[25] Cynthia F. Behrman, 'The After-life of General Gordon', *Albion*, 3.2 (1971), pp. 47-61 (p. 50).

[26] Shane McCorristine, *The Spectral Arctic: A History of Dreams and Ghosts in Polar Exploration* (London: UCL Press, 2018), p. 220; Leopold McClintock, *The Voyage of the Fox in the Arctic Seas: A Narrative of the Discovery of the Fate of Sir John Franklin* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. xix.

[27] Zachary, 'These Sad Relics'; Annette McClintock, *The Story of the Franklin Search, illustrative of the Franklin Relics brought together and exhibited in the Royal Naval Exhibition 1891* (London: Samuel Sidders, 1891), p. 1, 12.

[28] Annette McClintock, p. 11-12.

search. John Rae's contribution is particularly downplayed, probably due to his 'very unsatisfactory' report which suggested that the crew members resorted to cannibalism.[29] The sign overlooks Rae's status as the first explorer to discover the Northwest Passage, instead concurring with Jane Franklin's assertion that her husband's crew completed this journey first ('They forged it's Last Link with their Lives').[30] As part of the Royal Naval Exhibition, the sign presented a version of the Franklin narrative that suited the aims of the Navy – creating two generations of 'saints' (the original expedition and the search parties it inspired) to encourage a wave of new recruits and public admiration, while invalidating the man whose disgraceful report had damaged national self-confidence.

In contrast, *Man Proposes, God Disposes* sought to counter the myths that existed around the Franklin Expedition. The painting was commissioned by one of Landseer's patrons, Edward Coleman, who had an active interest in the story and wanted a work that 'tied together the various known facts of the discovery'.[31] Many of the scattered objects depicted are referenced in Rae's report, which mentions 'the mutilated state of many of the corpses', represented in the painting by a polar bear chewing on a ribcage, as well as 'watches, compasses, telescopes, guns [...] all of which appear to be broken up'.[32] Landseer chooses to include a telescope in his composition, an object commonly used in artworks to symbolise foresight, ironically contrasting the scientific instrument with the conspicuous pools of blood adjacent to it.[33] The artist shows a desolate, bleak scene with only traces of humanity, in contrast to the Royal Naval Exhibition sign which uses verbs, such as 'forged' and 'made', to describe Franklin and his crew actively existing in the Arctic. Furthermore, whereas the sign espouses an overwhelmingly patriotic narrative, Landseer prominently features the red British ensign flag, used for the national identification of a ship, being ripped to pieces by one of the polar bears.[34]

Landseer's decision to cast these particular animals as the perpetrators of the expedition's demise raises a lot of questions. Andrew Moore has argued that Landseer was inspired by reading a section of Leopold McClintock's book *The Voyage of the Fox in the Arctic Seas*, in which he describes an encounter with a polar bear on 20 April 1858, but McClintock writes later in the same extract that 'no instance is known of Greenland bears attacking men, except when wounded or provoked'.[35] Moreover, the destruction of a skeleton later discovered by the

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[29] Charles Dickens, 'Sir John Franklin and His Crews', in *Household Words*, XI.16 (1855), pp. 12-20 (p. 12); *Illustrated London News*.
[30] Ken McGoogan, *Fatal Passage* (London: Bantam Press, 2001), p. 190; Gilmartin.
[31] Andrew Moore, 'Sir Edwin Landseer's "Man Proposes, God Disposes": And the fate of Franklin', *British Art Journal* 9.3 (2009), pp. 32-37 (p. 36).
[32] *Illustrated London News*.
[33] Alexi Baker, 'The Symbolism of Early Modern Scientific Instruments', *History of Science and Technology at Peabody Museum*, 2020 <https://peabodyhsi.wordpress.com/2020/09/03/the-symbolism-of-early-modern-scientific-instruments/>.
[34] Gilmartin.
[35] Leopold McClintock, p. 103.

search party is attributed to 'large and powerful animals, probably wolves'.[36] Landseer's choice of polar bears may be a conscious attempt to undermine the credibility of McClintock's account, which was widely accepted by the Victorian public when compared to Rae's less palatable report. An alternative theory is that the artist was inspired by a family of polar bears that he observed at London Zoo.[37] Landseer was commissioned by the government in 1858 to design the four bronze lion sculptures in Trafalgar Square, and visited the Zoo many times to '[study] the habits of lions'.[38] Due to the anatomical accuracy of the polar bears in *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, it is likely that he had seen the species first-hand.

Figure 7: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer (Wanderer above the Sea of Fog)*, 1817, oil on canvas, Hamburger Kunsthalle. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

By featuring a large and forbidding creature, surrounded by menacing icebergs, Landseer created a work that had many sublime attributes. Famously defined by Edmund Burke in his 1757 work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, sublimity is characterised by 'an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances'.[39] Although the appearance of the polar bears and the many dismembered objects inspire terror, and the landscape is appropriately dark and gloomy, 'self-preservation', which is a central theme in Burke's theory, is absent.[40] The factual basis of the work leaves no room for redeeming features, like the rainbow in John Constable's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (fig. 6), or

Figure 6: John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, 1831, oil on canvas, Tate Britain. Photo: Tate. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows-t13896. Image licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0.

[36] Leopold McClintock, p. 294.
[37] Chapel.
[38] Richard Ormond, *Sir Edwin Landseer* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1981), p. 207.
[39] Edmund Burke, 'A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful (1759)', in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 131-143 (p. 131-132).
[40] Burke, p. 132.

the light on the horizon of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (fig. 7).

Pessimism permeates through the composition – either divine wrath has 'disposed' of the Franklin expedition (as per the title) or 'Landseer's ferocious and amoral beasts [are instead] a symbolic stand-in' for the bestiality of man.[41] The 'muscular Christianity' represented by the Royal Naval Exhibition sign is contrasted by the painting's explicitly Darwinist narrative, where 'the strongest live and the weakest die', regardless of any heroism or piety.[42]

Figure 8: Richard Westall, *Nelson and the Bear*, c. 1806, oil on oak panel, National Maritime Museum. Photo: Royal Museums Greenwich. Image licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND.

In his choice of animal, Landseer also alludes to an incident in the life of Horatio Nelson; whilst serving as a midshipman, Nelson encountered a polar bear and ended up attacking it with the butt-end of his musket, eventually being saved when the ice drifted apart.[43] This scene was depicted by Richard Westall in his 1806 work *Nelson and the Bear* (fig. 8). Despite both works having a similar soft-hued palate, *Man Proposes, God Disposes* differs from Westall's work in several telling ways. The polar bears, which regard the viewer with a look of pure savagery in Landseer's painting, could not be further removed from Westall's tame creature, who looks almost scared at the sight of Nelson's musket. One ship sails majestically through the Arctic, whereas the other has been

Figure 9: Matthew Noble, *Sir John Franklin (The Franklin Expedition Monument)*, 1866, bronze, Waterloo Place, London. Photo: Niamh Smith.

[41] Donald.
[42] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 244.
[43] 'Nelson and the Bear', *Royal Museums Greenwich*, n.d. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-14380>.

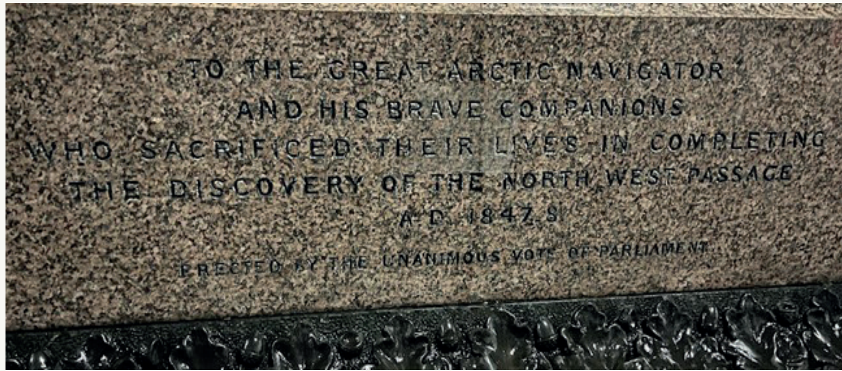

Figure 10: Inscription on plinth from Matthew Noble, *Sir John Franklin (The Franklin Expedition Monument)*, 1866, bronze, Waterloo Place, London. Photo: Niamh Smith.

broken to pieces in a similar way to its ensign flag and crew. While the Franklin voyage has met an untimely end with no survivors, Nelson will sail on to a distinguished career, becoming perhaps the most famous British naval hero. Indeed, Landseer was particularly familiar with the cult of Nelson, as his four lion sculptures were created to be placed at the foot of Nelson's Column. As a result, *Man Proposes, God Disposes* can be seen as demonstrating a reduced confidence in the Navy, where the successes of Nelson and his contemporaries have been replaced by failure and defeat at the hands of nature.

In Waterloo Place, just around the corner from Nelson's Column, there is a bronze statue of John Franklin (fig. 9). Unveiled in 1866, Matthew Noble's sculpture transforms 'a podgy, balding man of middling height [...] into a firm-jawed figure eight feet tall, perched on top of an imposing granite plinth'.[44] The plinth's inscription memorialises the expedition in a similar way to the Royal Naval Exhibition by stressing that the voyage had achieved its ambition: 'to the great Arctic navigator and his brave companions who sacrificed their lives in completing the discovery of the North West passage in 1847' (fig. 10). Objects, such as the exhibition sign and Annette McClintock's pamphlet, show that this was still the main narrative in the 1890s. However, over a century later, Rae's testimony, which had been discredited by the Victorian establishment, was proven to be correct; archaeologists ascertained that knife marks and 'pot polish' (a specific smoothness that bones develop after being cooked) on some of the human remains were signs of 'starvation cannibalism'.[45] With the discovery of the two ships (Erebus in 2014 and Terror in 2016) and their ongoing archaeological investigation, new narratives are likely to emerge in the coming decades and add to what we know about this infamous voyage.

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[44] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, 'Terror to Terror: How heroic lies replaced hideous reality after the Arctic death of Sir John Franklin', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 November 2009, pp. 3-4 (p. 3).

[45] Kristina Killgrove, ''Pot Polish' on Bones from Franklin's 1845 Arctic Expedition is Evidence of Cannibalism', *Forbes*, 2015 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristinakillgrove/2015/07/01/pot-polish-on-bones-from-franklins-1845-arctic-expedition-evidence-of-cannibalism/?sh=320606022ce7>.

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ELIZABETH REED

Worlds in Miniature: The Culpeper Microscope, Mary Leapor's 'The Enquiry', and the Social Construction of Science in the Eighteenth Century

The late seventeenth century was considered a golden age of microscopy. There were high hopes that this instrument would illuminate the world of the very small in the way that the telescope had revealed the distant objects of space. However, this excitement was relatively short-lived, and until fairly recently, the dominant historical narrative of the microscope has been that in the eighteenth century it made little contribution to scientific progress and was merely a plaything of the wealthy. This opinion has since been challenged, in particular making the argument that this view is based on a narrow idea of what is meant by scientific 'progress'. This article will consider The Enquiry*, a poem by Mary Leapor first published in 1748, and the Culpeper microscope, one of the most popular instruments in the period, to support a more sociological view of what is meant by scientific advancement.*

In 1665, the Royal Society published Robert Hooke's most famous work, *Micrographia*, 'the undoubted masterpiece of early microscopical research'[1] generating great excitement both among scientists, or 'natural philosophers', and the general public.[2] The book contained thirty-eight fold-out copperplate engravings of Hooke's drawings of the hugely-magnified objects that he had observed using his microscope, including a flea, a louse, and the eye of a fly. One ardent enthusiast was Samuel Pepys, who noted on the day he bought his copy, 'I sat up till two o'clock in my chamber reading Mr Hooke's Microscopical Observations, the most ingenious book that I ever read in my life.'[3]

It may come as some surprise that an instrument which is now so closely associated with scientific investigation, and which generated such excitement at the end of the seventeenth century, seemed to become no more than a toy throughout the eighteenth century. Until fairly recently, the dominant historical narrative of microscopy was that between the publication of *Micrographia* and

[1] Boris Jardine, 'Microscopes', in *A Companion to the History of Science*, ed. by Bernard Lightman (Ebook, Wiley, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118620762>, pp. 596-611, (p. 598).
[2] J. A. Bennett, 'The social history of the microscope', *Journal of Microscopy*, 5 (September 1989) pp. 267-280, (p. 268).
[3] Samuel Pepys in *S. Pepys' Diary, London*, ed. by H. B. Wheatley (1893), quoted in Bennett, p. 268.

the end of the century the microscope 'ceased to be an important scientific instrument and became the plaything of the aristocracy –most of all, of the "ladies."'[4] Much has been made of the words of Hooke himself, who lamented in 1692 that except by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, the use of the microscope had ceased to be used as a means of scientific investigation, but was instead employed

> for Diversion and Pastime, and that by reason it is become a portable Instrument, and easy to be carried in one's Pocket. If we enquire into the Reason of this Change of Humour ...we shall find that most of those, who formerly promoted these Enquiries, are gone off the Stage, and with the present Generation of Men the Opinion prevails, that the Subjects to be enquired into are exhausted, and no more is to be done.[5]

Hooke's opinion seems to be supported by the sharp decline in the publication of papers on microscopy after reaching a peak in the early 1680s.[6] One of the reasons cited for the relegation of the eighteenth-century microscope to the status of a plaything is its technical inadequacy. Poor optical correction, short focal lengths and small apertures meant that images were sometimes blurred and marred by chromatic aberration (colour fringes around the image). This meant that some 'observations' were optical effects produced by the instrument itself.[7] In addition, the microscope didn't quite substantiate what historians have called the 'mechanical philosophy' of the day: the complexity of the tiny organisms seen supported the broad theory of mechanical philosophy, but 'failed to reveal' the mechanical interactions of the tiny corpuscles that were thought to make up the material world.[8] Swirling around these technical issues was the ongoing debate about the relationship between appearances and reality, notably in the works of philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley and Hume.[9]

Meanwhile, popular interest in scientific instruments went from strength to strength – partly stimulated by public lecture demonstrations and a burgeoning trade in affordable and portable instruments such as those described by Hooke – so that by the middle of the century many homes had a collection of scientific apparatus including air-pumps, telescopes, and microscopes, which

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[4] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Microscope and English Imagination*, (Northampton, Mass., Smith College, 1935) p. 22. See also Catherine Wilson, *The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 226, M. J. Ratcliff, 'Wonders, Logic, and Microscopy in the Eighteenth Century: A History of the Rotifer', *Science in Context*, 13, 1 (2000), pp. 93-119, (p. 93), G. L'E. Turner, 'Eighteenth-Century Scientific Instruments and Their Makers' in *The Cambridge History of Science. Volume 4, Eighteenth Century Science*, ed. by Roy Porter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 511-535, (p. 525), and Bennett, p. 270.

[5] Robert Hooke, *Philosophical Experiments and Observations of the Late Eminent Dr Robert Hooke* (London: W. Derham, 1726), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ucm.532510710x&seq=5>, p. 261.

[6] Marian Fournier, 'The Fabric of Life: The Rise and Decline of Seventeenth-Century Microscopy', (doctoral thesis, University of Nijmegen, 1991), p.187, quoted in Wilson, p. 227.

[7] Turner, p. 525, and Savile Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967) p. 105.

[8] Bennet, p. 267 and p. 268.

[9] See Catherine Wilson, in particular Chapter 7, 'The Microscope Superfluous and Uncertain', pp. 215-216 for a fuller discussion of these philosophical debates.

were used for informative entertainment.[10] Unsurprisingly, this had a wide-ranging cultural impact, and influenced a great deal of literary output in this period, not least among poets who were inspired to think anew about humanity's place in a universe which seemed to have become infinitely expanded thanks to optical instruments. In an influential work on the impact of the microscope, Marjorie Hope Nicolson observes:

> Through the microscope there emerge new themes for literature, and, more than that, new conceptions which were to influence aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, and the conception of Deity and of Man.[11]

One well-known example of a poem inspired by these ideas is Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733-1734). Pope explores the Renaissance idea of a 'chain of being' – a continuous, graduated hierarchy encompassing everything in God's creation, from 'what no eye can see' up to God himself. Each link in the chain is perfectly formed for its specific place and function within the hierarchy; man's ability to both perceive and comprehend the world is fitted for his place in the chain:

> Why has not Man a microscopic eye?
> For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly.
> Say what the use, were finer optics giv'n,
> T'inspect a mite, not comprehend the heav'n?[12]

As the above lines suggest, Pope is sceptical about the use of instrument-aided vision, proposing that being able to see more will in no way aid man's understanding of deep philosophical questions; his knowledge is 'measur'd to his state and place' (71), and that to this 'due degree/Of blindness' man must 'Submit' (283-285).

Mary Leapor (1722-1746) was heavily influenced by Pope,[13] and 'The Enquiry', first published in *Poems upon Several Occasions* in 1748, shortly after Leapor's death aged only twenty-four from measles, takes up many of Pope's themes.[14] The daughter of a gardener (later a nurseryman) she lived in or within a short radius of Brackley, Northamptonshire, her entire life. Biographical information about her is quite thin; however it is known that she worked for some time as a kitchen maid and that during her short life she was prolific enough that she was quite well known for her writings in the area around her home.[15]

'The Enquiry' is a flight of fancy, musing on the wonders of the universe from the stars and planets to 'Creatures which no Eye can see' (38), and, notably, suggesting that the natural world provides an inexhaustible resource for man's curiosity:

> Wou'd Heav'n permit, and might our Organs bear
> To pierce where Comets wave their blazing Hair:
> Where other Suns alternate set and rise;

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[10] Turner, p. 517.
[11] Nicolson, p. 3.
[12] Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, in David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (eds), *Eighteenth Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, 3rd edn (England: Wiley, Blackwell 2015), pp. 184-192, (lines 193-196).
[13] Preface to Leapor's 1748 *Poems on Several Occasions*, referenced in Ibid., p. 272.
[14] Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth Century Women's Poetry*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1993), p. 22.
[15] Greene, pp. 4-18.

And other Moons light up the cheerful Skies:
The ravish'd Soul might still her Search pursue,
Still find new Wonders op'ning on her view:
From thence to Worlds in Miniature descend,
And still press forward, but shou'd find no End: (45-52)

The poem tackles the same philosophical issues addressed by Pope, but whereas he exhorts man to submit to the God-given limits of his vision and understanding, Leapor challenges this idea:

Then tell me, why our Eyes were made to view
Those Orbs that glister in the fluid Blue?
Why in our Sight those shining Wonders roll?
Or why to Man was giv'n a thinking Soul? (7-10).

Leapor strikingly asserts her personal right to ask big questions:

May I not ask how moves the radiant Sun?
How the bright Stars their pointed Circuits run? (11-12)

She also longs to be able to see the tiny wonders of creation:

All Matter lives, and shews its Maker's Power
There's not a Seed but what contains a Flower:
Tho' unobserv'd its secret Beauty lies,
Till we are blest with Microscopick Eyes. (65-68)

The echo of Pope's 'microscopic eye' invites comparison with his *Essay*, but instead of his confident assertions about an ordered universe, Leapor offers us a diffident yet excited curiosity about God's handiwork.

As mentioned above, the popular interest in microscopy was assisted by the rapid growth in the availability of affordable instruments. In the early days of microscopy, few would have been able to see for themselves what Hooke depicted in *Micrographia*. Pepy's microscope was made to order in 1663 and cost five pounds ten shillings, 'a great price'.[16] Indeed it was: this would have equated to seventy-eight days, or over two and a half months' wages, for a skilled tradesman.[17] One instrument maker who exploited the demand for more affordable instruments was Edmund Culpeper. Culpeper (c.1670-1737) was a mathematical instrument maker who had been apprenticed to Walter Hayes in Moorfields, London. It is probable that Culpeper took over Hayes' business on his death in 1685 and continued trading with his 'Cross Daggers' trade mark until at least 1738. From about 1700, Edmund Culpeper had been making single-lens 'pocket' microscopes, as evidenced by his trade card, and also made portable 'Wilson-type' compound microscopes that could be disassembled and carried in a box, such as that shown in Figure 1.[18] In 1710 he advertised:

several sorts of new contrived Microscopes ... I may boldly say, no one but my self in the Kingdom has the like variety of 'em.[19]

[16] Nicolson, p. 22.
[17] £5 10 shillings in 1660 converted at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter>.
[18] A compound microscope has two lenses, an 'objective' lens, and a second eyepiece lens near the user's eye.
[19] W. Hackmann, and Anita McConnell, 'Culpeper, Edmund (c. 1670–1737), scientific instrument maker', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January, 2008, retrieved from <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37330>.

The Wilson microscopes were hugely popular and were sold widely by instrument makers and opticians and it is most likely this type that was referred to by Hooke.[20]

Figure 1: Compound Culpeper-Wilson microscope by Edward Scarlett, Science Museum Group Collection Online, © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. This image is released under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Licence

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the microscope's use for 'Diversion and Pastime' was well established and was considered particularly appealing to women, as evidenced in a letter to a 1745 issue of the *Female Spectator*.[21] Signed *Philo-Naturae*, the letter suggests that on their 'little excursions they make in the fields' women should take a microscope, which is 'as portable as a snuff box' for the examination of insects and the like. The pursuit of 'natural philosophy', *Philo-Naturae* argues, is not only less intellectually demanding than the works of Newton and others, but would provide women with a richer source of conversational subject matter than those afforded by the usual topics of fashion and 'the repetition of what fine things have been said to them by their admirers'.

The women being addressed here sound rather like the *Virtuosae* or 'learned ladies' who were often the target of satirists: well-to-do women taking an 'eager, if superficial, interest' in the observations afforded by microscopes.[22] This explosion in the popular interest in science in the eighteenth century might have slightly prejudiced historians of this period in the past. A more positive historical view of the microscope's role in the eighteenth century has emerged in recent years partly due to developments in the philosophy of science, which since the late 1970s has argued for a 'social constructionist' approach, claiming that scientific knowledge is not 'discovered' but 'constructed', and involves 'many people, doing many different kinds of things.'[23] Not everyone's interest in Natural Philosophy was superficial, and while these 'amateur' scientists might not have written papers for presentation to the Royal Society, they nonetheless contributed to the programme of scientific advancement

[20] Jardine, p. 602.

[21] Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, 4 vols, III, April 27 1745, (Glasgow: Printed and sold by R. Chapman and A. Duncan, 1775), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CB0129018084/ECCO?u=oxford&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=1c4e6162&pg=124>,pp. 123-135.

[22] Nicolson, p. 41.

[23] Lynn K. Nyhart, 'Historiography of the History of Science', in *A Companion To the History of Science* ed. by Lightman, pp.36-53, (p.38) and Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd edn, (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 86-87.

as their involvement became 'part of a general education process.'[24]

Instrument makers are now considered to be a key part of this narrative, and Culpeper's decision to design his own microscope perhaps illustrates that he had identified a more serious segment of the 'amateur' market. Culpeper was already supplying portable microscopes such as those described in *The Female Spectator*, yet at some time between 1720 and 1725 he designed a microscope that would 'sweep away' the larger microscopes such as that used by Hooke and would become one of the most popular models for the next century.[25] Culpeper's tripod model (Figure 2) differed from the 'single-pillar' type used by Hooke (Figure 3) and Marshall (Figure 4). Its design meant that it was easy to construct and therefore relatively cheap to manufacture.[26]

Figure 3: Full size copy of Robert Hooke's original compound microscope. Science Museum Group Collection Online, © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. This image is released under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Licence

Figure 2: Culpeper microscope with pasteboard body tube and black shagreen support, on flat round base, English, circa 1740. Science Museum Group Collection Online, © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. This image is released under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Licence

Figure 4: Microscope by Marshall, c. 1700, with 6 objectives and other accessories. Science Museum Group Collection Online, © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. This image is released under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Licence

[24] Turner, p. 534. Turner also makes the point that there was not really a distinction between 'amateur' and 'professional' scientist in this period. Many important scientific advances were made by people who did not earn their living by study.
[25] Bradbury, p.106 and Reginald S. Clay and Thomas H. Court, 'The Development of the Culpeper Microscope', *Journal of the Royal Microscopical Society*, 45.2 (1925), pp. 167-173, (p.168).
[26] Bradbury, p. 106 and p. 109.

As can be seen, the Culpeper design is more streamlined and less cumbersome than the single-pillar types and would have been lighter. The Hooke microscope shown in Figure 3 weighs 3.45kg. The weight of the original Culpeper microscope would probably have been less than 2kg.[27] Despite its popularity, and widespread imitation by other instrument makers, Culpeper's microscope has been described as a 'definite regression' in design, largely because the tripod legs made turning specimen slides on the 'stage' rather awkward.[28] Also, Culpeper's design employed existing lens technology, with all its technical limitations. Optical aberrations sometimes gave false observations, a feature which had contributed to scepticism about the use of the microscope as a scientific instrument.[29] It is these factors that have tended to lead people to dismiss his microscope as a 'plaything'.[30]

However, Culpeper's microscope introduced an extremely important innovation – a concave mirror mounted in a gimbal which concentrated the light, greatly improving the illumination of specimens, which has been described as 'surely one of the greatest' steps in the development of the microscope.[31] Also, its relatively low cost meant that like the 'portable' microscopes, it was widely used, and this had several consequences. The popularity of the microscope stimulated improvements in instrument design and helped to develop many of the skills required, such as specimen preparation.[32] Indeed it has been noted that 'amateur' users often had skills 'far exceeding [those] of the professional scientist'.[33] It also fostered and promoted the instrument trade in Britain and Europe and encouraged funding from various agencies including learned societies, governments and wealthy individuals.[34] Hence the assertion that the eighteenth century was a fallow period for the microscope is an argument based on a dearth of microscopic 'discovery' (probably because of the relatively poor images which would not be corrected until lens technology improved in the nineteenth century) and ignores the advances that were made in microscopic practice.[35]

Sadly for Leapor, even the relatively cheap Culpeper microscope is likely to have been out of her reach financially. A kitchen maid was usually the lowliest type of servant, and she probably earned less than £4 per year.[36] Also she was not in the happy position of needing 'diversion and pastime,' or having the time to go on 'little excursions' in the fields; her days would have been amply filled by her long list of duties:

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[27] A Culpeper-type microscope by George Adam's in the Science Museum Collection weighs 1.99kg. <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co444363/culpeper-microscope-microscope>

[28] Bradbury, p. 110.

[29] See Turner, p. 525 and Bradbury, p. 105.

[30] Janet Fricker, 'The Culpeper Microscope', in *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, December 1986, quoting Dr Brian Bracegirdle, p. 582.

[31] Clay and Court, p. 168.

[32] Bradbury, p. 105.

[33] Ibid., p. 105.

[34] See Jardine, p. 604, and Turner, pp. 534-535.

[35] Jardine p. 604.

[36] Greene, p. 1 and p. 17.

these included cooking 'the butcher's meat & all manner of fowls,' cleaning all the rooms below stairs, the servants quarters, and both 'great & little' stairs, scouring the pewter and brass, and 'anything she is ordered.'[37] It is little wonder that her poetic output was occasionally at the expense of her paid responsibilities: in a letter to *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1784 it was noted that 'her fondness for writing verses ... displayed itself by her sometimes taking up her pen while the jack was standing still, and the meat scorching.'[38]

This context throws a slightly different light on lines 65-68 of 'The Enquiry' and Leapor's portrayal of the 'secret Beauty' of the flower within the seed, unseen by man in the absence of 'Microscopick Eyes.' Leapor's assertion that these tiny wonders of nature are 'unobserv'd' is a little strange, as she was undoubtedly aware of the use of microscopes: her poem bears striking similarities to an essay by Joseph Addison in *The Tatler* in 1709:

> Your Microscope can show you in it a compleat Oak in miniature ... you might pluck an Acorn from this little Oak, which contains another tree.[39]

Compare this image with lines 59-61 in 'The Enquiry':

> Pluck off yon Acorn from its Parent Bough,
> Divide that Acorn in the midst – and now
> In its firm Kernel a fair Oak is seen.

It should be stressed that Addison is not describing actual microscopic observations, but rather what he imagines, as does Leapor: the point is that the potential for microscopic vision was widely known. So is Leapor, like Pope, rejecting the validity of instrument-aided vision? The following lines suggest that Leapor wants to make a different point. She contends that when we eat a cherry or a plum, we are also swallowing a (potential) tree:

> And so destroy whole Groves that else wou'd be
> As large and perfect as those Shades we see.' (72-3)

The microscope has raised awareness of the sub-visible world, and her playful image draws attention to important philosophical questions about humans' role in nature. Another interpretation might be that this is a reflection on her personal circumstances. Given the limits on her time and finances, Leapor's interest in natural philosophy must be restricted to expressing her thoughts in poetry. Unless she is 'bles't' with the ability to see microscopically, the world of the very small will always be hidden from her, as instruments are beyond her reach. However it is interesting to consider that given the popularity of the Culpeper microscope, it

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[37] Ibid., p. 17.

[38] *Gentleman's Magazine*, 54 (November 1784), p. 807 quoted in Greene, p. 14. The anecdote was relayed in a letter signed only 'W' which was in response to a query in the October 1784 issue from 'MR': 'Q. Who is Molly Leapor, whom you mention in your note? I know no such person.' *Gentleman's Magazine*, 54 (October 1784) <https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/letter/docview/8523087/se-2>, p. 752.

[39] Thomas Joseph, *The Tatler*, 119 (January 1709), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0114076592/ECCO?u=oxford&sid=gale_marc&xid=662cb21e&pg=125>,pp. 124-129, (p. 127-128).

is likely that several of her readers would have owned one, and perhaps some of the ideas expressed in 'The Enquiry' might have helped to counter some of the perceived limitations of microscopic investigation, and served to encourage them in their endeavours.

Catherine Wilson has examined the philosophical impact of the microscope in the period 1620-1720 and argues that as well as the technical issues described above, part of the disenchantment with the microscope was that it did not reveal what was hoped for within the dominant theoretical framework: instead of establishing 'the truth of mechanical philosophy' it merely gave a different and more complex representation of what could already be seen.[40] As is the case today, philosophical concerns, including those relating to validity and reliability, usually have to be accommodated in some way for new technologies and procedures to be accepted.[41] Poetry can be a powerful means of exploring philosophical questions, and 'The Enquiry' is no exception. In the opening lines, the poem tackles the notion that the universe is too full of wonder to be fully understood by man:

> In vain, alas! (do lazy Mortals cry)
> In vain wou'd Wisdom trace the boundless Sky,
> Where doubled Wonders upon Wonders rise,
> And Worlds on Worlds confound our dazzl'd Eyes:
> Better be still – Let Nature rest, say they,
> Than err by Guess and with Opinion stray: (1-6)

The use of the word 'lazy' immediately tells us that the poet is bringing a critical voice to the attitude expressed in the following lines, and the unquestioning submission expounded by Pope when he says 'Whatever IS, is RIGHT.'[42] Leapor posits that instead of being passively accepting, mankind can be both awe-inspired and curious about the natural world. This is succinctly expressed by the double meaning of the word 'Wonders', signifying both 'amazing sights' and 'questions'. The pursuit of progress also means we must be prepared to make mistakes. Those 'lazy' mortals who shy away from the task of acquiring knowledge are afraid to be wrong and would rather do nothing than risk error. Mere observation on its own tells us very little — we need to postulate and test our ideas. 'Guess' and 'Opinion' might be reframed as 'hypothesis' or 'judgement' (or maybe consensus), important elements in what is now accepted scientific method. If it is the case that the early microscopists were disappointed that their observations did not fit their theories, or that the images they saw did not provide answers but only raised more questions, then perhaps the problem was not with the microscope but with the theory and approach. They should, perhaps, have asked themselves if 'grave-fac'd Wisdom may itself be wrong' (89). Leapor also tackles the notion of uncertainty, and the fact that even the most elegant scientific theory, maybe even science itself, might have

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[40] Wilson, p. 218 and p. 254. This argument is also made by Bennet, p. 267.
[41] Wilson, p. 71. For a detailed case study in the relationship between scientific advancement and societal factors, see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
[42] Pope, *Essay on Man*, in Fairer and Gerrard, 294.

limitations: ‘Not *Newton’s* Art can show/A Truth, perhaps, not fit for us to know’ (19-20), thereby opening the door to the possibility of a multiplicity of explanations for the wonders of the universe. This idea seems to foreshadow the social construction theory of scientific knowledge. One of its key implications is that ‘we should not expect that science will progress towards a pre-existing universal truth.’[43] ‘The Enquiry’ expresses excitement about what mankind might discover about the world aided by instruments such as the microscope, but (unlike many modern theorists perhaps) this is tempered by Christian humility — the sense that we should remain aware of our limitations and may never know the ‘truth’.

The relationship between instrument makers and scientific progress is relatively easy to delineate and understand, as is the influence of science on poetry. If we take a ‘social constructionist’ view of scientific progress, then one can perhaps envisage the rich potential for the advancement of knowledge where these two worlds meet: a community that contains both the readers of Leapor’s poetry and the owners of a Culpeper microscope.

[43] Nyhart, p. 38.

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PHILIP WILLIAMS

Sense in Relation to Morality: A Comparison of John McLure Hamilton and Christina Rossetti

This essay considers in comparison two artefacts from the late-middle Victorian era: a painting depicting an animal and vivisector by John McLure Hamilton (engraving by Charles John Tomkins) and a poem for children by Christina Rossetti. The artefacts are analyzed through the physical senses, using the thesis that sensorial communication most closely accords with objective morality, and that language is often a departure from, or rather an obscuring of, objective morality. The analysis shows that while they employed different media and approaches, Hamilton and Rossetti used propositional language sparingly and depended almost entirely on the senses. The analysis considers the question of whether sensorial communication occupies a privileged position in relation to morality.

This essay takes up the question of rhetoric, or even bare language, in relation to the conscience, as opposed to sensorial relation to the conscience. It will generally be argued that sensorial relation to the conscience is instinctive and automatic and should be viewed as more closely connected to a direct spiritual pathway to morality, while rhetorical relation is often a means of circumventing the conscience via wordplay masked as moral logic or, somewhat worse, utility. As an example, the Victorian anti-slavery position depended on, in addition to established ethical or religious traditions, primarily sensorial material, such as the literary or popular image of torture, images of slaves, material artefacts, and, above all, the imagination of slavery playing out on one's own body. The pro-slavery position, meanwhile, was forced to circumvent the sensorium via language, and was therefore composed mainly of propositional arguments even as it attempted to hide the images and sensations slavery produced.

This course of interpretation depends on several presuppositions: (A) there is a supernatural[1] element to existence, (B) this element is accessed more directly through the sensorium than through rhetoric, (C) this element provides us with an objective, though at times difficult-to-know, morality,

[1] Not primarily 'miraculous,' although this is included in the concept, but the more literal definition of a form of reality higher than material nature which, while interacting with material nature, supersedes it and provides meaning to it.

and (D) animal vivisection was objectively and obviously wrong.[2] If these presuppositions are difficult to swallow, an alternative and almost equally interesting position is still within reach, which is that sensorial and linguistic moral reasoning form two opposing, but ultimately arbitrary, approaches to morality, and that these approaches account for a great deal of political and relational disagreement. This view, minus arbitrariness, can be contained by the first view, but not vice versa. Even if at that time highly linguistic thinkers more often supported vivisection, while sensorial thinkers more often opposed it, we may still suggest that an objectively wrong practice was propped up by undue linguistic moral reasoning and the hiding of sensory data.

Two artefacts, one poem[3] and one painting,[4] will be the subjects of analysis. The painting, by John McLure Hamilton, depicts a vivisectionist about to work on a dog. He appears caught in moral reflection, deflated, uncertain. The dog 'appeals' wordlessly, through body language, through presence, perhaps whimpering or, perhaps oblivious to the intended purpose, inviting the man to play. The poem, by Christina Rossetti, makes use of language, but does so in a way which prioritizes the sensorium. A line such as, 'Spare puss who trusts us dozing on our hearth,' is typical, in that it offers up the image of a cat via language while making only light conceptual additions via language, namely the power of the human over the animal (*spare*) and the suggestion of dependency (*trust*; also, the borrowing of warmth). Language here is used primarily in its imaginative capacity rather than its propositional capacity. Both artefacts will be analyzed along the lines of the sensorium, with special attention given to the production of silence.

Background

Scientific vivisection of humans is attested as early as Herophilus, and was instantly controversial.[5] In this case, the work was supposedly done on criminals, certainly with the thought that criminals who were to be punished or killed in some other terrible way might as well be killed in a way that served society. This suggestion of lower forms serving higher forms would be the basis of animal vivisection when it reemerged in the Enlightenment. However, this classical attempt at scientific vivisection with its ostensibly prosocial roots and logical basis may obscure a more primitive animal origin.

At the very least, animals are known to torture, play with, and investigate their prey or their enemies. Orcas have developed the

[2] I say, 'was,' because this essay is restricted to the original sense of the word, meaning 'live cutting,' or similarly painful experiments. Relatively benign 'vivisection' is practiced on animals today and the term encompasses a far broader (and more humane) range of experimentation.

[3] See page 7 of this essay for the poem's text.

[4] See *Figure 1*. The actual painting is not available. This analysis uses a digital copy of an engraving by Charles John Tomkins.

[5] Richard French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society*, 1975, p. 15; Gary Ferngren, *Vivisection Ancient and Modern*, 2017.

[6] G. A. Bradshaw, *Carnivore Minds*, 2017, p. 33.

skill of killing sharks to remove and eat only their livers.[6] With the rise of humans came the necessary work of butchery after hunting (mastodons, unfortunately, could not be roasted whole). In cultures where cannibalism was practiced, this work would be done on human carcasses and in some cases on live humans.[7] Butchery should be understood as proto-dissection, preceding formal medicine by thousands of years.

Children, on another note, are known to torture and kill animals for the sake of curiosity,[8] in some cases pulling off limbs or cutting bodies open much in the same way a child might take apart a radio. It is perhaps too easy to consign these urges to childhood alone. While the Enlightenment came with the suggestion of power through knowledge, a power gained by obedience to nature, and the use of known nature for the good of humankind, it also tapped into a biological (and perhaps spiritual) urge to simply know. Some areas of natural science give only the smallest of actionable returns, yet in these areas the will to know is no less. Some areas of academic interest, such as philosophy, at times produce knowledge making life *less* actionable. It is credible, then, to suggest that the driving subconscious force behind vivisection is the innate drive for knowledge rather than a thirst to do good.

By the Victorian era, the time from which our two artefacts are drawn, anti-vivisection sentiment was becoming, if not very powerful, at least prominent. On the heels of a partial victory for the anti-slavery movement, former Lord Chancellor Erskine began in 1809 to lobby Parliament for new laws protecting the rights of domesticated animals.[9] The SPCA was founded in 1824, thirteen years before Victoria became queen.[10] Anna Sewell and H.G. Wells wrote influential popular works, in Sewell's case commenting broadly on animal cruelty in *Black Beauty* and in Wells' case attacking not only vivisection but the whole logic of redemptive pain in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Feminist thought and activism had in some cases extended the question of service or subordination to include the question of animals.[11] George Bernard Shaw, not yet famous, was in the late nineteenth century already cutting the legs from under the argument that vivisection could survive on moral weight. This was the primary argument in favor of vivisection, which said the good it did for humans outweighed the evil it did for animals. Shaw instead posed the problem of moral relation: the debt humans owed directly to their fellow creatures. As an old man, he was using his fame to attack leading proponents.[12] Rossetti and Hamilton, then, offered their works in the middle of a leading controversy.

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[7] Cătălin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 2011, pp. 81, 257-258.

[8] Compare with correlations to psychopathy in Dadds et al., *Associations Among Cruelty to Animals*, 2006.

[9] E. S. Turner, *All Heaven in a Rage*, 1965, pp. 119-123.

[10] Richard French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society*, 1975, pp. 26-27.

[11] Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen*, 1998, pp. 105-111.

[12] George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw on Vivisection*, 1951, pp. 1, 54-57.

Hamilton's Painting

John McLure Hamilton, born in Philadelphia and raised there before immigrating to England as a young man,[13] completed *Vivisection – The Last Appeal* in 1882 and debuted the painting in London in 1885.[14] It is that quiet moment just before something terrible happens, a moment in which all of life appears normal. Here in hesitation is shown that natural relation of animal and man: the dog supplicates for favor and the man, if only in delay, gives it. Yet this tranquility is close to the fire and ready to evaporate.

Figure 1: Charles John Tomkins and John McLure Hamilton, *Vivisection – The Last Appeal*, 1883. Engraving by Tomkins after the painting by Hamilton, 48.6 × 34.3 cm. Wellcome Collection. Image licensed under Public Domain Mark. <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/pdm/>

As the work is a visual medium, the greatest pressure is placed on the seeing sense. Here is visual beauty – of the bird at bottom left, expired but still serene, even holy, in its appearance; of the simple pleasures of the room, among which are books, tools, window, and light; of the dog, whose homely and almost comical appearance speaks of the low beauty on which we depend daily, the plain and unsexual beauty found in almost everything; of the man, whose balding head and enormous nose nevertheless contribute to that same sense of supportive plainness. Tools, death, light, books, and average bodies evince visual balance. Perhaps not all is as it should be, but at least the temporary calm is attractive to the eyes. The man maintains power, but in the visual suspension of overt domination the seeing sense is at rest.

[13] The Philadelphia Enquirer, *John Hamilton*, 83, Noted Painter, Dies, 1936.

[14] John McLure Hamilton, *Vivisection—The Last Appeal*, 1882, engraving by Charles John Tomkins, 1883. See *Figure 1*.

In the hearing sense is predominantly silence. This is made all the more so by the implied contrast with what could be happening, as by now most people would have heard of screaming animals under the knife.[15]

Figure 2: Emile-Edouard Mouchy, *A Physiological Demonstration with Vivisection of a Dog*, 1832. Oil on canvas, 112 × 143 cm. Wellcome Collection. Image licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

Within that silence is contained the polite whimper of the dog, who seems to want to play, the breathing of the dog and the man, and muted sounds coming in from the window, which appears to be closed. It is also in the context of silence that the man seems able to hear these smaller sounds, as if the loudness of Victorian modern life has until now made the whimper of a dog insensible.[16]

Taste and smell are mostly inactive. The smell of blood is perhaps implied, although the environment appears almost untouched by dissection. If the window is closed, it implies a severance from the reviving fragrances of nature. Most direct are the taste and smell of the liquids contained in the two bottles. One, half empty, sits beside the dead bird, suggesting perhaps a poison experiment rather than anesthetic. If this is the case, a strong chemical smell may be implied, though in this scene it is, like the other threats, suspended – both bottles being corked. Chemistry, like medical surgery, is kept at bay as the moral dilemma unfolds.

The sense of touch is everywhere. On the table are implements of the hand. In the microscope, especially, is felt something of the insatiable draw toward scientific inquiry; it is as much about the pleasure of the hand as the pleasure of the mind. The bird, of course, has already been handled. The books, wonderfully worn, are felt in their hours of harmony between body and mind. The man stands with one leg pressed against the edge of the table, his fingers bent and touching the tabletop, his other hand resting on his waist, and gripping somewhat too firmly the mysterious second bottle. Lastly, in the normal relation between human and animal, this sort of doggish appeal is often followed by scratching and petting. What is most normal and natural, then, is suggested by the memory of touch, implying by contrast the grotesque contradiction of nature in vivisection.

[15] Compare with Emile-Edouard Mouchy, *A Physiological Demonstration with Vivisection of a Dog*, 1832. See *Figure 2*.

[16] Compare to John M Picker, *The Soundproof Study*, 1999.

Rossetti's Poem

By the time she wrote *A Word for the Dumb* (originally entitled, *A Poor Old Dog*), Christina Rossetti had gained some position in public awareness, having published *Goblin Market* (1862), *The Prince's Progress* (1866), and *Sing-Song* (1872), and bearing an association to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The poem is certainly children's verse. Perhaps still writing in the spirit of *Sing-Song*, or perhaps recycling some rejected verses that did not make it into the book, Rossetti included the lines in a letter to her brother Gabriel circa January 1879 with this explanation:

> There has just been held a fancy sale at a house in Prince's Gate for the anti-Vivisection cause, – & having nothing else to contribute I sent a dozen autographs (!) as follows:
>
> ~~A Poor Old Dog.~~
> Pity the sorrows of a poor old Dog
> Who wags his tail a-begging in his need:
> Despise not ~~to~~ even the sorrows of a Frog,
> God's creature too, and that's enough to plead:
> Spare Puss who trusts us dozing on our hearth:
> Spare Bunny once so ~~merry~~ frisky & so free:
> Spare all the harmless creatures on the earth:
> Spare, & be spared:—or who shall plead for thee?
>
> Of these 9 on the first day fetched 2/6 or 3/0, while one even brought in 10/-! the remaining three I hope were disposed of on the closing day.[17]

The revised version, appearing in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*,[18] eliminates the ampersands and numerous colons, and makes only two word changes: *dozing* to *purring*, and *creatures* to *tenants*.

As a non-visual medium, the poem nevertheless puts forward images, and to the adult reader the images may be primary. In each of the first four images, it is implied a child is opposite an animal: a hungry dog, a frog being dismembered (unless 'sorrows' are froggishly existential?), a vulnerable cat, and a caged rabbit. The fifth image, nature as a menagerie, dispels the sense of intimacy in the previous images. The last image, judgment, either in the courtroom or at God's judgment seat, transitions the child from power to powerlessness. A language-based argument is in view, perhaps that violence creates a world of violence, and therefore the gain from vivisection will always be outweighed by the negative effects. However, the last line does not depend on logical language, but upon the image a Christian child would have of God. The child is meant to imagine standing before God, where 'he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.'[19] To the child of this poem this is not logic, but a settled imagined fact about life: there will be a time to stand before God carrying your deeds. The power, then, is in the image.

The hearing sense again prioritizes silence and quietude. Where there is sound, it is the soft tread of nature: the swish of a dog's tail, the sleeping sounds of a cat. And the cat sleeps *because* it is quiet. The fire has ceased

[17] Christina Rossetti, *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, 1997, letter 799.
[18] Christina Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*, 1885, July 19 entry, p. 138.
[19] James 2:13 (AV).

burning, leaving only the warmed hearth. Only small sounds are in the house. The adults are away, presumably, allowing the child this moment of temptation. This theme of aloneness, of the child and the voice of the conscience, is carried throughout with the exception, possibly, of the frog exclaiming his pain at being molested. In the end the theme of silence is turned, but it is still the absence of voice that activates the conscience: 'who shall plead for thee?' The child now stands 'dumb' before God, with nothing to say, with no mediating voice to advocate, under God's silent gaze.

Taste and smell are more present in the poem. The 'poor old dog' may come with a stench from sleeping on London streets, wanting food from the child's hand which has just been tasted. There is the smell of the pond, where the frog lives, the smell and taste of a fire gone out, the smell of the rabbit's cage and perhaps the taste of the rabbit's assorted vegetables. 'All the harmless creatures' depends on where a child lives. In the city, this may suggest the strong smells of cab horses and urban chickens. For many children, working with animals and clearing away manure was a daily chore, meaning that 'harmless creatures on the earth' did not, for them, signify the sweet fragrances of open country.

In touch is a potential division between how adults and children would relate sensorially to the poem. An adult might relate primarily through the images, but a child might relate through the physical body. An adult remembers these activities from childhood; a child is still in them. A child, then, feels the food in the hand offered to the dog, the frog in the hand being twisted or stabbed to death, the warmth of the hearth, the stick poking through the wire cage, the earth or cobblestone under the foot while walking among 'all the harmless creatures.' The child is bending, stooping, and holding. Perhaps more than all these, the poem invokes the bodily sensation of freedom. There are no adults to arrest the child's body by verbal commands, or to physically punish the body for the sins now being contemplated. At the same time, this freedom from human power is contradicted (for a child) by the bodily sensation of the conscience, represented in Rossetti's commands. To do evil is an act of the body, and its repayment via the conscience is a bodily sensation.

Synthesis and Conclusion

One similarity between these two works is the construction of power. In both, the actor is free from oversight and therefore not only free to act but free to act in privacy apart from social pressure. The vivisector and the child have no external human agent of shame.[20] The 'final appeal' is between animal, self, and God. Another similarity, already evident, is the setting of silence or quiet. For a sensorial approach to be more effective, Hamilton and Rossetti place the moment in stillness, allowing

[20] While Rossetti provides the voice of conscience, the need to provide it suggests the child's freedom.

[21] Julia F. Saville, *Victorian Soul-Talk: Poetry, Democracy, and the Body Politic*, 2017, p. 43.

each of the senses their turn. In the Victorian era there was concern that the pace and noise of the modern world were harming the soul. By reclaiming quiet, the soul was thought able to regain its bearings.[21] In *Goblin Market*, Rossetti was already sounding the alarm of silence in the modern world with poems such as *Consider the Lilies*, and *A Testimony*.[22]

One difference is that the painting uses an indirect approach while the poem uses a direct approach. According to Kierkegaard, this difference is accountable to the moral position of the audience. For a resistant or unwittingly ignorant audience indirectness is preferable. For an audience curious for information, the direct approach is preferable.[23] It should also be said that Hamilton's medium generally lends itself toward indirectness, yet it is also the case that he avoids direct confrontation with the audience, choosing an ambiguous title and leaving to the imagination what will transpire next. Rossetti, on the other hand, feels confident that children are eagerly in search of moral input. She answers in kind, with six direct instructions. She tells the child exactly what is to be done. Another difference is that Rossetti's poem in its context of childhood is preparatory, while Hamilton's painting is potentially final. Rossetti is speaking of the limited power of children over frogs and cats, a proving ground in which the child will eventually become something. Hamilton is speaking of extended power, in which cruelty contributes broadly to the shape of society. Noting the well-worn tomes, the man is now on equal footing with the great minds of his day, making his own contributions and projecting his own logic into the world.

This essay began with the thesis that a sensorial relation to morality is usually more accurate and therefore preferable to a language-based relation. If this is accurate, we should expect to see artists, writers, and speakers that come from the correct moral position using sensory approaches with ease, while those coming from incorrect positions will lack sensory clarity and be forced to fall back on language or on the hiding and redefinition of sensory data. While this short inquiry can hardly be considered conclusive, it does seem that both Hamilton and Rossetti used sensory approaches with ease. The question this should raise in similar research is whether sensorial communication[24] occupies a privileged place in the transmission of morality. It would accord with the sensorial logic of rule-of-thumb moral codes such as the Golden Rule, in which morality follows the sensory imagination of deeds done to one's own person, rather than language-based moral proposition.

[22] Christina Rossetti, *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 76-78.
[23] Benson P. Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 2020, pp. 27-38; compare with Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 2013, pp. 258-261.
[24] Especially poetry, art and other material media, physical presence, and manual labour.

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