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**Lost Works of Art:**  
**A Critical and Creative Study of Reception and Restitution**

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DPhil, Creative and Critical Writing  
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**University of Sussex**

**Bethan Stevens, DPhil in Creative and Critical Writing**

**Lost Works of Art:  
A Critical and Creative Study of Reception and Restitution**

**Summary**

This thesis examines pieces of visual art that are untraced, stolen or otherwise understood as lost. It conceptualises how this alters artworks. Are they still ‘objects’ in ‘visual’ culture? Might they become literature? Lost works continue to be circulated and interpreted through practices of remembrance, narrative and often through visual reproductions. These become extraordinarily overdetermined once a work vanishes. I investigate this process in four critical case studies and a novella. The first study looks at Vanessa Bell’s painting *The Nursery* (1930-32), a major work which has been critically neglected because unavailable. I ask what this can tell us about memory and nostalgia, and explore the ghostliness of visual representations. The second study examines Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* in the period after it was stolen (1911-13). I closely read some startling journalistic responses to this and to earlier, Victorian thefts. Through these writings there emerges a new kind of ekphrasis and a new conception of the museum. My third study builds on these readings of visual and literary restitutions to consider how lost art could inspire a corresponding critical methodology. With reference to writings on aesthetics by Burke and Derrida, I look at William Blake’s *Virgil* woodcuts, reading them through their missing parts, including chopped-off edges. The fourth study explores how lost works can be restituted creatively as well as critically. I analyse missing episodes of *Doctor Who*, which have inspired reconstructions from fans – an active audience of lost art. Finally, my novella tells the story of a curator of an illicit museum; it uses the epistolary form, which has a history of creating drama through lost letters. My conclusion suggests how, using evidence to feel for what cannot be seen, a focus on lost art can spark unique ways of thinking about vision, writing and criticism.

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## Abbreviations

- BLN*      *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Library Newspapers*. Gale digital collections, online database. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, Cengage Learning.
- OED*      *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 1989. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. OED Online. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- UKP*      *19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals*. Gale digital collections, online database. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, Cengage Learning.

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## Introduction

Lost works of art contribute to visual culture despite and through their absence. Because we know they have existed and continue to talk, write and think about them, lost works elbow their way spectrally into the canon. My thesis thinks through the role played by lost works as imagined objects, and the narratives that attach to them. This is most apparent with famous works: we might recall Pheidias's *Athena Parthenos*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Leda*, or the bronze version of Michelangelo's *David*.<sup>1</sup> But the loss of more ephemeral works also resonates through other texts. Consider, for example, the painted hangings that hung in people's houses in seventeenth-century England, which have not survived and are pictured today through related prints and terse descriptions in wills and inventories (Foister 1981, 273-82). Lost art is intangibly ubiquitous; it is likely that more works of art have vanished or been destroyed than are extant (although such a question is by nature impossible to answer). This thesis has developed from my belief that there is a need for a considered methodology when writing about lost works, and that their difference from extant ones ought to be conceptualised. With lost objects slipping out of visual culture, I also argue that they have a special relationship with literature.

I begin with a passage from Gombrich's classic survey *The Story of Art*:

The fame of Pheidias is founded on works which no longer exist. But it is not unimportant to try to imagine what they were like, because we forget too easily what purpose Greek art still served at that time... As we walk along the rows of white marble statues from classical antiquity in the great museums, we too often forget that among them are these idols of which the Bible speaks: that people prayed before them, that sacrifices were brought to them amidst strange incantations, and that thousands and tens of thousands of worshippers may have approached them with hope and fear in their hearts – wondering, as the prophet says, whether these statues and graven images were not really at the same time

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<sup>1</sup> For these works see Gombrich ([1950] 1984, 53-55), Meyer and Glover (1989, 75-82), Levine (1984, 91-120) and Flick (2003, 50-63).

gods themselves... The sculptures in our museums are, for the most part, only secondhand copies made in Roman times for travellers and collectors as souvenirs, and as decorations for gardens or public baths. We must be very grateful for these copies, because they give us at least a faint idea of the famous masterpieces of Greek art; but unless we use our imagination these weak imitations can also do much harm. They are largely responsible for the widespread idea that Greek art was lifeless, cold and insipid, and that Greek statues had that chalky appearance and vacant look which reminds one of the old-fashioned drawing classes. The Roman copy of the great idol of Pallas Athene, for instance, which Pheidias made for her shrine in the Parthenon, hardly looks very impressive. We must turn to old descriptions and try to picture what it was like: a gigantic wooden image, some thirty-six feet high, as high as a tree, covered all over with precious material – the armour and garments of gold, the skin of ivory. There was also plenty of strong, shining colour on the shield and other parts of the armour, not forgetting the eyes, which were made of coloured stones. (Gombrich [1950] 1984, 53-54)

This passage is a reminder of how lost art has always been central to the narrative of art history, although much of what makes it distinctive remains implicit. In this thesis I address the following unexplored avenues of research that spark from Gombrich's text (or indeed, from any number of writings about lost art):

1. Gombrich appeals directly to the reader's imagination: 'it is not unimportant to imagine what they were like'. Moreover, he claims that *without* the imagination, reproductions of lost artworks could even be 'harmful'. My thesis teases out this idea, exploring the kinds of critically informed imaginative acts that the viewing of lost works of art demands.
2. So, reproductions of lost art are unusually potent to help, but they can also 'do much harm'. Such reproductions carry the weight of lost originals on their backs. Gombrich's passage implies that we have different expectations of reproductions of lost works than we have of reproductions of extant ones. My thesis explores these expectations.
3. Lost art raises questions about medium. Gombrich re-creates an ancient sculpture by assembling various visual artefacts and 'old descriptions' to

help us imagine it (see above and [1950] 1984, 53-5). The wood, gold, ivory and coloured stones that once comprised the *Athene* have transmogrified into written narrative combined with marble (the Roman copy). A comparable transformation happens with all lost works. Despite this, it is astonishing how intangible artworks continue to be described in a straightforward way as ‘bronze’ or ‘tempera on panel’ (e.g. Frick 2003, 51, 295). I explore the way lost art takes medium apart.

4. Gombrich’s description of the lost Pheidias sculpture is one of the most memorable and creative passages in *The Story of Art*. Even as it impoverishes our visual culture, the absence or presence-through-absence of lost artworks can be a gift to writers. My thesis explores an unusual kind of ekphrasis, written after a work of art has already been lost.
5. It may be a coincidence that the lost work brings to Gombrich’s mind ‘strange incantations’. However, it is also possible that the lost artwork – as an invisible, intangible object in a visual and plastic culture – inevitably brings to mind magic and conjuration.

My focus is on works whose whereabouts are unknown, or that have been casually destroyed. While I include one chapter on stolen art, I exclude works that are the objects of deliberate, ideological attacks, since there is already a considerable body of scholarship that explores iconoclasm (Gamboni 1997; Freedberg 1985; Latour and Weibel 2002). The demands that lost art makes upon the viewer’s imagination – the fact that lost works persist only through memory and representation – put an unusual weight upon the idea of reception. My title alludes to this, as well as the to idea of restitution. I choose this word in part because it resonates with hopes of return and repatriation;

however, I am not primarily referring to any physical or legal restitution. Rather, I explore how critical and creative practices translate the lost work into new forms for new (blind?) viewers. I am indebted here to the ‘Restitutions’ chapter of Jacques Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*, which reads certain interpretations of Van Gogh’s *Old Shoes with Laces* as creating a ‘restitution scene’ (1987, 279), seeking to return the painting to particular individuals by projecting or hallucinating into it (366). While Derrida’s chapter shows how such strategies can *distort* extant paintings, I see this as one of the legitimate if perverse pleasures that *lost* works leave for their viewers.

### **Words about lost art**

Before giving an overview of relevant publications, I would like to draw attention to the uncanny qualities of some of the vocabulary that is routinely used by art historians when discussing the loss of art. Works or parts of works that escape loss are said to *survive*, a word whose etymology clearly relates to life and death, and the primary meaning of which is ‘to continue to live after the death of another’ (*OED*). In the everyday vocabulary of a discipline, we sense a strange prosopopeia. Words relating to *dispossession* and *possession* recur frequently, since the loss of art is bound up with ethical and legal questions of provenance and ownership – both in terms of private individuals and nations or cultures. While the first definitions of *dispossession* and *possession* relate to ownership, they also mean ‘exorcism’ and ‘control of a person by a demon or spirit’ respectively (see *OED*). Finally, when works are rediscovered by the art world they are said to *surface* or *re-surface*, a spatial metaphor that locates lost works in a strange netherworld. One place in which this metaphor is powerfully actualised is in the photography from the exhibition *Egypt’s Sunken Treasures* (Goddio and Clauss 2006; fig. 1). This blockbuster exhibition focused on discovery rather than

loss. But it was typical in that it beautifully exploited, but never analysed, the endless promise of lost art:

As the objects are uncovered bit by bit, they steadily grow out of the semi-darkness of the murky water. For many centuries they lay hidden beneath silt and sand. Because of encrustation, some of the objects acquire strange shapes. (Goddio and Clauss 2006, 28)

While numerous publications harness the popular appeal of lost art, my thesis interrogates the concept. I explore how loss alters artworks; as the above quotation suggests, they can ‘acquire strange shapes’.

As mentioned above, I define as ‘lost’ art whose whereabouts is unknown, or that has been casually destroyed. To supplement these criteria, I want to think more broadly about the meaning of *lost*. With the vocabulary of art history firmly in mind, I propose to do this through its opposite, *extant*. The *OED* gives the etymology of *extant* as coming from the Latin *ex(s)tare*, ‘to stand forth, be prominent, be visible, exist’. Lost art, in contrast, hides, is invisible or disappears. *Extant* describes something ‘in existence’ or ‘continuing to exist; that has escaped the ravages of time’. Lost art fails to escape those ravages – it is destroyed or plundered by time itself. The archaic definitions of *extant* are also illuminating. It meant: ‘standing out or above any surface; projecting, protruding’. The most recent citation given for this is from George Borrow in 1841: ‘Its naked body half extant from the coarse blanket’. Lost art sinks modestly below the surface; it intrigues us by hiding its body. Another early definition of *extant* is: ‘Standing forth to view... with phrase *extant to the sight*... conspicuous, manifest’. Again, the *OED* offers an interesting nineteenth-century usage, from Alexander Kinglake in 1863: ‘The truth should be visibly extant’. In contrast, lost art is not only shy and invisible; by this very token, it may be duplicitous.

Significantly, seventeenth century usage of *extant* suggests it can also mean ‘existing so as to be publicly seen... accessible, get-at-able’. This invites a plausible definition of lost art as *inaccessible*. This is particularly relevant today when there are increasing expectations that cultural treasures will be displayed in public museums and/or within reach of particular people or communities (thus, since they are displayed in London, the Parthenon sculptures are lost to the Greeks, the Benin bronzes lost to the Nigerians).

Finally, the word can mean ‘remains’, and the *OED* quotes a wonderful phrase from c.1658 from John Cleveland: ‘thy poor Extants’. The lost artwork is a body that haunts us because it leaves no remains. I have had a feeling, during this writing process, that a thesis about lost artworks is at least in part a thesis about ghosts, a feeling incited by work on spectres by Jacques Derrida (1987, 1994) and Nicholas Royle (2003, 2005). For example, I am thinking of the analysis of the ghost as something that leaves us uncertain whether ‘by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future’ (Derrida 1994, 99; and see Royle 2003, 282; 2005, 11). Lost works of art recall this structure: as past possessions, they persist through our hope that they will return one day. Writing about an extant painting by Van Gogh, Derrida’s ‘Restitutions’ begins and ends with ghosts (1987, 257, 381), with ‘spectral analysis’ (376) of a painting, with questions like: ‘Can a ghost be attributed?’ (381). The intangibility and hallucinatory promise of *lost* works plays with ideas like these in an oddly literal way.

### **Art historical explorations**

As a broad concept, ‘lost art’ is an area of study with considerable scope for new work. As mentioned above, iconoclasm, as a related but distinct subject, has attracted a

vast amount of critical writing, so it is surprising how small a quantity of theoretical work on lost art has been produced – nothing at all on its reception. One early treatment by Robert Adams, *The Lost Museum: Glimpses of Vanished Originals* (1980), is a popular book offering brief case studies of lost masterpieces, from antiquity to the twentieth century. Adams is insistent that lost art should *only* be studied to help understand our extant heritage better, and not in its own right. He begins with an intriguingly gendered disclaimer that, unconsciously, dramatizes the fact that other perspectives remain unvoiced: ‘No man is or should be a professional student of lost works of art’ (1980, 7).

Ed Lilley has written an insightful article about lost art – in particular, two lost paintings by an eighteenth-century artist known as Leclerc – which begins with a statement that is both self-evident and provocative:

It is eminently possible to imagine a history of art that excludes lost works. Such a discipline might indeed be favourably construed by some as being more ‘scientific’ than existing practice in its unique concern with examinable objects. Yet this state of things could also be seen as barren, denied the fertilizer of the discourse of the absent. No researcher, however diligent, is ever likely to find Zeuxis’s painting of grapes that fooled the birds, or Parrhasius’s image of a curtain that fooled Zeuxis. But a history (or theory) of art which lacked the possibility of recourse to these lost masterpieces for the discussion of art as illusion would arguably be very impoverished. (Lilley 2000, 396)

Lilley’s article is uniquely helpful in offering a theoretically informed breakdown of ‘some of the main categories’ involved in ‘the conditions of loss’, from the near ‘plenitude’ of the surviving object, all the way through to ‘the most difficult category, [...] those works known only through textual description’ (2000, 399). In my view this category-driven approach, in some respects invaluable, can also become slightly blinkered. For instance, Lilley sees ‘the missing image perpetuated by a photograph’ as

‘relatively straightforward’ (397), whereas I will argue that the loss of an artwork renders any visual reproduction peculiarly strange. Lilley analyses literary texts and reproductive images merely as documents – never as substitutes. Whereas his article is clearly written from within the discipline of art history and respects its boundaries, I see lost artworks as slipping between disciplines. I take liberties with them, in terms of trying to figure out what they *are*, and also doing my best to follow Gombrich’s injunction to ‘use my imagination’.

One of the most extensive considerations of lost art is a special issue of *Visual Resources* dedicated to the subject (Deliyannis 2000), comprising five case studies. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis briefly introduces these, arguing for the need to think through the ‘surviving traces’ (204) of lost works. Three of the articles included (by Carol Neuman de Vegvar, Liana de Girolami Cheney and Elizabeth Guffey) provide excellent accounts of *individual* lost works but, unfortunately, offer little to suggest how their conclusions are more broadly applicable to studies of lost art. The article in the collection that really gets to grips with the subject is Carrie Lambert’s piece on late 50s and early 60s performance art. Lambert explores the relationship of lost artworks to ‘imperfect memory’; their ‘peculiar status’, and how ‘no longer extant, they continue to signify’ (2000, 276, 279). However, contemporary art in general, and performance art in particular, fundamentally differs from the works considered in my thesis. As Lambert herself is quick to point out, she is writing about art that ‘was *designed to be lost*’ (emphasis in original, 276), whereas I am considering works that were produced with no such expectation. Finally, in the same volume, Frank Futral writes about a lost self-portrait by Charles Willson Peale, posing some fascinating questions about the relationship between lost art and literary texts. Futral asks, for example: ‘can a portrait continue to fulfill the mnemonic purpose for which it was designed if it becomes lost?’



(2000, 222). He argues that since only textual accounts of Peale's self-portrait survive, and since these accounts emphasise its mimetic excellence, therefore the 'deceptive illusionism' (226) that was the aim of the portrait works *better* in its absence than it would if it were extant. It is a compelling argument, although I am not so sure about this conclusion. In my view, repeated textual assertions of mimetic faithfulness mean that after its loss the painting comes to represent not Peale's face and figure (how can it?), but rather 'deceptive illusionism' *itself*. Futral argues that lost artworks can fulfill their function *better* than extant ones; I would say that they work profoundly differently.

Three years later Gert-Rudolph Flick published *Missing Masterpieces* (2003), comprised of illuminating case studies that document the history and surviving evidence of several lost works. However, he brushes extraordinarily lightly over the issue that is the *raison d'être* of his book, confining brief remarks on the cultural implications of the loss of art to his one-and-a-half-page introduction. Another recent, relevant publication is Sandy Nairne's *Art Theft and the Case of the Stolen Turners* (2011), an insightful memoir of a museum professional's search for two important stolen Turners from the Tate's collection, alongside essays on the historical, ethical, financial and fictional aspects of art theft. However, Nairne's focus throughout is on the criminal and detective aspects of stolen art, not on the qualities of the paintings themselves as lost works.

Other incidental analyses of lost art are widely dispersed throughout art historical texts. Catalogue raisonnés include sections on lost works, and case studies of individual lost pieces appear in academic journals. However, these tend not to analyse the unique qualities of lost art or the discourse it inspires. For example, throughout his excellent article 'The Case of the Missing Woodcuts', Morris Martin (1987) unselfconsciously uses the metaphor of the detective as the hunter of lost woodcuts, without analysing this metaphor or considering what it might teach us about the unique

ways lost works appeal to us. Another example is Julius Bryant's "'Mourning Achilles': a missing sculpture by Thomas Banks'. Bryant offers a convincing analysis of the surviving evidence about this important lost sculpture. Again, though, its unique qualities as a lost artwork need more thought. Take, for example, his opening sentences:

In 1784 Thomas Banks exhibited at the Royal Academy a colossal plaster statue entitled *Achilles, Enraged for the Loss of Briseis, Retires to the Sea-shore and Complains to Thetis, A Model*. Known as the *Complaining, Enraged, Frantic, Wounded* or *Mourning Achilles*, it will hereafter be referred to by the last title, this being the one most commonly used. (Bryant 1983, 742)

There is something disingenuous about choosing *Mourning Achilles*, as opposed to an abbreviation of the sculpture's official title. We can surely assume that *Mourning* was chosen by Bryant not *only* because of its common use, but also because it conveniently responds to the painting's loss. This offered an opportunity to discuss the idea of mourning in relation to lost art. Typically, however, this opportunity is not taken up, and the spectator's mourning remains implicit.

### **Lost art narratives**

As a subject, lost art offers exciting histories of secrecy, vanishings, war, greed and detective work against the odds – it all makes gripping narrative, and has been taken up by investigative journalists and non-fiction writers. Such works have a key if tangential relation to my thesis. They range from deeply researched histories with a strong narrative drive (Harr 2005), to coffee-table books in which art loss is both an appealing theme and one that promotes responsible politics (Webb 2008). There are also several books about art loss in World War II, particularly concerning the decimation of Jewish art collections by the Nazi party; excellent examples of these have been

produced by Lynn Nicholas (1994) and Hector Feliciano (1997). All these works share a clear awareness of the ethical dilemmas and sensational appeal of lost art, but do not stop to analyse the details of this appeal or its cultural and critical consequences. One recent example that considers the broad subject of lost art is Simon Houpt's *Museum of the Missing* (2006). Like many publications, it is densely packed with emotive language. In the space of just a few sentences, Houpt describes a missing work of art as 'like a loved one who disappears without leaving any trace,' the room where it once was as 'a heartbreaking tableau' and that same room with 'its heart... ripped out and secreted away from the everyday world' (2006, 11-12). Antonio Forcellino's recent book on a lost Michelangelo painting is quite explicit about the drive to narrative that lost art provokes:

In short, the story of the paintings boasts a plot that no fictional tale could hope to equal. This was the reason why I decided not to report the events in formal academic terms and to go further than is normally acceptable in such detached, dispassionate reports. I decided to include the excitement, the passion and the pure luck that underlie historical research – especially in a case like this, which not only concerns paintings of extraordinary value by none other than Michelangelo, but also uncovers individual stories, feelings and destinies. (Forcellino 2011, 2)

This urge, which could usefully have been analysed, is only briefly mentioned in Forcellino's 4-page introduction. Forcellino goes on to write a literary memoir of his research experience, with chapter one beginning: 'A dense milky white mist rose behind the trees' (2011, 5). My thesis, which includes four critical chapters and a novella, likewise relishes the narrative possibilities of lost art. However, it resists the temptation to jump *straight* into storytelling. By stopping to analyse the way that lost art can become a unique creative catalyst, I hope that I can give a critical account of what has become a significant theme of popular scholarship.

## Cultural Property

Our sense of ownership seems to augment when a work is lost. Take the following sentence describing an imaginary museum of lost art, from Houpt's *Museum of the Missing*: 'If the pieces hanging in this imaginary museum are not literally ours, they are the Western world's collective cultural heritage, and their absence renders all of us much poorer' (2006, 13). Not 'literally' ours, says Houpt. Not literally, but then in what sense? We are asked to tacitly accept that art which is not extant is in some unspecified way more 'ours'.

Calls for returns of cultural property in recent decades, as well as national and international concern at looting and illicit trade, suggest the significance of government engagement with lost art. The first public event at the New Acropolis Museum in Athens – a museum costing £110m that reserves its best spot to display works of art not in its possession – was a UNESCO conference on the return of cultural property.<sup>2</sup> Our passion for art that is lost to us seems at least to equal that for art we already possess. This is not to challenge the authenticity of this concern, but instead to try and understand how deeply the experience of loss affects the reception of works of art. Inevitably, legal and archaeological literature about art lost through conflict or illicit trade sidelines critical explorations of artworks in favour of questions of ownership. Recent scholars have called for more research into cultural property from different disciplinary perspectives, and Nora Niedzielski-Eichner has discussed a growing interest in this among art historians. She cites, for example, the College Art Association's protest following the U.S. military's failure to safeguard treasures in the National Museum of Iraq (Niedzielski-Eichner 2005, 185-66).

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<sup>2</sup> Reported, for example, along with pending requests for return, in the Secretariat Report of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation (Paris: UNESCO, 11-13 May 2009). Online version: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001822/182210e.pdf> (accessed 30 October 2011).

A desire to prevent the loss of cultural property has given rise to a new branch of international and national law in the last fifty years, and is the subject of three major international treaties, most recently the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995).<sup>3</sup> Because cultural property lawyers work to protect people from the loss of their artistic heritage, it is incumbent on them to try to pin down what makes that loss so damaging. John H. Merryman has published widely on cultural property from an international perspective since his two seminal articles of 1986 and 1989. In an article that prefers the internationalist approach and freer movement of cultural property, his rhetoric gently ridicules the opposing protectionist point of view. He explains that for some people ‘every export is an amputation’, and describes the kind of loss that occurs when an object disappears from its proper location: ‘Separated from its context, “decontextualized,” the object and the context both lose significance. At the extreme the object becomes anonymous, an orphan without reliable indication of its origin, its significance, its place and function’ (Merryman 1989, 356-57).

I first became curious about cultural heritage when working at the British Museum in 2001; my interest grew in 2005 when I lived in Colombia and fell in love with the posters in the airport that aimed to forestall the loss of artworks (figs. 2-3). At the time, I couldn’t see how such debates related to my own interest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British art and literature. However, I was convinced that art loss ought not to be a concern that was exclusive to developing countries or scholars of non-western art. So while the case studies that make up my thesis do not directly address looted art, part of my aim in defining and exploring the nature of lost art is to bring a new element to such discussions. Literary studies can and should say something new

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<sup>3</sup> See also the UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), May 14, 1954, 249 U.N.T.S. 240 and the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Cultural Property (1970) Nov. 14, 1970, 823 U.N.T.S. 231.

about the cultural property debate, analysing the uncanny politics not only of Merryman's orphans and amputations, but of numerous other curious metaphors that occur in this field and go unexplored. For example, see the following quotation from a government-sponsored catalogue from the Ukraine, of Western European paintings lost during World War II: 'These objects, forcibly [*sic*] removed from their homeland, are in fact "prisoners of war"' (Roslavets 1998, 7). It is one of many instances of writers using prosopopeia to publicise communal grief for lost art collections. The preliminary pages are bilingual English-Ukrainian, but most of the book is in poorly translated English. To me, the foreign English – addressed to 'wide range of who are partial to problems of saving' (*sic*) Ukraine's heritage – begins to embody an unmentioned awareness of potential alienation between the writer and the international community being addressed (Roslavets 1998, unpaginated copyright page). In Oleksandr Fedoruk's preface, the misuse of a linguistic metaphor from the English language and the roman alphabet intensifies this: 'Every step on this way brings near the day when historical justice will be renewed, dots the "i's" and cross the "t's" in World War II, the dramatical period in the history of humanity and Ukraine' (Roslavets 1998, 8). Here, the desire for lost art comes with a sense of uneasy global untranslatability.

### **Thesis Overview**

This thesis is divided into four critical case studies of lost works of art, and a novella. It first engages with the visual reproduction of lost works of art, and then considers literary reproductions. Next, I identify and suggest strategies for critical and creative recuperations of lost art. Finally, my novella offers a different perspective, telling the story of a curator of lost works.

My first critical chapter analyses a major lost painting by Vanessa Bell, *The Nursery*. By paying attention to lost elements, I try to offer a fuller reading of this work than has been given previously. I explore the idea of visual reproductions of lost art, and I think through memory and nostalgia as important concepts for this thesis. My second chapter analyses Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* at the time of its theft from the Louvre in 1911-13. Here I turn from visual reproductions of lost art towards literary ones, looking particularly at creative journalism as a sort of popular ekphrasis. In this chapter I discuss the museum as a home for art, and how vanished artworks change our idea of the museum. My third chapter explores William Blake's *Virgil* woodcuts. These had their edges chopped off during production, and diverse parts and versions of them have been lost. I analyse the idea of missing edges, alongside aesthetics of the frame as developed by Edmund Burke and then later by Jacques Derrida. My final case study looks at the BBC's lost episodes of *Doctor Who*, particularly *Marco Polo*, an early series of lost episodes from 1964. Exploring the series' politicised themes of drugs, gameplay and imperialism, I look at the creative potential of the lost episodes, including amateur reconstructions by fans.

My novella is a kind of Bloomsbury Gothic, about a young curator who ends up working in a private museum made up entirely of lost works of art. I have been intrigued by novels about obsessional hunts for lost works and thrilling thefts of paintings (particularly Michael Frayn's *Headlong*, and the 'Petersburg' chapter of David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*). I noticed that frequently this topic invites the conversion of sedentary, educated characters into action heroes. For example, the first page of Dani Sinclair's Mills & Boon romance about a lost painting succinctly states: 'His fingers were used to gripping pencils, not tree bark' (Sinclair 1998, 5)! While drawing on this idea, I offer a novella in which the art-hunt happens off-page, and

which explores, instead, the peculiar experience of dwelling with lost art. Rather than focusing on a single painting, as fictional accounts often do (Frayn 1999; Mitchell 1999; Sinclair 1998; Bradley 2003; Jardine 1997; Lowry 2008), my fiction aims to give a sense of the multiplicity of lost works – how they really do outnumber extant ones (this also balances out my critical case studies). Letters seemed an ideal form in which to layer up these multiple artworks and also tell a story. Undelivered letters have been a staple of English epistolary fiction since the eighteenth century, and I hope that by using this form I allow a dialogue to emerge between lost artworks and lost letters.

My novella borrows from the plot structure of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* ([1747-8] 2004), adopting a similar (if streamlined) conflict between oppressive family relationships and a strong romantic friendship. In the end, the plots diverge, but I draw on the way that *Clarissa* as well as Angela Carter's short story 'The Bloody Chamber' (Carter 1995, 111-43) create claustrophobia. Narratives about lost art frequently involve a sense of hetero-masculine pursuit, and these fictions offer a frame through which I explore and distort this. For a heroine, I choose an ambitious young woman in the emerging pool of female professionals in the early twentieth century, seeing potential in this to jump my source narrative off course. When researching the tone and language of early twentieth-century letter-writing I have looked at the correspondence of Vanessa Bell (1993), Elizabeth Bishop (1994), Roger Fry (1972), D H Lawrence (1978), Frieda Lawrence (1981), Katherine Mansfield (1989), Marianne Moore (1998), Bertrand Russell (1992), Vita Sackville-West (1992) and Virginia Woolf (1975-80; Sackville-West and Woolf 1984). I have looked closely at letters written abroad, having decided to set part of the novella in South America: I draw on the quietly imperialistic relationship between Britain and Colombia in the early twentieth century (Henderson 2001, 25-31). I felt that an uneasy internationalism would make a fitting background for



the subject of lost works of art, and would complement my critical case studies, which focus on British literary and visual culture.

Together, the different parts of my thesis draw on the creative potential of lost works of art and analyse their theoretical significance. In doing this, I try to weave together the perspectives of literary criticism, art history and fiction writing, seeking new ways in which these disciplines intersect. First, let's turn to Vanessa Bell's *The Nursery* – a painting that turns away.

## Chapter 1

### The Memory Loss of Art: Vanessa Bell's *The Nursery*

This chapter will explore the idea of nostalgia for lost art, as well as giving thought to the problems of visual reproduction. It will then chiefly focus on the memory of a single painting – Vanessa Bell's *The Nursery*. This work's whereabouts are unknown, and it may or may not have been destroyed by fire in 1940 (Spalding, 1983: 250). As a painting, it's a traditional medium that was meant to last. Yet, after loss, medium becomes hard to pin down. *The Nursery* is – perhaps – not an oil painting anymore. In a process that is remarkably characteristic of memory, representations of the lost artwork begin to add up to the thing itself. *The Nursery* is a collection of visual and verbal translations of itself, including photographs, passages from contemporary correspondence and related works. In art historical interpretations of extant works, these would be perceived as ancillary material or evidence. However, for lost paintings, such seeming supplements, together with that extra imaginative leap required from the viewer, take on new significance, collectively becoming the artwork itself in its lost form. 'Loss' is perhaps a medium in its own right, making it hard to distinguish between what is lost and what newly created.

Vanessa Bell's *The Nursery*, completed 1932, is represented in a 1930s black-and-white photograph by A.C. Cooper, a professional photographer of fine art (fig. 4). A mother perches on a footstool, while a nurse sits on a sofa. An older child stands among an array of toys, while the younger reaches for his brother's horse. Not only are the colours of the painting lost, but its texture, three-dimensionality, the extreme edge of the canvas, and its presence as a large object. These limitations are probably why, despite Bell's ambitions for it, and foremost art theorist Roger Fry's judgement in his

private correspondence that it was ‘one of the best things she’s done’,<sup>4</sup> there are just a few short readings of the work. The most important are two pages in Frances Spalding’s biography *Vanessa Bell* (1983); two paragraphs in Diane Gillespie’s *The Sisters’ Arts* (1988); and a single paragraph in an article by Gillian Elinor (1984). Spalding persuasively summarizes *The Nursery* as a ‘nostalgic evocation of motherhood’ (1983: 251, and see Gillespie, 1988: 159–60). Indeed, the painted mother and boys resemble Bell and her sons Julian and Quentin as they had been two decades earlier. As Bell began the work, her two sons were already adults; her third, much younger daughter had just left home for boarding school.

### **Colour and visual reproduction**

Ed Lilley, in an essay on lost paintings – particularly focusing on an 18th-century artist known as Leclerc – has argued that cases of those that “‘survive” through their *analogon*, the photograph’ are ‘relatively straightforward’, as opposed to ‘less simple’ cases of lost artworks recorded only through reproductive prints or verbal texts (2000, 397, 399). However, we need to be wary of seeing photographs ‘simply’ as a relatively good record of lost paintings: this may blind us to a more precise understanding of the loss. In the case of Bell’s *The Nursery*, in its present colourlessness, the quality of its ‘nostalgic evocation of motherhood’ becomes elusive. Is it dark, discordant, rosy?

An unknown early viewer wrote on the back of the photo reproduced here, one of two, ‘very much lighter’.<sup>5</sup> An art historical nostalgia for lost colour ought to frame Bell’s domestic nostalgia, but colour is never discussed in interpretations of the lost

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Spalding (1983, 250). I have been unable to trace this letter in the archives of King’s College, Cambridge.

<sup>5</sup> The other, lighter photograph is currently inaccessible because of the long-term storage of Agnew’s archives.

*Nursery*. Irretrievable, it is nonetheless crucial. The toy trumpet pointing into the image may even be a critical joke about painterly use of colour as a musical quality. Since the nineteenth century, when James McNeil Whistler started using titles like *Symphony in White, No. 2*, European colourists had been experimenting with explicit references to music, most famously Vasily Kandinsky, who not only used musical titles but theorised in 1911 that, for the artist, ‘colour is the keyboard’ (Kandinsky [1914] 1977, 25). Bell’s silent trumpet cannot restore the lost colour but does make it apparent how inarticulate is the surviving photograph. Fry, who had earlier judged Bell unequalled in Britain as a colourist ([1922] 1996, 349), praised *The Nursery* in a way that appeals to this reputation: ‘all extraordinarily gay and bright and something like a Fra Angelico’.<sup>6</sup>

Browsing through books about Bell to compare colour and black-and-white reproductions gives a crude but compelling indication of how she used complex colour structures, more than line, to create form and depth.<sup>7</sup> The central role of colour in Bell’s vision is borne out by her connoisseurial letters. In Italy she saw frescos of Piero della Francesca: ‘One can’t work out whether the colour is really cool or warm, it seems to be both and never cold or hot’, and she made similarly thoughtful assessments of colours used by modern artists (Bell 1993, 242, 245). In the case of the landmark c. 1912 painting *Studland Beach*, Lisa Tickner has shown how the red underpainting of the blue sky helps build an impression of atmospheric pressure in which the sky seems to be rolling forward over the beach rather than receding (1999, 67). There, Bell’s colour creates a sense of claustrophobia and disquiet. We cannot know what unsettling or melodious effects are used in *The Nursery*, although Fry’s use of the word ‘extraordinary’ warns against easily equating the colour with others of Bell’s paintings. We might also want to consider Bell’s own scepticism about the ekphrastic powers of

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Spalding (1983: 250). See note 1 above.

<sup>7</sup> Compare full-page illustrations of Bell’s *The Tub*, for example, in Shone (1976, 177) and Reed (2004, 194).

language with regard to colour, as she wrote to her sister, Virginia Woolf:

Your theories of art are very interesting, of course... The mere words gold or yellow or grey mean nothing to me unless I can see the exact quality of the colour, but I suppose if you do it well you convey that. But I don't see how you can ever count upon the reader getting just the right impression, as you can in a painting, when it comes to describing the looks of things. (Bell 1993, 87)

All this should not mean we ignore the loss: where viewers of the extant painting, such as Fry, took pleasure in its colours, viewers of the lost work can use the regretful and imaginative pleasures of nostalgia as a way to understand it.

Art history depends upon the existence of originals that can, at least notionally, be consulted – even as it uses photography to represent them. In the 1940s André Malraux proposed that the culture of photographic reproduction was not merely useful, but created something new, an imaginary museum that overreached real museums, levelling barriers between epochs and regions. Photography brought to the artwork ‘an unreal world that extends its boundaries ... an unreal world that exists only through photography’ (Malraux [1947] 1967, 110). Of course, such unreal worlds are themselves fixed in historical time. With lost art, developing technologies of reproduction for publications mean that a little while after they are lost, artworks begin to appear increasingly to have travelled from the past. At any given time, a certain type of reproduction meets our technological standards and operates invisibly for most viewers. This used to mean engravings; then black-and-white photography; now, high resolution colour digital images. With lost art, reproductions are technologically fixed at the time the work was last available. A black-and-white photograph taken in the 1930s of *The Nursery* (fig. 4) was still able to blend in to a book published in 1983 (see illustrations in Spalding 1983, facing 272). It's a spectral substitute that looks no different from the

reproduction of the extant painting on the same page. But the same photograph printed today, when colour is increasingly ubiquitously employed by art publishers, will begin to stick out, calling attention to the lost work of art. The flat, unremarkable photograph is a ghost of *The Nursery*. Labelling it as such differentiates it from photographs of extant works, reproductions that refer the viewer to an original. Unlike these, this photograph is – or more precisely, *might be* – the end of the line, both more and less than ‘reproduction’, an inadequate, partial after-image, tantalizing.

This is true of all lost works. To give another example, nowhere is the effect more apparent than in a catalogue from a prestigious *Toulouse Lautrec* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery (see Frèches-Thory, Roquebert and Thomson, 1992, 243). This page offers the only available reproduction of a (then) lost painting by Jean Béraud, *La Brasserie*. It is a rather weird sight: a line drawing reproduced by a nineteenth-century lithograph or photolithograph, captioned below simply as a ‘painting, location unknown’ – with no reference to the medium of reproduction (fig. 5).<sup>8</sup> There is a similar example elsewhere in the catalogue (188). It seems astonishing that a line-print can be treated as an invisible medium, photograph-like, capable of being captioned as a ‘painting’. If the painting had been available, this illustration and its caption would have been completely inconceivable in a 1992 catalogue from authoritative art historians and museums.<sup>9</sup> As it stands, it gives a ghostly look to the page. With lost art, the history of reproduction becomes strangely visible, and there are numerous examples of this.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This painting has since been found, and was auctioned at Christie’s, New York, on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2004. My suggestion that the reproduction is probably a lithograph or photolithograph (possibly a line-block or half-tone) is based on examination of the nineteenth-century publication from which it was taken (Dumas 1883, 169).

<sup>9</sup> The entry was written by Richard Thomson, then senior lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Manchester, now a professor at Edinburgh; the book was co-produced by the Musée D’Orsay and the Hayward Gallery.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Elizabeth Prettejohn’s *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, a book for which colour is particularly important given its centrality to Pre-Raphaelitism. Among a number of pages in which monochrome reproductions of lost paintings stick out (2000, 74-75, 80-81, 82-83), one image looks particularly out of joint because it is obviously a nineteenth-century photograph; placing this next to

By freezing reproductions at different points in time, lost art makes visible reproduction *itself*; a diachronic view of reproduction emerges that differs from and complements Malraux's synchronic imaginary museum.

Lilley's article on lost paintings claims that 'while a photograph of a painting reproduces its lines, its lights and darks, and sometimes its colours, and while it can transmit its "message", ... it does not partake of its presence, comprising its facture, its uniqueness, its "aura"' (2000, 397). This reference to Walter Benjamin's famous idea of a work's 'aura' neglects to explore the way lost art actually unsettles Benjamin's notion of the possibility of aura in reproduction. For Benjamin, a work's aura is tied to 'its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' ([1936] 1969, 220). After mechanical reproduction, the aura, he believes, 'withers' (221). With this in mind, consider the wording of an advertisement in *The Times* after the loss of the *Mona Lisa* in 1911; it promises purchasers that 'in the unhappy event of the permanent loss of the Original, the "Medici Print" is likely to remain the most authentic replica' (Aug 31, 1911, 313). This advertisement promises readers *precisely* what Benjamin believes is the 'most sensitive nucleus' of an artwork that comprises its 'aura': 'namely, its authenticity' (Benjamin [1936] 1969, 221). Whereas Benjamin argues that this authenticity is 'always depreciated' by reproduction (221), the lost work has the opposite effect; its complete disappearance from time and space lends an uncanny authenticity to the reproduction that it would not normally possess.

## Nostalgia

As discussed in my introduction, art history as a discipline has yet to satisfactorily investigate what lost art *is*. Case studies have focused on provenances and

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an extant painting that is unfinished only adds to the ghostly look of the page.

clues, detective work aiming to discover how a lost work *was*, whether it might be found, or whose property it should be, rather than how it *is* in its lost state.<sup>11</sup> The widespread failure to see the unique qualities of lost works as a serious subject of study is the result, I believe, of the past-focused bias of the discipline. Even a nuanced volume of case studies specifically dedicated to lost art concludes, in the words of Deborah Deliyannis: ‘Perhaps this is the main contribution of lost works of art to art history: they require us to focus our attention away from the object and toward something else, which leads to better understanding of the production and use of art *in the past*’ (2000, 205, my emphasis). This past-focus is limiting because works that were made in the past were not absent in that past; they *are* absent *now*. Vanessa Bell’s *The Nursery*, historically, *was* an oil painting. In terms of memory, however, it *is* a nebulous collection of other texts. To understand this, we need a kind of writing that specifically addresses itself to lost works and is candid about its present-focus. While history as well as memory is rooted in presentist concerns, nevertheless, memory actively takes up recall and representation in the present, while the ostensible object of history is a differentiated past. Putting history aside, and thinking in terms of memory and memory loss, will allow the *current* absence of lost artworks – and the consequent overdetermination of their representations – to stand in relief. Critiques of *The Nursery*, to date, have focused on the past, impoverished by a lack of evidence. A different sort of criticism might think more freely about the ghostly qualities of this so-called painting today; this could be called not *the history of art*, but, I suggest, *the memory loss of art*.<sup>12</sup>

Even when not recognized as such, the art history of lost art is frequently nostalgic. For art historians, art from the past has a cultural homeliness. Its loss prompts reflective longings, not only for works themselves, but for the versions of history we

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<sup>11</sup> There are exceptions in the field of contemporary art. See p. 16 above.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Nicholas Royle for suggesting this phrase.



could write if we had them, since, methodologically, art history privileges extant objects. For example, feminist art historians are an intellectual community for whom women's art production provides a powerful sense of origin. Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry wrote about women in the Vorticist movement c. 1914–17:

The destruction of ... these decorative schemes highlights some of the difficulties confronting the study of Vorticism, hampered as Cork discovered by "the loss of about half the movement's most important products". Discussion and interpretation of works by women artists must necessarily come to terms with the disappearance of much of their work ... (Beckett and Cherry 2000, 60)

Choosing words like 'hampered,' Cherry and Beckett characterize the present as disabled. A nostalgic longing for art's lost past is made explicit when they say that writing needs to '*come to terms*' with art loss (my emphasis). Elsewhere, Elizabeth Prettejohn's important chapter on 'The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood' begins by considering 'all our lacks'; she writes that 'in comparison with the riches available to the student of the male Pre-Raphaelites ... we lack the most basic materials, the works made by women' (2000, 69). In the case of Bell herself, Richard Shone longs for lost rooms that she designed, the 'extraordinary distinction' of which is 'difficult to recapture from a handful of photographs.' This is nostalgia felt bodily: a critic with a 'handful' of photos. He continues, commenting that 'quite apart from aesthetic considerations,' he regrets the loss of art to 'evoke for us ... what ... Vanessa's friends called "civilised" life' (Shone, 1976: 233). This thesis will argue that we should move beyond merely *acknowledging* lacks, and that dwelling longer and more self-consciously with lost elements can pay critical dividends.

When writing about art, the absence of objects threatens to close doors. A more up-front nostalgia will help us nose around this lack, by conceptualizing a perspective

that is at once imaginative and critical in its longing for the past, opening possibilities to talk about losses such as colour in Bell's *The Nursery*. Writers on nostalgia have shown how its subjective take on what is temporally and/or spatially absent can mingle the imaginative and critical in enabling ways (Boym 2002; Trigg 2006). Recently, Alisa Lebow defined one artist's 'strategic nostalgia' as that which 'refuses to repudiate the romanticism of the impulse while still maintaining a critical distance from it', so that it 'may suggest alternatives or even authorize a shift in perception' (2007, 137, 150). Where lost art is concerned, the weight of this strategic nostalgia falls on the critic.

Although nostalgia sweetly insists on its arrival from the past, it is most characterized by insistent hauntings of the present: nostalgia regards what's never quite *there*. Svetlana Boym writes: 'Nostalgia tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial' (2002, xvii). Like a ghost or a hallucination, a lost painting is what we see, but not with our eyes. Lost paintings promise colour and form beyond the peripheries of vision. They grow from evidence, but to experience them we have to move beyond documentation and beyond history. They offer art that touches our senses only obliquely; art history without empiricism. Lost artworks, often forgotten, are the immaterial paintings of the nostalgic. They look different in each re-telling – and yet they might return home at any moment. The strangeness of nostalgia has often been linked with the combination of familiarity, dislocation and change experienced when we return to an object of nostalgia. Lost paintings provoke what I believe is a unique nostalgia in that it's strange for the opposite reason: they might return *the same* as they were in the past.

The aim of writing about *The Nursery* today could be seen as a memorialising one. If so, it is an unstable memorial, since its object may show up to prove it false. Memorials are often subject to challenge, but we rarely expect them to be challenged by

their object. This will root the writing ever more firmly in its present, as we feel more uncertain than usual how relevant our texts can be in the future. It is about lost art – now.

### **The Lost *Nursery***

In researching and remembering lost art, we can shape the works that haunt art history. In personal letters written between 1930 and 1932 to her sister Virginia Woolf and her colleague and ex-lover Fry, Bell described *The Nursery* as ‘gigantic’ and a ‘monster’ and ‘an absurd great picture’.<sup>13</sup> In these words *The Nursery* begins to loom: as an imagined object, it acquires a commanding near-physical presence, a ghostly three-dimensional form, but never solidity. Bell’s nice pairing of ‘absurd’ and ‘great,’ on one level humble and self-deprecating – ‘an absurd great picture’ – magnify her work: it is not just big but absurdly big, and her delighted wonder at this presence is infectious, so that *The Nursery* becomes, in memory, an absurd great ghost. When planning to send it to a three-man show she held with Duncan Grant and Keith Baynes at Agnew’s, Bell wrote to Fry: ‘I shall probably have to show *two* monsters – The Nursery & also the stove picture, as Keith of course has nothing but small landscapes & flowers’.<sup>14</sup> Her comment makes a causal link between Baynes’s decision to send conventionally feminine paintings, ‘small landscapes & flowers,’ and Bell herself ‘hav[ing] to’ send in their opposite, ‘monsters’. This adds another dimension to *The Nursery*: a comic embrace of displaced femininity – oversized, ambitious, monstrous – not evident in the photograph.

I have been arguing that lost paintings can be shaped through a kind of nostalgic viewing, a sensory attentiveness to loss. This is particularly appropriate for *The Nursery*

<sup>13</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 20 July [1931?]: Charleston Papers, University of Sussex Library; for the letter to Woolf, see Bell (1993, 367).

<sup>14</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 13 May [1932]: Charleston Papers, University of Sussex Library.

because its nostalgia is double-layered – anticipated, by Bell, at the level of content. Bell’s biographer, Spalding, interprets *The Nursery* as an exploration of both ‘intimacy’ and ‘the remembrance of it,’ persuasively analysing the work as ‘mark[ing] the onset of separation; while celebrating motherhood, [it] is also poignantly about loss’ (1983, 251). Moreover, *The Nursery* is sensitive to the passing of modes of representation. When painting the central boy figure, Bell probably used some of the numerous reels of sunlit nude photos she’d taken of her sons Julian and Quentin in the 1910s (fig. 6). It wouldn’t be the only time she had used these; Christopher Reed has shown that Bell copied an early photo of Quentin for a 1929 panel at Penns-in-the-Rocks (2004, 257–8). In revisiting the figure of the nude child in 1932, in paint, when Julian was 24 and Quentin 22, Bell nostalgically extends the eroticized ‘stable matrilineal psychic space’ that Maggie Humm has read into the nude photographs (2006, 21). Thus *The Nursery* can be interpreted as nostalgic for aspects of art as well as motherhood; in the 1910s, Bell had been surrounded by children, habitually nude in summer, whom she used as models, especially for photography. By the early 1930s this artistic resource, as well as this kind of family life, had changed completely. Photography is usually the medium of choice for the modern nostalgic viewer. But for Bell as producer, *The Nursery* as painting offered a way to be nostalgic for photography – a particular type of photographic practice which took her children as its subject. Now the work is lost, this escalates: *The Nursery* is nostalgic for photography and also for paint, for itself.

The toys in *The Nursery* may revisit memories, photos or actual toys associated with Bell or her children. For example Bell’s letters mention a badminton set (1993, 124), and the large ship in *The Nursery* resembles one that appeared in a 1915–16 family photograph alongside Quentin, who later recalled: ‘the model ship was, I think, made by Roger Fry’ (fig. 7; Bell and Garnett 1981, 47). But Bell’s nostalgic vision is

integrated with other ways of seeing, such as academicism. The boy's spot-lit posture, standing straight with one leg relaxed, bent arms, and his head pointing slightly down and to one side, resembles photos of Julian but is also a child-sized adaptation of canonical nudes including Michelangelo's *David*.<sup>15</sup> Such sculptures are more commonly represented from the front than the back; it appears that this lost painting avoids looking back at us.

Formally, *The Nursery*'s nostalgia is interrupted – or created – in a gesture that rejects its viewers. The standing boy is a formal centre, bathed in light (especially following the instructions of the photo's annotator, and imaginatively lightening it). He stands out, the only uninterrupted strong vertical in a work dominated by a proliferation of maternal arcs and circles<sup>16</sup> – for the arcs, for example, note the string attached to the horse, and the right arm of nurse and mother, and numerous other lines, such as those of the jug on the mantelpiece and its handle. In contrast, potential strong straight lines are carefully interrupted: the line of the curtain is interrupted by the sofa; the lines of the fireplace by the bodies of mother and child; the sofa by the bodies of nurse and child; and the picture frame by the head of the nurse. All this serves to intensify focus on the boy's body. A visual inaccessibility is created as this crucial central figure turns his back, closing a circle of figures, and excluding the viewer – a shut-out observer who is also, in Bell, an artist and mother. The inaccessibility is exacerbated by gestures towards objects that are cut out of sight: the framed painting at the top, the flowers in the jug on the mantelpiece, and the window at the right – glaring absences, because Bell is known for her paintings of flowers and windows. Consciously or unconsciously, all these exclusions speak to the inaccessibility of the object of nostalgia, be it lost

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<sup>15</sup> Another possible source is a classical sculpture of *Antinous* that Bell may very likely have known since it was admired by her friend, colleague and ex-lover Roger Fry, who reproduced his book *Last Lectures* (1939, 214).

<sup>16</sup> Elinor briefly noted the circles and ellipses (1984, 33).

childhoods or lost art forms.

In a 1931 letter to Woolf, Bell responded glowingly to her sister's new novel *The Waves*, adding that she'd been struggling with a painting – *The Nursery* – that has 'some sort of analogous meaning to what you've done', particularly in terms of the relation between toys, figures, floor and light (Bell 1993, 367–68). While *The Waves* is in no simple way a place where *The Nursery* can be found, one key link between painting and novel is the formal device of a *closed* circle that excludes the viewer: *The Waves*' six characters are an exclusive 'circle' that 'closes in a ring' (Woolf [1931] 1998, 118).<sup>17</sup> In one passage near the end of the novel, the addressee suddenly becomes a stranger who, the text implies, cannot truly see the text, creating an inaccessibility for the reader: 'Since we do not know each other (though I met you once, I think ...), we can talk freely ... But unfortunately, what I see ... you do not see' (Woolf [1931] 1998, 199). This could be the refrain of the lost *Nursery* or any one of its figures: 'unfortunately, what I see ... you do not see'.

### **Lost Mother**

In its striking doubling of both child and maternal figure, *The Nursery* cites Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John Baptist* (fig. 8), a work that was innovative in including John the Baptist in the traditional grouping of Christ with Mary and her mother Anne (Schapiro 1956, 167). As a former Royal Academy student, Bell would have been familiar with Leonardo's cartoon when it was at Burlington House. In *The Nursery*, the precise postures of reaching infant and restraining nurse mirror the Madonna and child in Leonardo's cartoon. Insofar as *The Nursery* is a semi-autobiographical work, the figure of the mother on the left can be

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<sup>17</sup> Gillespie mentions the circular structures of *The Nursery* and *The Waves* (pp. 159-60), but does not observe the closed structure or excluded viewer, instead seeing a much cosier 'domestic circle' in which different characters are 'united'.

read as a playful symbol linking Bell to St Anne. As a Renaissance saint, Anne was celebrated for fertility and motherhood and for marrying three times (Schapiro 1956, 161). Similarly, Bell, who was nicknamed ‘The Saint’ as a child, had three significant partners throughout her life (including her husband, Clive Bell) and joked proudly with friends and colleagues about her ‘maternal instincts’ and ‘domestic virtues’ (Bell 1993, 71 n.1, 264, 314–15, 400).

For Mary Jacobus, nostalgia is itself bound up with the ‘always-absent mother’ (1995, 5). With this in mind, once again, the painting’s loss seems uncannily material to its theme. Bell’s reference to Leonardo’s cartoon, art history’s most famous image of a mother and grandmother with two boys, also evokes the spectre of Bell’s own mother Julia Stephen, her sons’ absent grandmother, who had died in 1895. Stephen’s memory was a frequent source of inspiration for Bell and Woolf (see Dunn [1990] 2004, 252–9). Bell had found Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse* ‘shattering’ in the way it resurrected memories of her mother, ‘like meeting her again with oneself grown up and on equal terms’ (Bell 1993, 317). Indeed, Spalding proposed that *To the Lighthouse* inspired *The Nursery* (1983, 251). This can be supported by formal analysis: the boy’s body, lighthouse-like itself, recalls the ‘line there, in the centre’ that had been essential to completing Lily Briscoe’s painting in the final paragraph of the novel (Woolf 1927, 170). In addition, one of *The Nursery*’s sailing boats resembles one in a *To the Lighthouse*-themed fireplace designed by Bell for Woolf (fig. 9).<sup>18</sup> Even the orchestrated mess in *The Nursery*, a picture that Bell twice summarized as ‘a floor covered with toys’, seems an illustration of how in 1930 Bell was using memories of her mother’s home to justify her own chaotic one: ‘I can’t think what he will make of this establishment, though really in some ways I often think it’s not unlike family life in my mother’s

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<sup>18</sup> The *Lighthouse* fireplace is reproduced by Gillespie (1988, 158), but not discussed in relation to *The Nursery*.

home in the summer holiday ... But I expect he's forgotten how shabby and casual it all used to be ...'.<sup>19</sup>

Leonardo's cartoon has been analysed in terms of the depiction of the Madonna and St Anne's relative status (Schapiro 1956, 163–4). Bell's *The Nursery* likewise involves a subtle exploration of status. The nurse is higher up in the picture plane and so, in Renaissance pictorial terms, has a privileged position. However, the mother's higher social position is indicated by her clothing and the way that, perched on a footstool while the nurse is sat securely on the sofa, she is shown to be a temporary presence in the nursery. A complex representation of maternity, this ambivalent depiction may also reflect Bell's well-documented uncertainty about establishing a modern relationship with servants (for Bell and her employees, see e.g. Bell 1993, 308; Spalding 1983, 182). Interestingly, further evidence of this can be found in another version of *The Nursery*, which does not appear in any of the literature on Bell: this version is also untraced and also photographed (fig. 10), and in it the mother figure wears an apron and shabbier shoes, apparently becoming a second servant.<sup>20</sup>

*The Nursery* is an exploration of lost mothers, lost childhoods and changing, complex social relations – it must always have been a nostalgic work. With the painting's disappearance, however, every element is erased and re-written; today, it is made up of lost brushstrokes that depict lost memories.

Artworks whose whereabouts is unknown, such as *The Nursery*, make rewarding objects of study in their own right, with the kind of relation to an extant work that a ghost has to a person. Like memory, lost works can turn disciplinary definitions on their heads. Consider the complex relation of lost art to the following two statements. First,

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<sup>19</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 29 September [1930]: Charleston Papers, University of Sussex Library.

<sup>20</sup> A photograph of this version is in Agnew's archives, with no information on its current location.



in *Memory and Material Culture*, Andrew Jones, re-stating an influential insight of the art historian Jules Prown, writes that ‘artefacts are the only class of historical event that occurred in the past but survive into the present’ (Jones 2007, 3). Second, Geoff Cubitt has reminded us that history has conventionally been understood to ‘differ from other branches of scholarly inquiry ... in having an object of study – the past – that has already gone for ever’ (2007, 32). Vanished art doesn’t satisfy our expectations of artefacts or of history. It occupies a nebulous borderline between history, the history of art and memory.

My aim in writing about *The Nursery* has been to a large degree a memorialising one, driven by a familiar desire to reinvigorate (and reinvent) cultural memories of what’s lost. However, memorials of artworks whose whereabouts are unknown are peculiarly unstable. Not because of the inevitable lack of evidence from the past – rather, it is an uncertainty about the future. *The Nursery* may or may not return tomorrow. And if it does return (unlike a person, say, or a place), it may return relatively unaltered. This makes for an odd nostalgia. Paintings do suffer damage and decay, but in relative terms, their durability and transportability mean that even after centuries of loss they can return as they were in the past. This is just part of what makes lost art unreliable and uncanny, and makes art-memorial writing a temporary, ephemeral genre, chasing an absence that may at any moment be confronted and erased by its opposite, presence.

## Chapter 2

### Spekphrasis: Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*

This chapter considers art theft, the way lost art alters our idea of the museum, and the creative responses this provokes. The Discovery Channel website on crime has a number of pages devoted to 'Hot Art.'<sup>21</sup> Lost art is hot: this is curious and disturbing.

In 2008, Norwegian auctioneers told *The Art Newspaper* they believed the thefts of *The Scream* and *Madonna* from the Munch Museum in 2004 had bolstered prices of Munch's work.<sup>22</sup> *The Scream*, itself a powerful interrogation of the traditional philosophical belief that paintings are seen but not heard, was thus missing for two years but echoes of it resounded louder than ever in the art world. This led to the coining of the term 'Munch Effect' in that newspaper, when they reported a church and tourist board who deliberately exploited thefts as a means of attracting visitors.<sup>23</sup>

If, as my previous chapter suggested, there is always something peculiar about reproductions of lost art, the widespread curiosity attracted by stolen art has actually led to the creation of *new* works. Lucian Freud's portrait of *Francis Bacon*, from the Tate collection, was stolen while on loan in Berlin in 1988. Freud launched a poster appeal for the painting's recovery in 2001, when he wanted to exhibit it. He designed a wild-west style 'Wanted' poster, and a limited edition of 2,500 was printed and plastered around Berlin (fig. 11).<sup>24</sup> Here, the loss of a tiny, unique oil painting on copper directly

<sup>21</sup> 'Crime and Forensics: Hot Art', Discovery Channel, accessed 5 November, 2011, <http://www.yourdiscovery.com/crime/hotart/hotart/index.shtml>.

<sup>22</sup> 'Munch prices "driven up by thefts"', *The Art Newspaper* 193, 1 July, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Clemens Bomsdorf, 'Cranach theft to be used to lure visitors to Norwegian church', *The Art Newspaper*, 3 March, 2009, web edition only, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Cranach%20theft%20to%20be%20used%20to%20lure%20visitors%20to%20Norwegian%20church/17100>.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Maev Kennedy, 'Posters beg Berliners to bring back the Bacon', *The Guardian*, 22 June, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/jun/22/arts.arttheft?INTCMP=SRCH>; Jonathan Jones, 'Bringing home the Bacon', *The Guardian*, 23 June, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2001/jun/23/arts.highereducation?INTCMP=SRCH>.

inspired the creation of a multiple with a theme from popular Hollywood films. And while the lost painting belonged to a London museum associated with high art and elite culture, the new poster had a more popular exhibition space – out in the streets of Berlin.

One of the most famous recent art thefts was in 1990, when thirteen works by artists including Rembrandt and Vermeer were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. This inspired a celebrated work by the French artist Sophie Calle, *Last Seen* (1991; fig. 12). Calle's piece juxtaposes photographs of the empty spaces left in the museum with framed panels of text. Calle compiled the text from interviews with 'curators, guards, and other staff members' – described as such by Calle in MoMA's exhibition catalogue *Museum as Muse* (McShine 1999, 136; see also Calle 2000). By carefully selecting and juxtaposing the roles of 'curators' and 'guards', amongst 'other staff members,' Calle makes a deliberate connection between two groups perceived as separated by economics, class, race or education. Elsewhere, the Gardner's director, Anne Hawley, has been quoted describing the theft from the Gardner Museum as a 'shot of adrenaline' which directly prompted new initiatives that reached out to new audiences for the museum.<sup>25</sup>

A picture starts to emerge about the possibilities for exploiting the popularity of art theft. In this chapter I explore these ideas through some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cases of lost art. In particular, I discuss Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, which was stolen from the Louvre on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1911 and recovered on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1913. Seen at the moment of its disappearance, *Mona Lisa* is here read as a popular early twentieth-century text rather than an elite Renaissance painting. As with *The Nursery* today, the *Mona Lisa* in those years 'survived' through an enmeshed muddle of remembrances and visual and verbal representations. Whereas in the

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<sup>25</sup> Abby Goodnough, 'A Wounded Museum Feels a Jolt of Progress', *The New York Times*, 15 March, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/arts/design/15good.html?pagewanted=all>; see also Boser 2008, 61.

previous chapter I gave particular thought to visual representations, here I will think through the literary reception of lost art.

In London, after the *Mona Lisa*'s recovery, a journalist from *The Daily Mirror* signing W.M. commented: 'She is found, and now millions, who would never otherwise have looked at her, crowd through the room where she is temporarily housed... But what... that smile now seems to say is simply: "Who would ever have thought people would be such fools? This shows the uses of advertisement"' (*The Daily Mirror*, 16 December 1913, 7). Rather than accepting that the lessons to be learnt from this are 'simple', my paper offers literary analysis of the journalistic descriptions of the lost painting. I discuss the museum as the perceived *home* of lost artworks, set against descriptions of inappropriate border crossings and uncanny foreign places. I explore how losses affect the way audiences perceive museums, taking journalists as a museum audience with a distinct and influential voice. Moving away from Paris, I focus on British reception of the theft – with some reference to examples of other international losses.

Writers on the *Mona Lisa* have noticed that once stolen, the painting began to figure – often as a woman, rather than a painting – in numerous spin-off artefacts, including newspaper cartoons, postcards, hatpins, cabaret songs and films (see e.g. McMullen [1975] 1976, 205). Whereas previous accounts have merely mentioned such objects, as evidence of the lost painting's popularity, I will offer a close analysis of some of these re-appropriations, to explore *how*, exactly, loss can seem to bring an object to new, uncanny, life.

The surge in popularity when the *Mona Lisa* was lost, and the subsequent creation of a new myth around the painting, has been the chief focus in writings about this theft. Theft provokes a shift from the *Mona Lisa*'s place 'among the cultural elite at

the end of the nineteenth century’ to a new situation in which the press, like the painting, ‘no longer addressed itself to a relatively narrow elite’, and ‘many flocked to the Louvre to look at the empty space where it had been hanging’ (Sasoon 2001b, 12; see also Sasoon 2001a, 171-219; Nairne 2011, 187-91, 216-22; Scotti 2009, 69-80; McMullen [1975] 1976, 197-216). Most histories of the theft, however well-researched and however well-qualified their writers, seem written with a popular audience in mind, tending to narrativise rather than critique the painting’s theft. Accounts often dwell on the police investigation and the profile and discovery of the criminal, Vincenzo Peruggia. These will not feature in my chapter, which is less concerned with the crime itself, and more with literary recuperations of the vanished painting. A rare theoretical exploration has been offered by Darian Leader ([2002] 2004), who uses the theft as an opportunity for a psychoanalytic discussion of art and Lacanian absence. But even this discussion avoids the use of scholarly footnotes or references – as though lost art were not destined for discussion in the academy – and seems unselfconscious of its own critical perspective.<sup>26</sup> Aaron Freundschuh’s (2006) excellent article is an exception,

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<sup>26</sup> Despite its aim at a popular readership, Leader’s book betrays an unconscious elitism. For example, compare the choice of pronouns in these two passages:

When *we* learn the elementary laws of perspective at art class in school, this reduction of the visible to the geometrical is taken for granted. *We* fix a vanishing point and a point of distance and then make a grid to organise our picture. ... If *we* follow these rules, the picture plane is established and the frame becomes a window to which *we* bring *our* eye. (Leader [2002] 2004, 130-1, emphasis mine)

This explains why *people* eat popcorn compulsively when *they* go to the cinema. Why can’t *they* just watch the film? ... When *people* eat popcorn, *they* don’t eat a bit, then stop, then eat a bit more later. *They* just shovel it in non-stop, to persuade *themselves* that feeding is a continuous as opposed to a discontinuous process. And all of this happens when *they* are confronted with the image in one of its most purified forms: film. (Leader [2002] 2004, 145-6, emphasis mine)

This telling shift from *we* to *they*, from the education of the psychoanalyst writer and his imagined readership, to the bad habits of the masses, may make us laugh or bristle, but there’s a serious problem of methodology here. In the second of these passages Leader is discussing the loss of the maternal breast and face that is central to his argument (see 145). But this loss is constantly viewed from the outside, as writer and reader supposedly *understand* the loss felt by the compulsive popcorn eater, rather than *experiencing* it. Nor are these two isolated passages. Looking at his descriptions of

using the theft to explore the relationship of narrative to the history of urban development in Paris.<sup>27</sup> He notes that while the theft inspired numerous narratives, it has ‘elud[ed] the sustained treatment of historians’ (Freundschuh 2006, 274). He could equally have written that the endlessly proliferating narratives have eluded literary critical analysis – that the journalistic delight in the theft has often been mentioned but never analysed in detail. This is what I intend to address here.

### **Babel and the Sphinx**

It is curious that the word ‘translation’ has been influential both in theories of visual reproduction and of ekphrasis. Beginning with Evelina Borea (1979), scholars of so-called ‘reproductive’ prints have suggested ‘translation’ as a preferable term for black and white line engravings after tonal paintings, in the light of creative and interpretative decisions that engravers made when ‘reproducing’ an image in such a different medium.<sup>28</sup> In a very different academic context, writers on ekphrasis, or the literary representation of works of visual art, have also proposed translation as a model, drawing attention to its ‘infinite relation’ and its ‘impossible project’ as being suited to the project of using words to describe pictures (Shapiro 2007, 14, 19; see also Krieger

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museum thefts, we begin to see how his language is structured: ‘we follow the Lacanian argument’ while ‘*crowds* flock to the Louvre’ (66, emphasis mine). This isn’t simply a matter of what is temporally feasible, since the same language is used of a recent Monet exhibition, to which ‘*crowds* flock’ while ‘we explain’ (3, emphasis mine). For me, this sort of hands-off approach to the missing object just won’t do. Instead, I want to write a thesis that, whilst being situated within academia, is also from the point of view of an unashamed popcorn addict and lover of the big and small screen, with all the valorisation of escapism that this implies. I suggest that we analyse lost art, but also allow it to beguile *us*.

<sup>27</sup> Another attempt to theorise the theft is a short chapter by Callum Storrie (2006, 7-15), which explores the suspicion that fell on Apollinaire and Picasso, arguing that the *Mona Lisa* is ‘forever missing’ and that ‘at the heart of the Ur-Museum there is an absence’ (15).

<sup>28</sup> This debate was begun in Italian by the art historian Evelina Borea (1979, 374, 380; cited in Bury 2006, 275-6): Bury acknowledges the importance of Borea’s term and suggests that in some circumstances even ‘translation’ is too strong a word for the relationship between prints and the original compositions they draw on. However, ‘translation’ has since become a common idea for historians of the print; for example, it has been taught by British Museum and UCL in their MA in the History of the Print.

1992, 16; Steiner 1982, 21). This coincidence of terms within the fields of ekphrasis and the history of printmaking is understandable, given how influential the idea of translation has been in recent decades. For instance, both of these ideas about translation could be thought in relation to Jacques Derrida's essay 'Des Tours de Babel', which distrusts the possibility of 'reproduction' ([1980] 2002, 123) and discusses the 'infinite labour' of translation, its 'necessary and impossible task' (133, 109). According to Derrida, the Tower of Babel may be 'the myth of the origin of myth'. The tower with its lost language 'tells of the need for figuration, for myth, ... for translation inadequate to compensate for that which multiplicity denies us' (104). There is a fit, here, for lost works of art, which are always translated into multiple texts, and which lead us to imagine a lost *singular* original. And no lost work of figurative art has been more mythical than the lost *Mona Lisa*.

From the nineteenth century, thanks to writers such as Théophile Gautier, the look and smile of the *Mona Lisa* was already associated with the mythical sphinx (see McMullen [1975] 1976, 176-9; Cheeke 2008, 180). Curiously, after the painting's loss, this sphinx-link magically grew. When the painting was stolen, its frame was abandoned on the staircase leading to the Cour du Sphinx in the Louvre, as Jérôme Coignard gleefully notes in his chapter 'L'énigme de la Cour du Sphinx' (Coignard 1990, 20). Sadly this connection goes unexplored; Coignard, like most writers on the *Mona Lisa*'s theft, produces a piece of popular investigative journalism that steers clear of the fascinating theoretical questions it perhaps unwittingly raises. But we might think of the Sphinx as a silent twist on Babel, a shift from the impossible task of translation to the equally impossible riddle. If we move from Babel to the Sphinx, we're also moving between the verbal and the plastic arts, monotheism and polytheism, the masculine and

the feminine, and some very different ideas about language. To quote an essay by Hélène Cixous published four years before ‘Des Tours de Babel’:

“Watch-bitch,” [chienne chanteuse] the sphinx was called: she’s an animal and she sings out. She sings out because women do ... they do utter a little, but they don't speak. Always keep in mind the distinction between speaking and talking. It is said, in philosophical texts, that women’s weapon is the word, because they talk, talk endlessly, chatter, overflow with sound, mouthsound: but they don't actually speak, they have nothing to say. They always inhabit the place of silence, or at most make it echo with their singing. (Cixous [1976] 1981, 49)

This chapter will think through verbal recuperations of lost works of art, alongside visual recuperations. I want to think of this meeting in terms of Babel and the Sphinx. The memory loss of art is a bit like this; it is as if the citizens of Babel, en masse, presented themselves before the Sphinx – or as if the Sphinx got up, went to Babel, and padded up its lost tower.

### **An audience for the lost *Mona Lisa***

Before the theft in 1911, the London *Times* had mentioned the *Mona Lisa* five times since 1900 – plus once by implication, when the Queen of Italy is described as having seen the ‘great masterpieces of Leonardo da Vinci’ in the Louvre (19 October, 1903, 5). Of these six mentions, two involve royal visits, and all evoke elite scholarly or cultural contexts. In 1900 there is a critical article about ‘The rearrangement of the Louvre’ (4 September, 1900, 9); in 1908, in the context of a disparaging review of a modern art exhibition, the *Mona Lisa* is mentioned in a quote from what they call a ‘clever critic’ (24 February, 1908, 4); in 1909 it is mentioned alongside a scholarly debate about the attribution of a wax sculpture to Leonardo (15 November, 1909, 6); in 1909 it appears in an article about ‘The King of Portugal in Paris’ (2 December, 1909,



5); and finally in 1911, when an actress at the prestigious Royal Court Theatre is said to have brought ‘touches... of Monna Lisa’ to her role (1 February, 1911, 12).

*The Daily Mirror*, another successful paper aimed at a much less privileged audience, tells a comparable story. Between the *Mirror*’s founding in 1903, and the theft of 1911, the *Mona Lisa* features twice. On the first occasion the painting, as the most famous of Leonardo’s works in the Louvre, appears in an article from the perspective of ‘the modern critically-minded student’, defending this collection’s authenticity against accusations from ‘irresponsible persons’ (29 October, 1904, 10). The second mention, in 1910, is in the paper’s socially ambitious section ‘To-day’s Dinner-Table Topics,’ in which subjects and opinions are offered to socially-aspiring readers. The context is a fire at an exhibition in Brussels, and readers are invited to discuss the riskiness of art loans, and to laugh at the ‘futurists who hold that all museums ought to be burnt down by law, as they trammel the future by setting examples from the past.’ After ridiculing futurism, the article goes on to exclaim with horror: ‘If the Monna Lisa were burnt!’ (16 August, 1910, 7).

Immediately after the theft, journalistic reception of the *Mona Lisa* changed; interpretations of the painting from broader sectors of society began to be seen as relevant. The first report from *The Times* notes: ‘The only suggested clue is a remark made by a working mason to a comrade as they were passing through the gallery yesterday to the effect that the “Monna Lisa” was the finest picture in the Louvre’ (23 August, 1911, 6). This was sourced from Reuters and also appeared in *The Daily Mail* (23 August, 1911, 5) and *The Guardian* (23 August, 1911, 6). In marked contrast to earlier discussions of the *Mona Lisa*, here a working-class man is represented with a connoisseurial opinion of the painting – although this fact in itself is seen as inherently

suspicious, as a 'clue' to the theft. In 1913, on the painting's recovery, a more confident representation of working-class connoisseurship appeared in *The Daily Mirror*:

**A Workman and 'Monna Lisa'**

The 'Monna Lisa' of Leonardo da Vinci has been made the subject of many eulogies, the most famous of them being, of course, that of Walter Pater. But a phrase that I chanced to overhear in Soho last night describes the picture as well as anything that has been yet written on the subject. It came from a working man. And this was the phrase: 'The Madonna of the wicked eye.' (16 December, 1913, 5)

This brief article, although it upholds the status of both the named literary giant, Pater, and the journalist as flâneur, also defines as newsworthy an art-critical performance from a workman on the city streets. With its hints of sexual deviancy and supernatural powers, 'The Madonna of the wicked eye' recalls Gautier's well-known literary description of *Mona Lisa* as having 'le regard sagace, profond, velouté, plein de promesse' (Gautier, Houssaye and Saint-Victor 1864, 24). Leader has linked the theft of the *Mona Lisa* to the portrait's threatening, feminine gaze, citing as evidence the fact that the eyes of pictures are often targets for vandalism ([2002] 2004, 17- 18, 52). But of course, the *Mona Lisa* was stolen, not vandalised. It is the viewer and not the painting that is blinded here. Indeed, we might fantasise that the painting, hidden, watches us. The reference to the 'wicked eye' is appreciative rather than threatened in tone; it is a pleasure to be watched.

It is impossible to say if the workman's words were actually overheard, or if they are a fiction of the anonymous journalist; they certainly owe something to the description by Pater to which the article refers:

... like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about

her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. (Pater 1869, 507)

These lines bring together the proper name of Mary, the vampire, and the eyelids – not unlike ‘the Madonna of the wicked eye’ – except that Pater’s phenomenal sentence structure also holds these elements carefully apart. The workman’s critique is more radical than its model, directly re-labelling the seductive secular portrait as a religious painting of a wicked Madonna.

### **A proliferating image**

One of the most spectacular Victorian thefts was of Thomas Gainsborough’s *Duchess of Devonshire*, taken from the art gallery Agnew’s on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1876 (curiously, this was the same dealership that handled Vanessa Bell’s *The Nursery*). This theft has been described in sensationalist accounts of art crime such as Ben MacIntyre’s *The Napoleon of Crime* (1997; see also Cummins 2011; Worth 2001). These accounts focus their attention on the thief, Adam Worth (see also Nairne 2011, 188), and the reception of the missing painting has not received critical attention. Before the date of the theft, nineteenth-century newspaper mentions of this well-known painting gave accounts of connoisseurial opinion and auction prices. These were predictably gendered; the name of the female sitter appeared alongside that of male artists: not only Thomas Gainsborough but also the engraver, Samuel Cousins. Other people involved were male connoisseurs, such as the auctioneer, Thomas Woods, who said ‘that this was the finest portrait he had ever seen in that room’ (*The Lancaster Gazette*, 10 May, 1876,

BLN (R3211854960)), and male owners – Thomas Agnew bought the painting from the estate of Wynne Ellis, via Messrs Christie, Manson and Woods.<sup>29</sup>

After the theft of Gainsborough's *Duchess of Devonshire* (which the press also re-christened *The Duchess of Gainsborough*), newspaper accounts suggest a dramatically altered, more creative response to the picture. For example, there was plenty of wordplay relating to the theft, particularly in terms of proper names. Jokes were made about the fact that a different lost painting, Thomas Sidney Cooper's *The Monarch of the Meadows*, was rediscovered in London's Gainsborough Street (*Fun*, 1 February, 1882, UKP (DX1901455235)). *The Sporting Times* playfully reported a coincidence that the current Duke of Devonshire had been the last person to view the lost portrait, as if he might have somehow carried off the ghost of his ancestral wife (*The Sporting Times*, 17 June, 1876, UKP (DX1901833354)). The lost *Duchess* became co-opted into stories at once familiar, magical, and disturbingly gendered; one of the false conjectures about the painting's recovery had it 'down in the cellar' of a house 'tenanted by an old woman of retiring habits and mysterious ways' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 September, 1898, BLN (Y3200485190)). The poet R. E. Egerton-Warburton published in *The Sporting Gazette*'s column 'The Man About Town' what the paper claims is 'a rather neat epigram' about the lost picture. This poem reflects on the role of the historic Duchess of Devonshire as a famous canvasser in parliamentary elections; it

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<sup>29</sup> This brief account of journalistic reception before the theft is based on a search of the 19th Century British Library Newspapers database. The search terms 'Gainsborough AND Duchess of Devonshire' yield 93 results up to and including the evening of the theft. Of these, several are irrelevant articles in which the words happen to coincide. Of the articles that address the painting, all are as I have described here. Curiously, the painting was also untraced (though not yet stolen) in the early and mid nineteenth century, and three of the articles make brief, interesting references to this: '[Gainsborough] tried his hand at the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, but it is said destroyed his picture, her grace being "too hard" for him' (*The Morning Chronicle*, 27 October, 1856, BLN (BA3207240019)); see also *The Morning Post*, 12 October, 1850, BLN (R3213120084)); *Leicester Chronicle*, 1 November 1856, BLN (R3213211465).

makes a nasty play on the idea that both woman and picture are seizable commodities, as well as punning on the word ‘canvas’ in electioneering and fine art:

***On the Lost Picture***

Fair Devonshire’s Duchess, unrivall’d, they say,  
By none could those charms be cut out in her day.  
One kiss on her cheek when the contest begun,  
She at once paid the price and her canvass was won;  
How chang’d now her fate! To her purchaser’s cost,  
Her charms are cut out and her canvas is lost.  
(*The Sporting Gazette*, 17 June, 1876, UKP (DX1900444833))

It’s interesting that this writer chose the epigram, a form associated with both ekphrasis and funerals (Krieger 1992, 16); we’ll be returning to cemeteries later in this chapter.

As with the lost *Mona Lisa*, Gainsborough’s stolen painting invites a new more diverse audience in class terms:

Chambermaids and scullery maids, of course dressed as duchesses, were there in profusion, and it was no uncommon experience to meet the Duchess of Gainsborough or a Countess of the previous night polishing the front door handle or sweeping the stairs at one’s hotel the next morning. (*The Isle of Wight Observer*, 17 September, 1892, BLN (R3211607123))

For the first time, there is evidence of the painting attracting an audience that includes housemaids. Other groups not previously associated with the work include the detained mentally ill: the painting inspired ‘one of the most attractive’ costumes at a fancy dress ball at the Lancashire County Asylum (*The Lancaster Gazette*, 26 February, 1887, BLN (R3211618605)). Products related to the missing painting were frequently reviewed and advertised, including buttons, fans and hats.<sup>30</sup> Prize cattle was named after the portrait

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<sup>30</sup> See for example ‘Notes on Novelties’, *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, 1 August 1876, UKP (DX1901418072), which tells us that ‘since the mysterious disappearance of the missing picture, the Gainsborough hat has regained all its old popularity, and is now, *par excellence*, the

(*The Dundee Courier & Argus*, 8 June, 1894, BLN (R3214538084). Scores of articles mention girls and women dressed up as the missing picture, with sometimes more than one missing duchess at the same event. At the Lady Mayoress's ball in London in July 1876, 'of the many splendid costumes none were more noticeable than those copied from the missing picture of the Duchess of Devonshire' (*The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1 July, 1876, UKP (DX1901418047)). The picture's loss could seem to allow it to live; at a Wrexham fancy dress ball we are told of 'the Duchess of Devonshire, who has stepped out of Gainsborough's picture in order to enjoy herself tonight' (*The Wrexham Advertiser*, 9 December, 1876, BLN (R3210989235)). The lost artwork was transformed; it could shrink and multiply. At a Liverpool ball 'the lost Gainsborough picture of the Duchess of Devonshire was found restored, but in diminutive form; and she seemed to be quite at home with the Dolly Vardens who surrounded her, not seeming to care about the stir which her disappearance had created' (*The Liverpool Mercury*, 12 January, 1877, BLN (BB3204180822)). Again, this highlights the lost work's new popular context; Dolly Varden, the locksmith's daughter in Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, makes a curious juxtaposition with the aristocratic duchess.

The missing picture was recommended as a good, 'ambitious' subject for Christmas 'tableaux vivants', provided 'a lady [is] found with the right type of feature' (*The Derby Mercury*, 22 December, 1897, BLN (BA3202817228)). The lost painting has become a tableau vivant – literally, a living painting. And the embodiment of the missing picture was not confined to women, as drag acts of the picture began to appear from actors such as Fred Foster and a Mr Gomersal:

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chapeau of the season'. For fans, see 'Pretty Gifts and Graceful Giving', *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1 December, 1876, UKP (DX1901418205); for buttons see 'The Ladies' Column', *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 19 June, 1880, BNP (R3210753712).

Mr Fred Foster is just now appearing with great success at the Music Halls as the ‘missing’ Duchess of Gainsborough. (*The Era*, 24 September 1876, BLN (BB3202463173; for Gomersal’s performance see *The Era*, 12 November, 1876, BLN (BB3202463422)))

Here, I am intrigued by the way the quotation marks have slipped away from the painting’s title, and instead embrace the word ‘missing’; the punctuation makes it look like the quality of being *missing* has become the work of art and names it. Fancy dress acts after the lost painting are not merely an active audience; they constitute lost performance pieces in their own right. With the painting’s loss, the boundaries separating artist, spectator and picture begin to blur. When the *Mona Lisa* was stolen in 1911, *The Daily Chronicle* offered ‘Queer Theories’ (24 August, 1911, 1) about the theft as one of its front page headlines (just three years before the *OED*’s first usage of *queer* as *homosexual*). A brief, uncanny echo of the Gainsborough drag acts three decades before, this begins to give a sense of the weird, disruptive potential of lost art.

The reported audience for lost works, then, expands quite dramatically; however, this of course does not mean the disappearance of expectations founded on gender or class distinctions. *The Daily Mirror* saw the ideal critic of the lost *Mona Lisa* as masculine, asking in its column ‘Today’s Queries’: ‘If the women can understand why such a fuss has been made over Monna Lisa?’ (23 December, 1913, 5). Predictably, women were instead expected both to embody the lost work and to be chief consumers of spin-offs and imitations. Drag acts and prize cattle aside, this is broadly similar to the situation with *The Duchess of Devonshire* a few years before. *The Daily Mirror* provided detailed instructions for ‘Monna Lisa Coiffure: Hints About the Pictorial and Artistic Dressing of Hair’ (1 December, 1911, 10). The same paper published an article on *Mona Lisa* hatpins that explicitly links the museum’s loss to gains for urban street culture: ‘Although the stolen ‘Mona Lisa’ no longer smiles her wonderful, elusive smile

in the Louvre, Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece is smiling just now more than ever before in Paris streets'. This writer stresses the economic levelling involved, since the *Mona Lisa* hatpins are available at different prices: 'The heads of the smile-pins are sometimes made of the pretty silver bijouterie work, and are quite cheap, and others are in enamel'. The loss of the original head of the *Mona Lisa* uncannily contributes to the creation of hydra-like women with multiple faces: 'Excellent replicas of the picture now appear on hatpins, and La Gioconda [i.e. the *Mona Lisa*] smiles sometimes two or three times from the same hat'. Finally, this article suggests that the new jewellery is compensation for women's fruitless attempts to capture the spirit of the lost portrait: 'Women who, since the theft of the picture, have tried in vain to cultivate the "Mona Lisa" smile, now carry it about with them as a decoration for their hat or gown' (*The Daily Mirror*, 11 October, 1911, 4). Able to be everywhere at once, the lost portrait haunted the country, and it spoke as much of feminine failure and commodification as of playfulness and opportunity. Once singular, the *Mona Lisa* multiplied. For example, as mentioned in chapter 1, an advertisement in *The Times* claimed that 'in the unhappy event of the permanent loss of the Original, the "Medici Print" is likely to remain the most authentic replica' (31 August, 1911, 313). The painting's loss was celebrated to the extent that its auratic value fractured, and now some of the wandering spirit of the original went on sale to the public, most of whom could never own original Renaissance art.

### **The Museum as Home**

Before the theft, working-class spectatorship of *Mona Lisa* was associated not with an active, imaginative viewing, but rather lent itself to the depiction of comic alienation between visitor and painting – particularly in the context of anxieties about



museum visitors (Freundschuh 2006, 279). In Emile Zola's *L'Assommoir*, the disreputable wedding party's reaction to the Louvre's masterpieces is characterised by 'incomprehension' (Zola [1877] 2009, 77). As Freundschuh notes, the sole response to the *Mona Lisa* is: 'she reminded him a bit of one of his aunts' (Zola [1877] 2009, 77; Freundschuh 277). However, while Freundschuh persuasively notes Zola's representation of the museum as a space of 'urban fluidity' (2006, 278), he passes over the way that for the working class audience the museum *itself* becomes the spectacle. Curiously, in this passage, the furniture, fixtures and fittings of the Louvre inspire more wonder than its artworks. The polished floor, for example, offers the visitor an interactive experience (walking on it) and is reminiscent of one of Christ's miracles:

In the Gallery of Apollo, what amazed the group most was the floor, which was clear and shiny like a mirror, and reflected the legs of the benches. Mademoiselle Remanjou kept her eyes closed, because she felt as if she was walking on water. (Zola [1877], 2009, 76)

Zola's exploration of curiosity towards the museum itself, over and above its collection, is an interesting prefiguration of a widespread later obsession, after the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, with museum walls and fixtures and fittings (fig. 13). Journalists reported that more people queued up to see the empty hooks that once supported the painting than had ever visited it previously (see Sassoon 2001a, 176). Max Brod remembered when he and Franz Kafka joined the crowds looking at the empty space at the Louvre in September 1911. The next day they went to the cinema, 'laughing so hard' at the short film *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde*, a farce about the theft 'set in the hall of the Louvre, everything excellently imitated,' including 'the three nails on which the *Mona Lisa* hung' (cited in Zischler [1996] 2003, 45-51).

After the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, bulletins in the *Times*, *Guardian*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* reported several police searches of boats and trains leaving France. As if the *Mona Lisa* had planned a voyage, *The Daily Graphic* described a ‘special “visa”’ system operating in the Louvre that allowed works to be moved (25 August, 1911, 7). If art theft usually involves transportation and inappropriate border-crossings, the source museum becomes associated with homeliness, and questions are raised about whether it makes a *good* home. When the stolen *Mona Lisa* was returned to France in 1914, the *Daily Mirror* quipped in its column ‘Today’s Queries,’ ‘Does “Monna Lisa” feel at home now?’ (2 January, 1914, 5). On January 10<sup>th</sup> the paper described ‘the return home of the truant Monna Lisa’ (10 January, 1914, 5). Here, the museum is a ‘home’ but is also shunted into the institutional role of school, against the ‘truant’ painting as appealing anti-hero (5). Homeliness has also been relevant in reactions to more recent thefts, such as from Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990. Ulrich Boser – author of the latest book on the heist – made a disturbing statement to the *New York Times*: ‘If a painting were stolen out of a contemporary art gallery where the walls are all white... you might say it’s a shame for that artwork. But the way that people who visit this place feel violated, it’s like somebody stole this art out of their own living room’.<sup>31</sup> Boser implies that, while visitors may feel sad because *works* are lost, they will sympathise with an *institution* only to the extent that it feels like a home.

The tension between homeliness and institutionality in museums has attracted press attention since the nineteenth century. I will look at one Victorian example: the reporting of the temporary loss of a Delacroix painting during the International Exhibition of 1862, an exhibition which played a key role in the establishment of

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<sup>31</sup> Abby Goodnough, ‘A Wounded Museum Feels a Jolt of Progress’, *The New York Times*, 15 March, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/arts/design/15good.html?pagewanted=all>.

British imperialist museums in London. Eugene Delacroix was among the most prestigious artists on show, but journalists found his contribution less intriguing than the story of its loss. A database search of national and local newspapers reveals that Delacroix's presence in the exhibition was mentioned in sixteen articles. Five of these were art criticism, but the remaining eleven reprinted more or less verbatim a story from the *Daily News*, describing its misdelivery.<sup>32</sup> The intended recipients were the organisers of the exhibition; the actual recipient was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Liege. While both parties stand for massive institutional bodies – Church and exhibition – the writer uses the idea of home to portray the bishop as a private individual pitted against bureaucracy:

A good story is told of one French painting, "The Bishop of Liege," by Eugène Delacroix. It was packed up three months ago in a stout case, and sent to the railway station, but instead of the regulation address to her Majesty's commissioners, the sender had put outside the name of the picture. Railway officials are not more intelligent than nine-tenths of the human race, and therefore the picture was naturally forwarded to the present Bishop of Liege. The bishop had no "advice" of the present (to use a commercial term), but he liked the picture very much, and after it had hung in his dining-room three weeks or a month, he liked it still more. He believed that it was a gift from some faithful son of the church, who desired not to be known by name – a peculiarity of many religious benefactors.

In due time the most prosaic business-like inquiries were made after the missing picture, and it was traced to the house of its delighted possessor. The dream about an anonymous church benefactor was rudely broken (not without some little difficulty), the masterpiece was torn from the snug room and repacked, and care was taken on this second journey to deliver it safely at South Kensington. (*The Daily News*, 8 April, 1862, BLN (BA3202970524))

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<sup>32</sup> Based on a search of the 19th Century British Library Newspapers database. Searching for 'Delacroix' in the year 1862 yields 21 results, of which five are not relevant to the International Exhibition, and the remainder are distributed as described.

In this ‘good story’, as it tellingly describes itself, the Bishop of Liege and his residence are strategically domesticated through descriptions such as ‘snug room’. The familial metaphor in the paternalistic Church structure is highlighted by the Bishop’s fantasy of a ‘faithful son of the church’. The bishop himself is portrayed as a bumbling, appealing individual. Careless of the commercial niceties, he ‘liked the picture very much’ and when the mistake was revealed, is comically reluctant to part with it. By directly connecting the painting’s position in the dining room with the bishop’s growing familiarity and fondness for it, the writer conjures up an intimate scene of the bishop’s pictorial musings three times a day with his meals. In contrast, the exhibition organisers are de-personalised, situated at ‘the regulation address to her Majesty’s commissioners’. Their business may be art, but here their activities are reduced to making ‘the most prosaic business-like inquiries’, ‘rudely breaking’ dreams, and ‘tearing’ works from ‘delighted possessors’ such as the bishop.

To any reader who visited the exhibition, saw the catalogue, or had the least background knowledge of Delacroix, there is something peculiar about this ‘good story’. Firstly, we sense the painting has an unexpected agency, being narcissistically destined to reach its human counterpart, the bishop. Secondly, it is both weird and comic that the writer suppresses the fact that the painting’s full title and subject was *The Murder of the Bishop of Liege*. Anyone who knew this would have imagined more complex emotions hidden behind the bishop’s ‘delight’, and a more sinister edge to the way the painting was fortuitously addressed to him.

## **Cemeteries**

The most uncanny of homes is perhaps the cemetery. Since the nineteenth century, the cemetery has been repeatedly used as a metaphor for the museum and has

become a cliché. Curators, museologists and other scholars continue to take issue with it, interpreting the metaphor as a stick that has been used to beat the museum. Recently, for example, Andrea Witcomb (2003, 8), Boris Groys (1994, 150-51) and Daniel Sherman (1994, 123) have critiqued earlier descriptions of the museum as mausoleum, cemetery and sepulchre respectively. In contrast, by analysing journalistic language at the time of the *Mona Lisa* theft, I hope to demonstrate that, despite the negative intentions of its avant-garde proponents, and despite the denials of museum-lovers, the cemetery metaphor has more life in it than at first meets the eye.

Witcomb, in her book *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, considers how the image places museums in a negative, unhelpful light: 'In describing the museum as a mausoleum, this intellectual tradition places museums outside of wider social, cultural and economic contexts. In its most radical form, some of its proponents even call for its destruction' (2003, 8-9). She problematises 'the association of museums with mausoleums, with removal from everyday life' (13), putting this in such a way that 'removal from everyday life' becomes a gloss for 'mausoleums.' While in one sense this is literally true, there is more to be said. Mausoleums are indeed the homes of people removed from life. On the other hand, burial rites are part of life and a vigorous image in the collective imagination. Indeed, given our association of the cemetery with extreme experiences, faith, the supernatural and the uncanny, its association with museums may contribute to maximising the 'wonder' that Stephen Greenblatt has shown museums so apt to provoke ([1990] 2004, 541-55).

Interestingly, the cemetery metaphor was published most famously just two years before the *Mona Lisa* theft, in F. T. Marinetti's 1909 Futurist Manifesto, which was critiqued in the mainstream British press, including in *The Daily Mirror* (see p. 49 above). Marinetti's manifesto expounded at length why museums and cemeteries were

‘identical’; in the course of this, he even specified the *Mona Lisa* as one of art’s buried dead:

We intend to liberate [Italy] from the countless museums that have covered it like so many cemeteries.

Museums: cemeteries! Identical, really, in the horrible promiscuity of so many bodies scarcely known to one another...

That once a year you might make a pilgrimage, much as one makes an annual visit to a graveyard... I’ll grant you that. That once a year you can deposit a wreath of flowers in front of the *Mona Lisa*, I permit you that... But I cannot countenance the idea that our sorrows are daily shepherded on a tour through museums, or our weak courage, our pathological restlessness. Why would we wish to poison ourselves? Why wish to rot? (Marinetti [1909] 2009, 52)

It is a spooky coincidence that two years after Marinetti wrote this, the *Mona Lisa* was stolen and his rhetorical fantasy was actualised; after the painting’s disappearance visitors really *did* leave flower tributes hanging in its place. For example, *The Daily Mail* reported:

During the afternoon a young girl walked up to the square vacated by the ‘lady with the witching smile’ and hung on one of the hooks a bunch of roses tied with a white silk ribbon. A zealous guardian, however, immediately removed the sentimental tribute. (30 August, 1911, 5)

The museum, represented by its ‘zealous guardian,’ already seeks to remove the traces of this metaphor. It persisted. One journalist (signed W. M.) wrote in a column about the stolen *Mona Lisa*: ‘Such... is the supposed safety of museums – those tombs wherein we place our masterpieces’ (*The Daily Mirror*, 26 August, 1911, 7). This is one among many articles that criticised the Louvre’s security in the wake of the theft. In it, the ‘supposed’ inviolability of the tomb is revealed as a sham; the museum / tomb is not

sealed off from the rest of the world, but rather spills out its secret contents in a problematic way, as missing, resurrected bodies.

In another article about the lost painting, entitled ‘In the Salon Carré’ – an immediate reference to the *Mona Lisa*, which had been housed there – W. M. again couldn’t write about the theft without spending a substantial part of the text describing unrelated unquiet tombs:

We have often wished that it were allowable to spend one night amongst the mummies in the British Museum. We should then know if it’s true that the winged souls of those preserved Egyptians do, as some say, nightly revisit their painted coffin-houses; or whether the journey so far north is too much for them. We might find out whether there’s any sense in rumours that the mummies *move* sometimes—turn slightly, in their sleep of eternity, and visibly stretch or yawn. The dark brings such dreams through the Gate of Horn into the semblance of possibility. We regret, then, that robberies from museums make such night adventures impossible. If one slept amongst the mummies now, one would meet only police-men and night-watchmen, with possibly Dr. Budge, walking in his sleep uneasily.

It is Monna Lisa—need we say?—who brings these thoughts to the mind. Thinking over her disappearance from the Salon Carré of the Louvre, wherein, as in the Tribune of the Uffizii, are gathered the official masterpieces of the collection, we come to the conclusion—which no subsequent rediscovery of the lady can altogether confute—that she was removed at the instigation of the others: we mean, the other ladies in the room. At night, in the Salon Carré, we dream of overhearing a whispered plot against that smile, those folded hands, that landscape of sea-green rock and sky. We dream that the others considered La Gioconda too attractive. It was time she disappeared. (*The Daily Mirror*, 24 August, 1911, 7)

The article goes on to explore in joking art-critical detail why various paintings in the Salon Carré had cause to be jealous of *Mona Lisa* – for example ‘Rubens’ princesses were too fat, and middle-aged’ – until ‘One night, in the Salon Carré, the others descended from their seats and hid her away forever’. In this fantasy, the theft not only re-animates the *Mona Lisa*, but all the other paintings on display in this room. An

uncanny quality is lent to the neighbouring paintings when they are initially described simply as ‘the others,’ and it is not at all clear which others or which other what.

W.M.’s subsequent clarification ‘we mean, the other ladies in the room’ makes this spookiness humorously pointed.

W. M.’s ‘regret’ that tightened security has made it impossible to spend an illicit night in a museum is a specific dig at the Louvre. Embarrassingly, not long before the theft, a journalist actually spent a night in the museum to expose poor security, hiding in a sarcophagus. Even taking into account this loose connection between burial and the *Mona Lisa* scandal, it is striking that W. M. spends the first twenty-five percent of his or her article discussing mummies. After all, the title and the remainder of the text focus on the stolen *Mona Lisa*. Bearing in mind *The Daily Mirror*’s previous references to museums-as-cemeteries and to the futurist movement, it is tempting to interpret W.M.’s decision to connect the British Museum’s ever-popular mummies with the Louvre’s prestigious Salon Carré as a deliberate engagement with the cemetery metaphor. Nowhere does W.M. explicitly come out with the fact that when the *Mona Lisa* walked out of the Louvre this was a compelling refutation of Marinetti’s criticisms of museums. Instead, the writer assumes that the connection between the risen dead and a runaway painting will be self-explanatory: ‘It is Monna Lisa—need we say?—who brings these thoughts to the mind.’ W. M.’s poetic text about animated corpses is perfectly placed to have the effect of answering Marinetti, using the *Mona Lisa*’s theft as evidence that museums are more eventful places than the Futurist Manifesto, with its representation of the *Mona Lisa* as a lifeless corpse, would lead us to believe.



### **Ekphrasis: *Mona Lisa* in writing**

Readers of *The Daily Mirror*'s article just quoted may have noticed that W.M.'s interest in mummies and the lost painting is specifically literary, concerned as much with 'rumours' and 'thoughts' as it is with 'adventures.' For example, the 'dreams' mentioned in the article turn out to be dreams not of action but of listening, language and story: 'we dream of overhearing a whispered plot against that smile'. Importantly, W. M. also notes that the loss of the painting, in removing *the* essential piece of physical evidence, frees up a space for ekphrastic fantasy; (s)he refers to a 'conclusion, which no subsequent rediscovery of the lady can altogether confute' – in other words, this story will not be denied, precisely because the painting is lost.

Theories of ekphrasis have traditionally seen literature as a time-based art, whereas the visual arts take place in space (see Mitchell [1986] 1987, 95-115). Ekphrasis attempts to cross from one art form to the other. It thus links curiously with the idea of nostalgia, which similarly occupies an undecidable position between the loss of a place and the loss of a point in time. Stolen art lends itself to ekphrasis because it has an unknowable quality in this respect; it could have been destroyed – lost in time – or hidden – lost in space. The journalistic preoccupation (then and now) with the empty space in the Salon Carré, and with creating narrative around the painting's disappearance, is an enchantment with ekphrasis and with the very place and moment – definable with lost art in a way it cannot be with extant works – at which visual art becomes narrative.

Since a description of a work of art can never capture the spirit of the original, W. J. T. Mitchell has written about 'a commonsense perception that ekphrasis is impossible' which has led to its 'minority and obscurity,' with notable exceptions (1994, 152). The creative journalism that has followed the theft of paintings is one indication

of how ekphrastic writing becomes easier and more appealing when artworks disappear. However inadequate as a substitute, writing is one way to find, imagine and remember a lost work. A painting on the wall of a museum stands ready to mutely contradict – or at best render superfluous – literary narratives that depend on it. A lost painting, on the other hand, even when its absence is short-lived, creates a window of literary freedom. Mitchell's work also puts forward the idea of 'ekphrastic fear,' the experience of 'resistance... when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually'; at this point, he argues, ekphrastic writers fear that the presence of objects would 'spoil their whole game', and wish the object to stay invisible (1994, 154). Writers on stolen objects are shielded from this fear. They are able to draw on the spirit of the work of art they describe, but their work is also, paradoxically, independent. This writing, that takes on the ghost of an absent work, I propose to call *spekphrasis*.

Criticism on ekphrasis has commonly seen its visual object as structurally lost, at the point of writing – even when the artwork is accessible in a museum, the *writing* lacks it, and in this relation, 'absence is not an obstacle but that which enables ekphrasis' (Shapiro 2007, 14). Norman Bryson has written marvellously about 'the idea of resurrection' in ekphrases of ancient paintings that have long disappeared (Bryson 1995, 183; see also Shapiro 2007, 17). But almost none of the ekphrases considered by Bryson, Shapiro or other critics are of demonstrably real artworks whose whereabouts were unknown at the moment the ekphrasis was written, which is what interests me here.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, ekphrases of ancient paintings by Philostratus or Franciscus Junius are in a totally different register from *The Daily Mirror's* take on the *Mona Lisa*. When people

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<sup>33</sup> For a brief, arguable exception, see Shapiro 2007, 17. In cases of ancient ekphrasis, it is often not known whether a piece of writing refers to an actual or an imaginary work of art (in the latter case, this is called notional ekphrasis).

write about real lost artworks in the wake of their disappearance – write about them *as* lost objects – as in the newspaper accounts of stolen paintings – the theory that ekphrasis involves an absent object is strangely literalised. The evidence considered in this chapter may suggest that this kind of ekphrasis of a *literally* vanished artwork – spekphearsis – invites an unusually accessible variety of ekphrastic writing – anyone can get in on this story, not just those in the art world.

### **Prosopopeia: *Mona Lisa* resurrected**

The journalism discussed here involving the *Mona Lisa* and other lost works suggests a creative tendency to respond to art loss with prosopopeia. Informative summaries of the popular prosopopeic responses to the *Mona Lisa* theft are given by Sassoon (2001a, 173-188) and Roy McMullen ([1975] 1976, 200, 205-7, 212-3), and other evidence is offered by Darian Leader ([2002] 2004, 172) and R.A. Scotti (2009, 46, 73). Overwhelmingly, the lost painting is described as if it had come to life as a woman, or at the very least as a corpse. Sassoon, for example, quotes postcards of *Mona Lisa* ‘happy to be on the loose’ (2001a, 178); McMullen quotes the painter Maurice Denis describing the loss as ‘the death of a friend, an old friend’ ([1975] 1976, 200, see also Sassoon 2001a, 181). However, while Sassoon does draw attention to the fact that ‘a painting had been turned, anthropomorphically, into a person, a celebrity’ (2001a, 188), neither he nor the other commentators analyse the consequences of such constant use of prosopopeia. Rather, almost all of them elect to repeat it throughout their own writing, for example in Sassoon’s chapter title ‘*Mona Kidnapped*’ and the frequent use of the pronoun ‘she’ instead of ‘it’.

Paul De Man has argued that prosopopeia is ‘hallucinatory’ (1986, 49), and is ‘the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the

possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech' (1984, 75). One of the haunting qualities of this discussion of prosopopeia's 'fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave' (De Man 1984, 77) is that it is not obvious whether we are being faced with absence or death or inanimacy – only that prosopopeia is at once lifeless and life-like. Etymologically, De Man points out, prosopopeia 'means to *give* a face and therefore implies that the original face can be missing or nonexistent' (1986, 44). This logic of the missing or nonexistent original is particularly revealing in the case of the stolen *Mona Lisa*. Since the painting is not human, this linguistic device which shows it to act in a human way is prosopopeic in the second of De Man's senses – a face is being given when the original face is nonexistent. However, the first of De Man's senses – that of the original face being missing – also applies, since a portrait has been stolen, and a portrait, by definition, (re)presents a human face.

One striking example of prosopopeic language describing the lost *Mona Lisa* occurs in the news section of the *Times* in 1913. The painting is mentioned in the context of another theft, that of a valuable necklace that had disappeared on its way from Paris to London. The article states: 'M. Niclausse, the detective in charge of the case, yesterday received the "valuable suggestion" that the missing pearls would be found round the neck of the equally elusive Monna Lisa. The work of the police, our Correspondent adds, is considerably hampered by the many rumours and fantastic theories forced upon their notice' (*The Times*, 23 July, 1913, 8). It is curious that the journalist, out of the 'many rumours and fantastic theories' available, selects the one involving *Mona Lisa*. Picturing the stolen necklace around the neck of *Mona Lisa* involves an odd twist since they cannot be, as the journalist jokes, 'equally elusive.' Whereas the missing necklace, assuming it was not destroyed, existed somewhere as a physical object (like the missing painting), the *character* *Mona Lisa*, insofar as she is

three-dimensional enough to put pearls around her neck, does not exist except fictionally. The ‘fantastic theory’ of the lost Mona Lisa wearing the lost necklace takes place in an unchartable location in which a fictional character can physically wear an actual necklace.

Interestingly, there has been a history of associating prosopopeia with ekphrasis since Jean Hagstrum made the connection in 1958 (18 n. 34; see also Heffernan [1993] 2004, 6). Others have objected to this, saying that the idea of envoicing it suggests is inadequate, leaving no space for ekphrases of non-figurative art (Clüver 1998, 36-38). Spekphrasis opens up the possibility of new research avenues; although they are outside the scope of this thesis, I am intrigued by the literary possibilities of lost abstract paintings, by the sort of spekphrastic mist they might provoke, pushing the boundaries of the literary.

### **The New Museum**

The museum, in losing a work, becomes associated with a nebulous place that is both fictional and actual, deathly and vibrant, a place we can’t visit, but that is accessible to the imagination. Callum Storrie has argued that ‘ “Mona Lisa” is forever missing. At the heart of the Ur-Museum there is an absence’ (2006, 15). Darian Leader has made similar arguments ([2002] 2004). I would contest this. In a funny way, the empty space in the museum is more characterised by a vague plenitude than by absence. It is a space of promise, of past and future movement, of expectations of return or arrival. The empty space reassures us that – however rigid their de-accession policies – museums can change and do have vulnerabilities. It is a space that is waiting for something, and this perhaps is why it has inspired so much creative work, from unusually imaginative newspaper articles to new works by elite artists such as Lucian

Freud and Sophie Calle. Contemporary responses to the *Mona Lisa* suggest that the elite work that disappeared by no means equalled the accessible ghostly fun it became when it was missing (who knew, furthermore, what state it would be in when it got back – considerable anxiety was expressed over this point). If the museum was a cemetery, this empty tomb was messianic, standing both for a promise of resurrection, and a fear lest this promise be unfulfilled or inadequately fulfilled.

Structurally, the empty space in the national museum recalls what Derrida has written about the ‘democracy to come’:

Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return..., messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope—and this is the very place of spectrality. (Derrida 1994, 65)

This connection suggests a potential for empty spaces to play a role in museums’ civic function. After all, something of an expectant spectrality is surely evident in the New Acropolis Museum which opened in 2009 in Athens. Considerable space in the museum has been created to house the Parthenon sculptures, which, although we know their location, are certainly lost to Greece for the time being. Surely something strange is going on when so much is invested in a museum one of whose functions is to house works of art which are not there. Charles Stewart described the plan for the new museum as exemplifying ‘anxiety felt about... looted histories’ (2003, 486), and the building has been widely interpreted as a new bid for return of the sculptures in the British Museum. Quite apart from such considerations, we may want to consider the strong sense of promise and expectation that will accrue in such a space, and wait to see

how this expectation – as long as it lasts – shapes, develops and inspires in a distinct way from the physical sculptures.

In 1913, the English artist William Nicholson painted *Le Retour de la Joconde* (fig. 14), both celebrating and meditating on the return of the *Mona Lisa* to the Louvre. It has been persuasively read as having a theme of ‘*not* looking at the masterpiece’ (Schwartz 2004, 156; and see Nairne 2011, 217). In the background, we see a view of the wall in the Salon Carré with the *Mona Lisa* and a crowd of spectators. But as Schwartz’s reading suggests, these are not the main focus of interest, and the *Mona Lisa* and neighbouring paintings are identifiable but hardly visible. The male figure in the foreground is singled out, and he alone is looking at a different picture. Disproportionately tall, with an uncanny, mask-like face and comic moustaches, this spectator is also a spectacle come to life. We the audience, conversely, rather than being given a position of human viewers, are positioned as though captured in a painting that hangs on the wall opposite the *Mona Lisa*. The male figure’s gaze, any moment, will fall on us. We might even imagine that his next move will be to steal us away. *Le Retour de la Joconde* is a haunting work fascinated with the museum as an exhibition space, in which the materiality of the museum’s collection appears to be beside the point. The missing focal point, the object of the painting’s curiosity, is another work of art that stands in the viewer’s own shoes.

The prosopopeic language used while the *Mona Lisa* was missing has created a situation in which Nicholson can imagine a common ground between being art and being human. The lost artwork comes alive, even as the viewer freezes into a spectacle. It is a creative process reminiscent of the journalism of *The Daily Mirror*’s W. M., and of earlier, nineteenth-century journalists. In each case, the disappearance of the painting opened the way for unique fantasies in the literary and visual arts.

## Chapter 3

### Miniatures unbound: William Blake's *Virgil* Woodcuts

Lost works of art can be partially represented through other literary and visual texts, and in chapters one and two this process was considered in detail. This next chapter takes up the ways of thinking that emerged, and uses these to think more broadly about the critical possibilities of the memory loss of art. My focus is on William Blake's woodcuts for Robert Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil* (figs. 15-34).<sup>34</sup> I have chosen these precisely because they are *not* usually thought of as lost artworks; they can reveal a broader application for the kind of critical recuperation of lost art that I want to explore.

Blake's only known woodcuts are among the more accessible of his original prints, in terms of the number printed, both in his lifetime and posthumously, and the market price today.<sup>35</sup> They illustrate Ambrose Philips's 'Imitation of Eclogue 1' in *Pastorals of Virgil*, a schooltext by Thornton (1821) then going into its third edition. This reproduced Virgil's Latin eclogues alongside English imitations and commentaries aimed at edifying the schoolboy reader, with a prefatory endorsement from the headmaster of St. Paul's School. There were hundreds of illustrations throughout, including thirteen pages that were wholly or partially by Blake. His contributions are

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<sup>34</sup> For convincing evidence that these are woodcuts not wood engravings, see Sung (2009, 141-63).

<sup>35</sup> Thornton's bestselling schooltext is now rare, but usually available on the market. A recent catalogue of bookseller John Windle lists three copies, two sold and one still available at \$47,500, as well as cheaper reprints and loose sets of prints (Windle 2009, 12-13). After Blake's death the woodblocks were reprinted by their owner, John Linnell, and by artists and publishers to whom he lent the blocks. One block was reprinted in the *Athenaeum* (21 January 1843, p. 65). Later, three of the original blocks were reprinted in the second edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (see Binyon 1920, 284; Gilchrist 1880, 1:xx, 320). This edition of Gilchrist's book is also readily available; at time of writing, one copy is advertised for £283 on [www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk) (accessed July 26, 2011), and I myself bought a battered copy for £80 in York in 1999. The woodblocks have been reprinted as recently as 1977 when a limited edition of 150 were issued by the British Museum (Wilton 1977). Certainly, impressions of these blocks are much more readily available than Blake's illuminated books, which were printed by the artist in small numbers, and all but a fragment of the copperplates lost.



frequently exhibited regionally, nationally and internationally.<sup>36</sup> They have always been singled out as haunting and experimental works of art, inspiring later artists including Edward Calvert, Samuel Palmer and Graham Sutherland.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless Blake's series includes lost images and lost borders whose formative visual qualities have escaped interpretation.

Losses to the series include three of Blake's twenty illustrations, which were designed by him and perhaps engraved.<sup>38</sup> However, apparently because Thornton disliked Blake's style, a more conventional hand was commissioned to make replacements (figs. 28-30), nicely described by Gilchrist as 'wretched, jejune caricatures of the beautiful originals' (1880, 1:319). Also missing are ten of twenty drawings by Blake that relate to the series. The drawings are works in their own right, finished in sepia wash, and their manner differed dramatically from the woodcuts and was unlike anything achievable in that medium. Finally, we have lost the edges of the illustrations, which were cut off and discarded, almost certainly at Thornton's behest. Evidence of these lost edges is provided by proof impressions of eight of the illustrations, roughly inked and still subject to revision (figs. 35-42). There have been other peripheral losses as well. For example, one surviving sheet of four illustrations done not in wood but in relief etching (Blake's unique print medium, figs. 43-46), suggests that Blake tried to

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<sup>36</sup> Examples of recent exhibitions and museum displays include: *William Blake* (Tate Britain, London, November 9, 2000 – February 11, 2001 and Metropolitan Museum, New York, March 29, 2001 – June 24, 2001); *Poets in the Landscape: The Romantic Spirit in British Art* (Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, March 31 2007 – June 10 2007); *William Blake: le génie visionnaire du romantisme anglais* (Petit Palais, Paris, April 2, 2009 – June 28, 2009); *Visionary Landscapes 1800-1860* (Tate Britain, London, display closed 31 October 2010).

<sup>37</sup> For the woodcuts' influence on nineteenth-century artists see Binyon (1925). See also Essick (1980, 233) for the woodcuts' influence on later artists including Sutherland.

<sup>38</sup> Several writers appear to assume, following a suggestion in the *Athenaeum* ([Cole] 1843) that these illustrations *replace* three that had already been engraved by Blake (see e.g. Bentley [1969] 2004, 372-3; Lister 1975, 31). There is no definitive evidence that such lost woodcuts by Blake existed, and given the economics of book production, it is perhaps counter-intuitive to assume that commissions would have been doubled up. However, in her argument about the nineteenth-century reception of Blake's woodcuts, Mei-Ying Sung gives convincing evidence that different versions of the same image in the series may have been executed before publication (Sung 2009, 147-8).

persuade Thornton to allow his designs to take this form (Essick 1991-2). This raises the possibility that relief-etchings of the rest of the series once existed. Finally, there is Blake's contribution to Thornton's chapter on Virgil's second eclogue: a lost intermediary drawing for Byfield's engraving of the Cyclops Polyphemus after Poussin (fig. 47), ignored by most scholars.<sup>39</sup>

While critics have lamented some of these losses, their significance has been interpreted largely in historical-biographical terms, with losses cited as evidence of the works' printing history and the professional relationship between Blake and Thornton (see eg. Gilchrist 1880, 1:318-9; Patterson 1985, 340; Essick 1991-2, 126; Paley 2003, 30, 32; Sung 2009, 147-8). Formal and iconographic interpretation has, understandably, been limited to the extant woodcuts and related extant works. In contrast, I want to show how *visual* aspects of the *lost* elements of the *Virgil* illustrations can enrich understanding of the series as a whole. In my reading, the lost elements do not replace the extant artworks, but neither are they merely supplementary evidence. Going a step further, I seek what Thornton's book chooses *not* to reveal – a kind of methodology of lost parts and chopped-off extremities (there's a logic of castration running through this).

Blake's *Virgil* series, despite its continuing popularity, has failed to attract the innovations in interpretation that Blake's illuminated books, for example, inspire.<sup>40</sup> Since the 1930s, criticism has put most of its energy into arguing about the woodcuts' technical strategies, the narrative of their commission and reception, and the relationship between Blake and Thornton, which ended in Thornton printing the series

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<sup>39</sup> This work is mentioned in most critical overviews of the *Virgil*, but never closely analysed. The drawing may have been lost because it was done directly on the woodblock, or it may have been transferred from paper. Most writers assume the intermediary drawing was by Blake, since his name is signed on the block. There is some evidence that John Linnell began the drawing, however (see Bentley 2004, 372). Given that Linnell was helping Blake to find paid work at this time – and had indeed provided the introduction to Thornton for this reason – Linnell may well have decided to hand the job over to Blake.

<sup>40</sup> For the illuminated books, amongst other examples, see for example Makdisi 2002, Mee 1994, Erdman 1954 and Frye 1947.

with a well-known disclaimer (see the letterpress text around fig. 15), highlighting the authorship of ‘the famous BLAKE’ but apologising that the works ‘display less of art than genius’ (Keynes 1937, 7-20; Lister 1975, 31-34; Essick 1980, 224-33; Tolley 1988, 4-11; Gott 1989, 134-9; Essick 1991-2, 117-27; Essick 1999, 7-13). Other points of interest have included: links between the images and Blake’s biography (e.g. Essick 1980, 230-32; Patterson 1987, 255, 257; Paley 2003, 46-47); accounts of how the woodcuts work intertextually with Ambrose Philips’s poem (eg. Bindman 1977, 204-5; Patterson 1987, 257, 259; Paley 2003, 20-52); and attempts to read Blake’s pastoral in line with late twentieth-century interpretations of eighteenth-century images of rural life and poverty (Patterson 1985, 334-5, 340-2; Paley 2003, 46-47).

My chapter focuses on the woodcuts’ formal and aesthetic qualities, particularly in their lost forms. Laurence Binyon has described Blake’s white-line woodcut technique as creating ‘gleaming shapes and gestures that the artist has struck out of the solid shadow’ (1917, 324), and ‘solid shadows’ might be a good account of what this chapter seeks. Exploring how literary texts supplement lost images, I also return to Samuel Palmer’s influential nineteenth-century description:

They are visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry. I thought of their light and shade, and looking upon them I found no word to describe it. Intense depth, solemnity, and vivid brilliancy only coldly and partially describe them. There is in all such a mystic and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul, and gives complete and unreserved delight, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world. They are like all that wonderful artist’s works the drawing aside of the fleshly curtain, and the glimpse which all the most holy, studious saints and sages have enjoyed, of that rest which remaineth to the people of God. The figures of Mr Blake have that intense, soul-evidencing attitude and action, and that elastic, nervous spring which belongs to uncaged immortal spirits. (Palmer, 1892: 15-16)

With hindsight, Palmer's claim to find his own language 'cold' and to have 'found no word to describe' the woodcuts becomes laughable, so routinely is this passage quoted (if seldom analysed).<sup>41</sup>

Until now, relative inattention to the elements of Blake's woodcuts that have vanished has resulted in formative visual qualities of the *Virgil* woodcuts escaping critical interpretation. I propose that we allow ourselves to imagine the lost parts as forming part of a vivid alternate reality for the series, one that is imaginary but also historically informed – real, in a rather ghostly way, since its existence depends entirely on the vision of the reader.

Throughout, I imagine the missing elements restored. I start with Blake's lost intermediary drawing after *Landscape with Polyphemus*, and consider the way *Pastorals of Virgil* uses and reduces Poussin's Cyclops. The chapter then moves on to discuss the lost edges of the woodblocks as evidence of Blake's original intentions for the series, and how Thornton sought to contain it spatially, through the imposition of a frame. With reference to Jacques Derrida's (1987) writing on Kantian *parerga*, I analyse some unique problems in the way that printed pictures relate to the frame. Finally I argue that lost versions of Blake's images defamiliarise scale, confusing giants and boys, birds and stars. Throughout, my exploration of missing images and chopped-off extremities explores the gendered dynamics of scale and framing in book illustration. I look at Blake's work alongside writings by Derrida (1987) and Edmund Burke ([1757] 2008), whose sexualised conception of the beautiful and sublime saw these as embodied by smallness and vastness respectively, the former having some kind of limit or frame, and the latter being unbounded.

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<sup>41</sup> It has been pointed out that Palmer's text 'overlooked the darker side' of Blake's illustrations, which are more 'foreboding' and 'melancholy' (Essick 1980, 229; Bindman 1977, 204). But the passage is usually just quoted as 'one of the first and still most beautiful descriptions' (Essick 1980, 229).

## Cyclops and a queer lost plot

The framing of art had to do with beauty, conventionally defined as feminine. Theorists as diverse as Burke, Kant and Derrida have agreed that, in Derrida's words, 'the presence of a limit is what gives form to the beautiful' (1987, 127). In contrast the sublime, associated with the masculine gigantic, is essentially unframable. Of interest in this debate is a lost intermediary drawing for Byfield's wood engraving 'The Giant Polypheme', which appears in *Pastorals of Virgil* signed by Blake as draughtsman (fig. 47), in a chapter that focuses on Virgil's second eclogue.<sup>42</sup> In Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, the sublime was 'vast'; unframable because its boundaries could not be perceived, it was therefore incompatible with clarity:

But let it be considered that hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. (Burke [1757] 2008, 58)

In the same passage Burke argues that the 'obscure' language of poetry is fitter for the sublime than what he calls the 'clear representations' of painters. Blake, with a less empiricist outlook on vision, would certainly have disagreed. We know he read Burke; his copy is lost, but he refers to it in his annotations to Reynolds:

Burke's Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions... I read Burkes Treatise when very Young ... on looking them over

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<sup>42</sup> The drawing may have been lost because it was done directly on the woodblock, or it may have been transferred from paper. Blake's name is signed as intermediary draughtsman. However, there is some evidence that John Linnell began the drawing (see Bentley [1969] 2004, 372). Linnell perhaps decided to hand the job over to Blake; he was helping Blake to find paid work at this time, and had indeed provided the introduction to Thornton.

find that my Notes on Reynolds in this Book are exactly Similar. I felt the Same Contempt & Abhorrence then; that I do now. (Blake [1965] 1988, 660-1)

The Cyclops Polyphemus was ideal for exploring the sublime, in line with representations of the colossus that were being produced elsewhere in Europe by Goya and his followers (see illustrations in Derrida 1987, 130, 141). And Blake knew all about the production of the gigantic on a small scale; his small illuminated books contain several depictions and mentions of giants.

Poussin's seventeenth-century *Landscape with Polyphemus* was obviously not painted to fulfil eighteenth-century expectations of the sublime. Anne Mellor has argued that in the 1820s, while painters like Salvator Rosa were admired for sublime landscapes, Poussin was associated rather with beauty (Mellor 1993, 98). This indeed seems true of *Landscape with Polyphemus*. The Cyclops's bulk is conveyed by the way he uses a mountain like a chair, but even this large body is comfortably held by the landscape. The proliferation of details and light, of foreground and distance, add to the sense of harmony, an order which easily contains (ie. frames) even these mountains, even this giant. Despite the kind of promise an early nineteenth-century audience would have heard in its title, Poussin's painting hardly presents a colossus in the tradition of Burke, Kant and Derrida: an immeasurable figure whose size was uncontrollable. Furthermore, in working on the reproduction, Blake contributed to a process that contained the colossal body in ever-decreasing frames. Poussin's canvas (which Blake wouldn't have seen – it was in Russia) measured 155x199 cm. Blake probably used as his source the scaled-down engraving by Étienne Baudet (58x76 cm, fig. 48), to create an even smaller image for Thornton's little octavo (pages approximately 178x106 mm). The whole process might have seemed to prove the point of theorists on the sublime

who said that the visual arts just weren't up to it. As we shall see, Blake's own woodcuts go out of their way to disprove this.

Scholars of Burke have analysed how explicitly his categories of sublime and beautiful are gendered and sexualised. The feminine beautiful is objectified as 'an aesthetic of heterosexual excitement', to quote Robert Jones (1998, 57). On the other hand, Burke's sublime has been described as 'phallic' by critics who pick up on his description of the 'swelling' associated with viewing terrible objects (see e.g. Zerilli 1994; Eagleton 1989, 57). Many writers also note that the attempt to separate the feminine beautiful from the masculine sublime inevitably fails – predictably, a desire to (heterosexually) mix them wins. Tim Fulford writes: 'Having gendered his aesthetic categories, Burke develops arguments about social and political authority which also suggest that the feminine beautiful is a useful addition to the masculine sublime' (1999, 33). In the rest of this chapter I will suggest that while Blake too both exploits and destabilises the distinctions between the sublime and beautiful, his chaotic and challenging way of doing this creates a gendered aesthetic that is another world from Burke's socially useful mix.

With this in mind, it is curious that Thornton introduces the giant Cyclops to push a clear heterosexist message. The following previously unnoticed quote appears in the page before the Cyclops illustration:

As far as regards the present Eclogue, instead of a frightful Cyclops in love with a Mermaid, as in Theocritus, the Monster is transferred [by Virgil] into a beautiful Shepherd, and the Mermaid into a charming Youth. To all minds attuned to taste and virtue, there will need no apology for our letting the Mermaid again resume her place, although she has captivated a more graceful lover. (Thornton 1821, 20)<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Text is identical in earlier editions; see Thornton 1812, 20.

A mermaid, with all the fabulous baggage she implies, is a better lover for a youth than another youth. Moreover, the Cyclops Polyphemus, though monstrous, was a model of pastoral heterosexuality and domesticity, especially in Theocritus's account, which *Pastorals of Virgil* reproduces alongside Virgil's second eclogue. In Theocritus, Polyphemus was a careful farmer living in a neat well-stocked cave, in love with the nymph Galatea. Whether or not Thornton's homophobia is entirely sincere (after all, by flagging his act of censorship he almost invites his young readers to imagine the restoration of Virgil's original) he probably believes his schoolbook must steer clear of male-male desire to be a commercial success. Readers interested in aesthetics would have noticed the leaps in the above quotation between the sublime and beautiful, and their association with sex and the sexes. Thornton's description of the 'frightful Cyclops' alludes to the established link between terror, the masculine, the sublime and the gigantic. The subsequent move into Virgilian homoeroticism mirrors a move from sublimity to beauty in the 'charming Youth'. Thornton's fudged solution is a re-asserted hetero-masculinity, the mermaid with her 'graceful lover', although 'graceful' retains Virgil's beautiful masculinity. Thornton then reinforces the heterosexual myth with two full-page illustrations of his censoring Cyclops (figs. 47 and 49).

In 1991 Essick published his newly discovered relief-etching of four of Blake's *Pastorals of Virgil* illustrations (figs. 43-46), convincingly proposing this as Blake's first attempt at the designs. The pale relief-etching haunts the extant woodcuts, inviting us to imagine how the other scenes would have looked if a similar muscular Blakean nudity had been allowed to dominate: scenes of shepherding, travelling, teasing, community dancing, and quiet evening suppers among men (see figs. 15-34). In an argument that focuses on aesthetic and technical reasons why a relief-etching would



have been unpalatable to Thornton, Essick only fleetingly considers the designs' sexuality:

The aesthetic objections... may have been accompanied by moral qualms centering on Colinet's near-nudity in all four vignettes and Thenot's buttocks in the top design. Such views are likely to have arisen since the book was intended for use by "Youtm [sic]" in "Schools" (title page). The re-costuming in the drawings and wood engravings may not have been Blake's decision, but Thornton's or his publishers'. (Essick 1991-2, 125)

Essick's juxtaposition of 'youth' and 'buttocks' is a rather hands-off, tentative allusion to the plate's homoerotic potential. Put together with the passage by Thornton just discussed, we suspect it was not straightforward nudity that Thornton may have objected to. In fact, although Essick is silent on this point, there is plenty of sexualised 'near-nudity' elsewhere in Thornton's book, including illustrations showing bare female breasts and flashes of male buttocks, but the heterosexual context is always clear (figs. 49-51).<sup>44</sup> In the changes from the diaphanous drapery of the relief etching to the more robust clothing of the woodcuts, Thornton imposes a heavier frame (I'm thinking here of Derrida's reading of Kant's *parerga*, in which picture frames, drapery and colonnades are *the* examples of limiting supplements: see 1987, 37-82). Indeed, we'll see that the limits Thornton imposed on Blake's woodcuts were inseparably gendered and spatial. In the background of the third relief-etched image (fig. 45), Lightfoot appears, a shepherd from Philips's poem. Unlike the woodcut (fig. 18), the relief-etching discreetly depicts Lightfoot's genitals, and our attention is drawn to them by Thenot, who gestures at Lightfoot's sex. Essick's 'near-nudity' again seems understated, and a mild description of the uncanny interaction between drapery and flesh throughout this relief etching,

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<sup>44</sup> See e.g. Thornton 1821, to face pp. 20, 88, 101. These also appear in the earlier edition of illustrations that Blake would have seen before beginning work (Thornton 1814, same pagination but illustrations only).

graphically reminiscent of Samuel Palmer's calling the woodcuts a 'drawing aside of the fleshly curtain' (1892, 16) – these drapes hang like fleshly curtains indeed. And the well-known removal of the extremities of Blake's woodcuts goes hand in hand with the removal of the phallus, as Thornton both frames and feminises Blake's work. If we accept that the surviving relief-etching represents a censored version of the series, its very lack – or at least the viewer's knowledge of the lack – will make the extant woodcuts irresistibly touched with homoeroticism.

Christopher Hobson has rightly pointed out that, despite recent work that begins to redress this, there remains a widespread tendency for critics to pin Blake along straight lines, and to assume that 'if there isn't absolutely incontrovertible evidence of homosexuality ... the topic can and in fact should be omitted'.<sup>45</sup> The scholarly treatment of the book *Pastorals of Virgil* is a notable case of this. Thornton gave two important apologies in his work: one for Virgil's homoerotic plot, and another for Blake's delicately rugged engraving style (see below). The latter has been considered in almost all critical discussions; the former, never noticed. But the two apologies speak to each other, and it's time that Thornton's uneasiness about Virgil's homoeroticism be brought into the critical narrative.

### **Framing and cutting: lost borders**

Palmer's famous description of the woodcuts warrants a closer linguistic analysis than it's received. For example, he says Blake's figures have 'that elastic, nervous spring which belongs to uncaged immortal spirits' (Palmer 1892, 16). The word 'uncaged' itself suggests a refusal of the frame. As suggested above, this is by definition

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher Hobson, 'Normalizing Perversity: Blake and Homosexuality in 2012', forthcoming. I am grateful to Christopher Hobson for sharing this pre-publication.

a refusal of beauty and the bounds or boundaries it implies – a refusal of containment – inappropriate to the miniature form.

The extremities of Blake's woodcuts were lopped off before publication; documentation is lacking about this. From 1920 when Binyon spoke of it as 'a real mutilation', commenting on 'how far richer and ampler' the untrimmed proofs were, and that 'our only regret must be that proofs of the whole set have not survived', most critics agree this was disastrous.<sup>46</sup> The lost edges are generally contextualised within what appears to have been a thorny working relationship between Blake and Thornton. This ended in Thornton printing the woodcuts with an apology, as mentioned above, highlighting the authorship of 'the famous BLAKE' but apologising that the works 'display less of art than genius' (Thornton 1821, facing p. 13; and see fig. 15). The masculine sublime was associated with genius, the feminine beautiful with art – it is as though Thornton were apologising that the illustrations were not quite as feminine as he'd have liked. Blake's rough, rugged lines, too, suggest these small illustrations inappropriately hankered after the sublime.<sup>47</sup>

From examining the two sets of surviving proofs (see figs. 35-42), it is known that Blake originally produced sets of four images on one large woodblock, to be printed together. These were later cut into separate blocks and trimmed down. The usual interpretation is that they were 'cut down to fit the crowded pages of the primer', as Wilton comments, and that this was '*necessary* to make them fit Thornton's book' (Wilton 1977, 16-17, my emphasis). However, there's something queer about the whole process. For example, Wilton sensibly adds that '[t]here is certainly every reason to believe that Blake took the stipulated format of the book into account when designing

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<sup>46</sup> Binyon (1920, 284); for another good discussion of the trimming, see Paley (2003, 31-2). Most critics agree that the losses were damaging, although Ted Gott prefers the cut-down versions (see Gott 1989, 135-6).

<sup>47</sup> For ruggedness and the sublime, see Burke ([1757] 2008, 66, 113).

his blocks' (1977, 17 n. 22), but he nonetheless describes the butchering of the blocks as 'a contingency that Blake seems to have tried to avoid, judging by the way he printed his early proofs, with four designs on a single uncut block so that they are packed tightly together on each sheet' (1977, 16). In other words, Blake *knew* the size of the page (moreover, my measurements indicate that the pages of the earlier first edition had been equally restrictive), he *knew* that he ought to follow the established format of the book by leaving room between illustrations for letterpress titles, captions and page numbers – but he just thought he'd ignore these requirements. This seems unlikely from an experienced printmaker who needed commissions. Essick, in the context of a different argument, measures pages to demonstrate that 'Blake could easily have known the size and unusual format required of his illustrations well in advance of any composition' (1991-2, 124).

An experienced commercial artist, Blake surely sized his illustrations deliberately. He possibly gambled that he'd get away with it, counting on the superior quality of his images, and the book's higgledy-piggledy design ethos – after all, Thornton had already dispensed with a running title in one or two pages of the earlier edition.<sup>48</sup> My measurements show that the size of Blake's proofs (150 x 85mm and 147 x 85mm) was remarkably close to the printable area of the page, in all editions, for the letterpress text, which measured between 150 and 154 mm high, and 81 and 83mm wide, including page numbers, titles and all letterpress printing. In other words, Blake designed his woodcuts to a size that he would have known to be feasible in terms of printing, trimming and binding, but that allowed no space for any *extra* letterpress text to be printed around the borders.

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<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Thornton (1814, unpaginated, to face p. 62 – also reprinted in the 1821 edition).

Seemingly, Thornton would not give way. Blake's woodblocks were trimmed to allow for a running title and page numbers at the top, and a minimal caption for each image. The captions might have been particularly annoying for Blake. Most read simply 'Colinet', 'Thenot', 'Colinet and Thenot', 'Colinet' etc., indicating which shepherd is speaking in that section of the poem. For the final page this has been replaced by the line numbers standard to the book. But no captions would have been necessary to the schoolchild reader – it is easy to see how Blake's designs relate to Philips's text. Considering Blake knew the format of the book's illustrations, it is tempting to assume he wished to exclude Thornton's framing letterpress text, and that this was important enough to risk the edges of his designs being chopped off.

Curiously, this struggle emerged around the *edges* of the woodcuts at a time when, more widely, the edges of prints were becoming a site of interest and anxiety to their artists. In 'The Angel's Wing that Wasn't: Old Master Paintings and Eighteenth-century Mezzotints', Natalia Parshina presents fascinating evidence that a number of so-called reproductive prints were published in the eighteenth century which restituted missing edges to Baroque paintings – only these edges had not really been missing, since they never existed. One example is the angel's wing of Parshina's title, of which the tip had never been present in Rembrandt's painting, but this non-existent tip nonetheless appeared in an eighteenth-century engraving (2000, 367). Parshina shows how such changes in engravings actually led to late twentieth-century art historians erroneously believing that paintings had had their edges trimmed off at some point in their history (2000, 367, 373). Parshina stresses that it is hard to say who was responsible for these falsely-restituted edges, since engravers often copied intermediary drawings (which often don't survive) or other engravings. Her interest is in correcting the art historical record and in examining changes made 'either deliberately or

unconsciously, during the process of engraving' (2000, 373). But clearly, her work also has important implications for studies into the frame and into lost art. Applied to Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil*, it helps us understand that Blake gambled with the edges of his woodcuts – and lost – at a time when a strange, over-enthusiastic interest in *recovering* missing edges was happening in print culture.

Certainly, Blake's *Virgil* explores the idea of the frame pictorially. The first four images follow long-established conventions of landscape pictures, with trees creating an internal frame on one or both sides, and often arching over the top of the image. This device was truncated when the woodblocks were chopped: effectually, Thornton had much of Blake's framing device shaved off and substituted his own (compare figs. 15-18 with figs. 35-37). In the fifth woodcut the lush frame is struck down, as Colinet's woes are represented by a blasted, anthropomorphized tree that refuses to round the corners of the design. In a change visible in the proofs (fig. 38), but less so in the published illustrations (fig. 19), the blasted tree resembles a frame collapsed on itself. From its sagging left branch to its jagged right one – the latter jutting out of the vignette into the margin – the tree's line slashes diagonally through the landscape and out the frame. In the sixth woodcut the framing tree returns, but as though taking a forced position; the frame itself is revealed as a painful, constricting form (see figs. 20 and 39). Then this overt visual play with the frame abates, unless we see the dancing bodies in fig. 27 – the only female figures in the series – as forming a curving frame, or the couple of shepherds in fig. 32 as being framed domestically by their hut. However, because no proofs are extant for Blake's last eight designs, we can only speculate, imagining other truncated edges. By the very end of the series, all sense of the frame disappears. The final two designs have a modern form that – as far as we can see in their current state – rejects conventional landscape framing (figs. 33-4). They are bare and

open, structured around a horizon. This is more in line with later nineteenth-century landscapes by Turner or Millet than with the work of Claude or Richard Wilson. Perhaps Blake was anticipating a modern sensibility that, instead of self-consciously framing landscape, sought, impossibly, to use a finite pictorial space to gesture towards its limitlessness. As far as we can tell, as Blake originally conceived it, this series created a visual narrative about breaking out of the frame. In terms of formal aesthetics, this would be a heroic, masculine narrative in which book illustration surprisingly reached for the sublime. The well-known dispute between Blake and Thornton can be interpreted as a struggle for control of the frame; by imposing a frame on the woodcuts Thornton was trying to impose a feminised aesthetic (and literally castrating them).

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida shows how the *parergon* – the frame, ornament or supplement – is essential to our conception of the *ergon*, or work. Commonly perceived as things in their own right, frames indispensably enable us to identify the artwork, ‘to determine the intrinsic – what is framed – and know what one is excluding as frame *and* outside-the-frame’ (Derrida 1987, 63). Re-reading Kant, he goes on to demonstrate how tricky it is to make such a determination: frames properly belong both to an inside and outside (or neither). By showing how *parerga* define and impinge on art – how, for any work, these are their *integral* supplements – he can help us build on Parshina’s evidence and envisage what the possession of pictorial edges might have meant to Blake, Thornton and their contemporaries.

Derrida analyses the frame in perhaps its broadest possible sense, offering an expansive reading of Kantian *parerga* and considering painting, sculpture and architecture. However, print media, particularly etchings and engravings, themselves have a self-consciously *parergonal* relation to Derrida’s text; he refrains from mentioning them – although etchings and engravings are reproduced in the majority of

the chapter's illustrations. Instead, *The Truth in Painting* frequently returns us to the example of the painting as a thing around which the idea of the frame may be thought. The titular painting persists as a starting point for subsequent commentators too,<sup>49</sup> a relatively graspable figure (in contrast with Kant and Derrida's other examples: statues' drapery and palaces' colonnades) that helps us remember what a frame is, even as its definition and function are being fiercely interrogated.

The 'frames of pictures' have been defined as parergonal since 1797, when Kant's third critique was first translated into English. If etchings and engravings have an unbalancing, silent presence in the illustrations to 'Parergon', they also haunt the extended passage that Derrida quotes from section 14 of Kant's third critique – particularly in Bennington and McLeod's influential English translation. In Derrida's French *La Vérité en Peinture*, he translates Kant ('je traduis ici', 1978, 61), thus offering a version situated in some respects in the present moment of his writing. McLeod and Bennington naturally replace Derrida's own translation with James Meredith's English version, first published in 1911. Meredith, in turn, would have been influenced by the anonymous partial translation of Kant 'expounded' by James Sigismund Beck and published in 1797. One of various echoes in *The Truth in Painting*

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<sup>49</sup> For example, see Philip Shaw's discussion of Derrida's text:

Why do art works require frames? It is impossible to imagine a painting, for example, without one; even the edge of the canvas marks a limit. And the frame does not have to be physical. Art is defined by its institutional context: a bottle rack, for instance, is just a bottle rack when it is located in a bar. If the bottle rack is removed by an artist such as Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and transferred to the setting of a gallery and then given a title, it is regarded as a work of art. The *parergon*, as frame, drapery, column, title, or institution, is not therefore simply peripheral; rather it is directly related to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*. (Shaw 2006, 117)

Here a generic painting is rhetorically positioned as *the* exemplary (framed) work. In contrast, Duchamp's modernity is cited as expanding our notion of framing. When discussing the parergon, there is a problem with this near fixation on the painting as *the* traditional (and, implicitly, *historical*) artwork. Although it nicely highlights Derrida's radical contribution to our developing understanding of the frame, it isn't necessarily the best medium for developing Derrida's insight that frames were already a tricky issue for Kant's contemporaries.



from the 1797 translation is the wording of the ‘frames of pictures’ and the other types of parergon mentioned by Kant.<sup>50</sup> Whereas Derrida’s writing underlines its currentness – ‘I translate here’ – the translators’ bibliographic citation to Meredith works as a sort of backward glance, putting a past-oriented twist on the English vocabulary. A look at the definitions of the words *picture*, *engrave* and *print* in Samuel Johnson’s dictionary confirms that, in the eighteenth century as today, ‘picture’ first and foremost meant painting.<sup>51</sup> Prints were pictures, but only, perhaps, by the skin of their teeth. Even the name ‘print’ is too easily confused with letterpress, as though pictorial prints, unlike paintings, were inseparable from writing, to the extent of not receiving a name to differentiate them.

If relations between paintings and picture-frames are far from intuitive, historically, this has been still more complicated with prints. In the eighteenth century it was common practice to juxtapose framed and unframed prints on walls.<sup>52</sup> The margin – a by-product of the printing process for both intaglio and relief prints – might be conceived as a frame. Indeed, Derrida suggests frames take place ‘somewhere in the margins’ (1987, 55). But although margins push against the edges of prints, it’s unclear to what extent they belong. With intaglio prints measurements are routinely taken from

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<sup>50</sup> Kant (1797, 308). Compare the whole of this page with Meredith’s 1911 translation (see Kant [1790] 2007, 56-57). There are notable echos as well as substantial differences. Meredith would probably have looked at the earlier version; it has been in the collection of the British Library since 1844. The three examples of parerga are almost word for word identical, except for the odd ‘or’, comma, article, or a change in preposition.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson offers four definitions of the noun ‘picture’, in an entry heavily weighted towards the medium of painting:

1. A resemblance of persons or things in colours.
2. The science of painting.
3. The works of painters.
4. Any resemblance or representation. (Johnson [1755] 1799, unpaginated)

Similarly with the verb ‘to picture’, the first definition is ‘to paint; to represent by painting’, and the second more generally ‘to represent’. But if these entries encourage us to think that a picture is most likely to be a painting, the first definition of the verb ‘to engrave’ is ‘to picture by incisions in any matter’. Similarly, the third and fourth definitions for the noun ‘print’ are ‘pictures cut in wood or copper to be impressed on paper’ and ‘picture made by impression’.

<sup>52</sup> There is plenty of evidence of this practice; see for example O’Connell 1999, 13.

the platemark, rather than from the edge of the picture, and the platemark cuts *through* the margin. However, browsing collections of eighteenth-century prints suggests that margins were dispensable on the level of reception – they could be retained, or just as easily trimmed off at the picture’s edge. In other words, they are often trimmed off within the platemark, and thus well *inside* the line that curators measure today as constituting the boundary of the *ergon*, or work.

The frames of book illustrations are still more complicated. What boundaries do illustrations have; where are their edges; what frame belongs to them? Derrida writes: ‘not every milieu, even if it is contiguous with the work, constitutes a *parergon* in the Kantian sense’. He then lists several types of milieu that are not *parerga*, a list ending, ‘nor the other works around one or other’ (1987, 59). And yet, if book illustrations have edges, these must be formed by the work in which they appear. Authors and artists of eighteenth-century books were distinct producers, who often signed separately: the author’s name on the title-page, and (depending on the quality of the publication) the artists’ names under the print. But if the frame of an illustration sits within another work, this automatically explains why illustration feels humbler as a genre – hardly a work in its own right. The illustration is framed within another work, the book; barely real, it is like a framed painting hanging on the wall of a doll’s house, which, no matter how excellent, would never quite be perceived as a proper painting with a proper frame.

Relief prints like woodcuts were even trickier. With blocks the same height as type, they could be printed in the same press, so woodcuts, unlike engravings, could appear literally framed by the letterpress of the book being illustrated, as we see with Blake’s *Virgil* designs. Since this was the only time Blake’s relief illustrations were published commercially, this kind of letterpress framing was a new experience for the artist.

The only way an illustration could logically be perceived as a work in its own right is if we take it to occupy a kind of hole in the book, so that it doesn't fully touch the body of text it illustrates. This seems an unlikely way of describing published illustrations. It might, however, be a better description of *extra-illustration*, that unique form of collector-driven illustration in which items that had *not* been published in a book were bound within it at relevant places by the collector. Part of the unique quality of such books is the way extra-illustrations often look foreign to the book in their size, design or colour.

Impossibly, could it have been an extra-illustrated look that Blake was trying to achieve? Unquestionably, his woodcuts appear alien in Thornton's text, not only in their mood and quality, but in their blackness, which contrasts with the paper-white background of the book's other illustrations (and there are many, with each of Virgil's eclogues and their English imitations illustrated with multiple cuts – see fig. 52). Geoffrey Keynes describes graphically how foreign Blake's pictures are to the book; he sees this difference as 'shock'-inducing:

The pages of Thornton's *Virgil* are filled with everything that is trite and trivial. Suddenly, as a leaf is turned, a page of Blake's woodcuts leaps into the consciousness and for a moment the world is transformed by the breath of genius. As the first shock of astonishment passes, the wonder grows at how Blake has conveyed so much in such small compass. (Keynes 1937, 10)

Published with Thornton's letterpress surrounds, Blake's illustrations *do* look part of the book – just about. But if they had appeared as Blake originally designed his proofs, the overwhelmingly black, haunting, wordless images, pushing against the limits of the book's margins as though regardless of them, might have passed for extra-illustrations indeed. In their format, the lost versions of Blake's woodcuts challenge the space they

are meant to occupy in Thornton's book and, as well, their own status as 'illustrations'. In resisting the frame offered by Thornton's letterpress, and in attempting not only to reduce the margins to the minimum size, but to re-make them as the frame of a print rather than the margins of a book, the lost versions of Blake's woodcuts vainly try to break out of their own frames, to create an impossibility – uncontained miniatures. Blake's attempt to resist Thornton's frame is a rejection of a hierarchical relationship between writing and illustration in which the latter would be contained, beautiful and artful – and feminine. Thornton's confused apology that the illustrations 'display less of art than genius' is a rather bewildered indication that Blake's work had been disturbingly masculine, too big for the page and not smooth enough for beauty, resisting what may have seemed a natural gendered hierarchy between writing and illustration.

### **Lost Little Giants**

Binyon found it 'astonishing how much bigness and grandeur Blake contrived to get into these tiny prints, and yet leave no impression of being cramped' (1917, 322). Similarly, Keynes marvels how 'in that tiny space, using the greatest economy of line, Blake has depicted with complete mastery a spacious landscape, a cataclysm of nature' (1937, 10-11). A clue to *how* Blake achieved this 'astonishing' 'mastery' of scale may lie in Palmer's famous description of the woodcuts, which describes the figures as having 'that elastic, nervous spring which belongs to uncaged immortal spirits' (1892, 15-16). I am intrigued by Palmer's word 'elastic', and in the remainder of this chapter I'll take this as grasping after an uncanny manipulation of space on Blake's part. An 'elastic' approach to scale can slyly approach the sublime. It suggests the kind of undecidability of size, shape and scale that eighteenth-century aesthetics believed was out of the reach of the visual arts.

In Blake's fourth woodcut (fig. 18), the image with the shepherd Lightfoot is revisited. His genitals are now missing. Incidentally, this is the final image in the series before the wooden, framing lines of the trees collapse in upon themselves. There is a formal echo of Poussin's *Landscape with Polyphemus* (see fig. 47). Both images have framing trees, a pastoral scene with figures in the foreground, and slopes or mountains in the background which are dominated by a shepherd (Lightfoot / Polyphemus), whose crook juts into the sky. The shepherd crooks have a phallic angle, although Poussin's Polyphemus does not embody the confident masculinity associated with the sublime (and of course in Homer this character was suggestively penetrated by Ulysses's red-hot stake). Polyphemus's posture suggests that melancholy Burke associated with a 'relaxed state of the body', a dangerous feminising state whose only antidote, according to Burke, was pain, terror and the sublime ([1757] 2008, 122). Blake's wood-cut Lightfoot may have lost his phallus, but he has a vigour the Cyclops lacks, and also a sublimity in terms of scale.

The repetitive structure of Blake's first four illustrations does make Lightfoot appear gigantic, from a certain perspective. In each preceding illustration the shepherds Thenot and Colinet converse across the picture plane, there is a framing tree or trees, and hills in the background with the sun rising between. In the first and third illustration, moreover, a cottage below the hills gives a careful indication of their scale and distance. The Lightfoot image presents a remarkably similar structure, so that it's natural for the viewer to perceive the slope as, likewise, a distant hillside, even if such a reading puts Lightfoot and his dog on a colossal scale. Furthermore, in proof impressions (fig. 37), Blake's experimental printing creates a halo of white light around the aptly named Lightfoot, as if he replaces the sun itself, whose position from the previous images he adopts. The white colour creates a sense of receding depth and thus distance in this part

of the picture. In many published impressions this halo does not appear, and Lightfoot is brought back to earth. Looking closely at the sheep at the bottom of the slope, we see that logically it's all closer than at first appears – not a hill, but a small incline not too far back from the picture plane – in which case Lightfoot's scale is more human-sized. Again, the proofs are a reminder of what has been lost from the series. We might speculate about what they suggest of different plans Blake might have had for the woodblocks' completion, before Thornton responded negatively to the proofs.

Although the question of scale in this illustration has not been discussed, some major museums and scholars continue to assume intuitively, following Binyon's 1926 catalogue, that 'Lightfoot is seen running in the distance' (1926, 81). 'Distance' is of course nicely vague. However, the only way it doesn't seem like an overstatement is if the slope is a hillside, and Lightfoot on a colossal scale. In 2003 Paley described Lightfoot as 'a youth who appears running down a hill' (2003, 35). These illustrations were untitled and are often published as such, but when titles are required, this one is often called *Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet, Lightfoot in the Distance*, a title used by Martin Butlin in 1978 and still followed in all Tate publications and by other museums.<sup>53</sup> However, when David Bindman assigned titles to Blake's works in the *Complete Graphic Works* of that same year, he appears to have considered the illustration and the existing descriptions differently. His title is very like Butlin's – almost verbatim – but avoids the word 'distance', preferring *Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet, Lightfoot in background*. Bindman's title is today followed on the websites of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Fitzwilliam Museum,

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<sup>53</sup> See Butlin (1978, 138-9). This is followed in all subsequent Tate publications and the online catalogue at <http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/> (accessed 31 July 2011). For other usage see e.g.: Gott (1988, 135); Martin, Butlin and Meyrick (2007); and see the online catalogue of the Sheffield Museum at <http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/collections/> (accessed 31 July 2011).

Cambridge.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, there has been some uncertainty as to whether the young shepherd is in the ‘distance’ or merely the ‘background’.

Blake was never one to follow perspectival (or other) laws blindly. We shouldn’t think that the figure of Lightfoot, flickering between giant and youth, was accidental. By refusing to follow the laws of perspective, Blake creates what both Burke and Kant thought impossible: a work of visual art that presents a complete vision of a giant whose dimensions are undecidable and thus unbounded, a figure that has form but not limits.

The name ‘Lightfoot’ may have suggested a spiritual message for Blake; two celebrated relief-etchings from *Milton* show a star entering the foot of William and Robert Blake respectively (see figs. 53 and 54). Indeed, the postures of these figures resemble Lightfoot’s. Figures of masculine energy and beauty – Burke would see this as a contradiction – they are likewise missing genitals. Whereas William and Robert are about to be penetrated by a star, Lightfoot, as mentioned above, is positioned as a sort of stand-in for another star, the sun.

Another echo of Lightfoot is the messenger in plate four of Blake’s *The Book of Job* (fig. 55), as noted by Michael Tolley (1988, 14). In my view, having met, and confounded, Burke’s idea of the sublime through the figure of Lightfoot – in terms of ‘Vastness’ – Blake uses the same figure in *Job* to explore another category of the sublime: ‘Infinity’, or ‘that uninterrupted progression, which alone can stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity’ (Burke [1757], 2008, 67-8). Blake had first used the messenger figure in a *Job* watercolour of around 1805, but there’s an important change in the later engraving of the same design, made at least two years after the *Virgil* woodcuts. Blake was struck, apparently, that in the Biblical story the messenger’s words ‘and I only am escaped alone to tell thee’ – with their emphatic claim to

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<sup>54</sup> See Bindman (1978), the online catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum at [http://www.metmuseum.org/works\\_of\\_art/collection\\_database/](http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/) and the online catalogue of the Fitzwilliam Museum at <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/collections/> (both accessed 31 July 2011).

uniqueness – are uncannily repeated four times in the short space of Job 1:15-19, as four messengers arrive, each delivering news of disaster, ending on these words. The repetition makes a gesture to infinity, as we imagine the bad news may be never-ending. Whereas in his watercolours Blake reproduced two of the messengers – hardly a series – in his engraving he adds a third, a miniscule, distant figure against the horizon (on top of a hillside, his posture again like Lightfoot's) who allows us to imagine endless further messengers zig-zagging back into the invisible landscape beyond. In his textual borders, Blake reproduces the biblical echo by engraving the words 'and I only am escaped alone to tell thee' twice in the same area of the plate. If this reading is accepted, it is striking that Blake takes a Biblical text in which the number four appears to approach infinity, and creates a picture in which the number three does. Surely these numbers are too small? His work may remind us of Burke's belief that the sublime can be achieved by 'a successive disposition of uniform parts in the same right line', and that 'this disposition is enabled to make a comparatively small quantity of matter produce a grander effect, than a much larger quantity disposed in another manner'.<sup>55</sup>

I'll conclude with some final thoughts on unbounded scale, with reference to birds and beauty. Blake's lost bird woodcut is one of three illustrations that he designed for the *Virgil* series, but which were re-cut by an anonymous craftsman. The published version doesn't resemble a reproduction of Blake, but a scar that shows where his work has been cut away (fig. 28). The best clue to the lost illustration comes from Blake's preparatory drawing, although its technique is utterly different from the woodcuts; even the drawing has been untraced since the 1930s and is only known through a photograph (fig. 56). We see harvested corn, and birds flocking in the sky. Two of them – the largest – are bill to bill, as if kissing in mid-air. The published reproductive print of

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<sup>55</sup> Burke ([1757] 2008, 128). This section of Burke's text is particularly addressed towards the parergonal colonnade.



Blake's birds minimalises the impact of the anthropomorphised bird-couple, and ignores the dramatic, angular shapes Blake gives to the birds. In the *Virgil* sequence, this image immediately follows Blake's illustration of uncannily graceful, dancing women (fig. 27). Curiously, one of Burke's most infamous passages sexualises a 'beautiful bird', a 'smooth and downy' dove whose 'parts... are melted into one another', a description that abruptly transfers to 'a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts' ([1757] 2008, 104-5).

Imagining the lost woodcut, we invert the colours from black on white to white on black. In line with the series, Blake would probably present us with a mostly black sky and the birds picked out in white. Imagine it – the birds, with their jutting triangular wings, tails and bills, would look like stars – larger and brighter stars than the twinkling ones that appear outside the shepherd's convivial hut in the eighteenth illustration (fig. 32).

As a reader of Burke's *Enquiry*, Blake would have noticed that stars are sublime, though problematically so – tiny and vast at the same time – not to mention infinite. Here we return to the question of whether the sublime is possible through smallness, including the smallness of the woodcuts. Burke discusses 'smallness' as an attribute of beauty. He analyses linguistic diminutives and how 'in the English language the diminishing *ling* was added to the names of persons and things that were the objects of love. Some we retain still, as darling, (or little dear) and a few others' ([1757] 2008, 102). Might it have occurred to Blake that one of these 'others' was *starling*, or little star? Etymologically, in this case, the *OED* tells us that the 'star' of starling was the name of a bird, as distinct from a heavenly body, but it is a startling homonym. What's more, the lost woodcut under discussion was designed to illustrate this line by Philips: 'First then shall lightsome birds forget to fly' (Thornton 1821, 17). *Lightsome*,

according to the *OED*, does not only mean light-hearted, but radiant, light-giving, like a star. As with Lightfoot, the inspiration for Blake's startling lost woodcut came direct from the text.

Thinking through the gaps, it is tempting to believe that Blake's reading of Burke 'when very Young', and his later re-reading, was formative. Did Blake notice how his name echoed the older man's, this B--ke? That his best-selling *Philosophical Enquiry* was first published in the year of Blake's birth, 1757? This act of reading, which may have seduced Blake even as it irritated him, was perhaps the beginning of a productive connection between birds and stars, youths and giants.

Blake's library was dispersed before his death. While we have evidence that he read Burke, we can only imagine whether his collection included Kant's third critique or early translations into English, and whether Blake's marginalia ever drew attention to the passage on *parerga* that so fascinated Derrida. It may well be coincidental that the *Virgil* series engages with *parerga* not only through 'the frames of pictures' and 'drapery', as discussed above, but also through Kant's third example, 'colonnades' (Kant 2007, 57). In the published woodcuts, one of only two nude figures is the labourer in figure 24, who is levelling a lawn outside a Palladian mansion (the other nude is Lightfoot), his nudity complemented by the bare façade of the house and the branchless tree. Another illustration on the same page revisits the mansion (fig. 27).<sup>56</sup> This time, however, the multiple figures are clothed, and the mansion is adorned with colonnades – another of the *parerga* listed by Kant. Playing with the appearance and disappearance of frames, drapery and colonnades, Blake's series could illustrate Kant or Derrida perhaps more sympathetically than it approaches Thornton's pedagogic text.

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<sup>56</sup> Paley suggests this may be the other façade of the same house (2003, 46).

We will almost certainly never know how Blake might have wished to present his vision for Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil* (although another relief etching or proof may turn up one day). But what survives of the project allows much to be plausibly imagined – and it is very clear that what survives is less than what Blake had in mind. We can only imagine how the rest of the series might have looked if Thornton had allowed the relief-etched versions to continue, those shepherds with their fleshly drapes. We can imagine what Blake's intermediary drawing of the reduced Cyclops might have looked like. The eight surviving proofs with their unchopped edges also recall what might have been, had Thornton imposed a lighter frame – we could have seen 'uncaged immortal spirits' indeed. Similarly, the three anonymously engraved illustrations deserve our attention, and it's certainly possible to imagine these compositions as Blakean woodcuts. I have been arguing that Thornton's comment that Blake's images 'display less of art than genius' betrays anxiety about their masculinity, their scale, and their sublimity. This reading comes about by paying close attention to the substantial amount that has been cut from these images (of course woodcuts are always about cutting off and away).

Here, the indistinctness of lost elements help the visual arts to sublimity. Dimly flickering between big and small, Blake played fast and loose with the gendered rules of aesthetics. He almost created something that was not-quite-sublime, not-quite beautiful. His illustrations incorporate the visible and invisible, and are impossibly unbounded.

## Chapter 4

### Tele-visionaries: the BBC's *Doctor Who*<sup>57</sup>

#### Nostalgia

—*Doctor Who* takes this thesis full circle, from mothers to fathers. Who is the endlessly regenerating father of the universe.

—Here is Richard Molesworth in the foreword to his recent book *Wiped! Doctor Who's Missing Episodes*:

And as the years went by, the realisation set in that perhaps the mystique of the missing episodes somehow *added* to the whole ethos of *Doctor Who*. If every single episode of the series still survived, to be repeated relentlessly on UK Gold, or to be sold in VHS or DVD box sets, then would *Doctor Who* have become as iconic and enthralling as it undoubtedly is? (2010, 11, emphasis in original)

Molesworth's book details an extraordinarily comprehensive archival study of the production, loss and recovery of 1960s *Doctor Who* episodes. This chapter is indebted to this and other research, but attempts to do something completely different. For example, Molesworth never theorises the idea of the missing, or try to account for *how*, as he rightly states in this paragraph, lost episodes have 'somehow *added*' to the *Doctor Who* myth. We're interested here in unpicking the magic behind this word 'somehow', a word that's slipped discreetly in beside Molesworth's emphatic '*added*'. And while Molesworth focuses on a historical narrative of production, destruction and discovery, we want to attempt a close reading of what's not there, to explore the visual and literary qualities of lost episodes.

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<sup>57</sup> This chapter borrows the form of the 'polylogue' from Derrida's 'Restitutions' in *The Truth in Painting* (1987, 255-382).

—While many 1960s episodes of *Doctor Who* are lost (the BBC wiped tapes to save money and space), all survive in audio form, thanks to recordings made by viewers.

Graham Strong's high-quality amateur recordings, which he began making at the age of fourteen, are one of the major sources for the lost episode audios. He tells a good story of this in a recent interview with BBC's Shaun Ley:

GS: To start with, I was recording with a microphone. And, we had a 17-inch box TV at the time, and I remember hanging the microphone over in front of the speaker, with a flowerpot or something on the top to keep the wire in place. And, when the title appeared on the screen, I would shout into the microphone the episode title. At the time, '63, I'd lost my father – he died when I was twelve years old – and I was an only child, so it was just me and mother. So, mother was given instructions not to come in when *Doctor Who* was being recorded.

SL: So, Mum was banished?

GS: Basically, yes.<sup>58</sup>

—It is a compelling coincidence, this lost father at the moment of lost art: losing one father and saving another in his image. But only the voice remains, taped.

—And banished mothers. Our Mum hated *Doctor Who*.

—Our own father remembers watching bits of the lost *Marco Polo* storyline from *Doctor Who*. He says it was unusually good, that he watched it in an Oxford common room. He only recalls one 'dramatic visual': the swordfight between Ian and the Mongol warlord Tegana. I ask for more, but that's all he's got. Funny though, he remembers the characters' names. And he has actually *seen* it, and this brings home the loss, the inaccessibility of another's memory. I try to imagine him in an Oxford common room – all I can come up with is some wooden panels. Then we talk a bit more and realise the chronology's wrong – he can't have seen it there. It must have been at

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<sup>58</sup> From 'Doctor Who: The Lost Episodes', presented by Shaun Ley, produced by Chris Ledgard, BBC Radio 4, 29 December 2009. Re-issued by BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

our Aunt Mary's house. Would she have watched it too? Again, lost art makes demands of memory, demands that it can't meet, and the memories that do survive become overdetermined.

—Let's return to Graham Strong's interview:

SL: Why did you want to have a recording of your own?

GS: Purely for my own personal preference of listening to it later.

SL: And did you listen back to them?

GS: I listened to some. But it's very difficult: as time goes on you cannot visualise the pictures you've seen, you only have the audio. But in the early days yes, I could sort of close my eyes and visualise the picture and listen to the story.

In chapter one we explored the importance of productive nostalgia when it comes to lost art. We also said that *memory loss* might be more to the point, and Strong's story comes back to this. Lost art does not *only* free the imagination, it also sets it up to fail. Daydreams only last so long – hence the call for more tangible restitutions.

—Strong's account of the loss of his father appears in the documentary within two minutes of this descriptions of memory loss.

—Why go on so about fathers? Surely the relevance of Strong is in the meeting between lost art and the amateur. After hearing this interview, who can listen to *The Dalek's Master Plan* without loving the thought of the flowerpot's role in it, the boy shouting titles at the mic? If the BBC had kept its own recording, this story would never have become a cultural memory, an inextricable part of the provenance of this artwork.

There are video reconstructions of lost *Doctor Who* stories. Loose Cannon Productions have put together photographic stills, photographic composites, surviving clips, cgi animation and new photography and video to re-create all of the lost episodes. Whospites have made cartoon versions, and other animations have been uploaded onto

Youtube.<sup>59</sup> We already considered, in chapter 2, how art might become more accessible after it's lost – how anyone can take an active role in its restitution. This is part of that story.

—Amateurism is not unconnected with family. An amateur is a lover. We might think of this in relation to a deconstructed idea of the professional / amateur relationship.

Nicholas Royle writes:

‘Amateur’ here involves not only a sense of the love and of that love which is a condition of any deconstructive reading, but also a deconstruction of the ‘professional’ as such. Might we not dream of a kind of critical writing that would be a deconstruction of profession, of every professionalism and professing? – not in the name of some traditional, hierarchically opposed notion of amateurism (like that of the amateur man or woman of letters, the ‘mere’ ‘amateur’), but rather as part of an acknowledgement and elaboration of the fact that every professor or professional, and every profession worthy of its name, is radically amateur... (Royle 1995, 56-57)

—The amateurism of the *Doctor Who* restitutions is similarly complex. At first, it seems they are all amateur – necessarily so, since the BBC owns the copyright, which creates challenges in publicising and distributing reconstructions. But actually, this sort of restitution-work treads a fine and curious line between the amateur and professional. Derek Handley of Loose Cannon productions is an engineer, but he's also a part-time filmmaker who has produced a phenomenal body of research and creative work on reconstructions. As well as producing amateur full-length storylines distributed free of charge to fans, the label has also been commissioned by the BBC to make condensed recons of two storylines for inclusion in commercial DVDs. One of several contributors to Loose Cannon and other amateur recon projects is Chris Petts, a CGI animator whose

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<sup>59</sup> For Loose Cannon's website see <http://www.recons.com/> (accessed 19 December 2011); for Whospites see <http://orangecow.org/who-sprites2/1guide/> (accessed 19 December 2011); there are various versions on Youtube, e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsvY0AinFvU> (accessed 19 December 2011).

professional credits include the new series of *Doctor Who* and the *Harry Potter* films.<sup>60</sup>

Petts described to me his enthusiasm for lost episodes in terms that suggest a grasping after something tangible, a nostalgia for a craft-based way of working:

This actually started when I was about sixteen... I bought a jacket in Oxfam, which I thought looked similar enough to William Hartnell's jacket. It's not bad; it needs a bit of modification in order to make the costume. So that's the thought that's in my head, maybe someday – I don't know. So when I finally decided – ok, let's actually try this, with no time-scale to it, but let's try this and see – I'd been going around... hunting down the right fabrics and stuff, trying to get really good reference images of costumes, that sort of thing. I've now got to the stage where I've got a pretty good approximation of William Hartnell's costume... I'm working on a waistcoat at the moment, which I've embroidered myself. I worked out it had about 10,000 stitches in it, which is quite disturbing in itself [laughs], and I've found the right sort of shirt, with the right sort of cuffs to it, and the right wing collar...

What does appeal to me, recently, is that I spend so long making things on the computer that don't exist, ...making something that I've got absolutely nothing to show for, apart from a picture on a screen, that it's really nice to just actually create something physical, that you can go, yeah, I made that, you know. There's no undo button, but at the same time, it just feels very different to my job...

You have to learn a lot of skills. Carpentry, embroidery, electronics... ...<sup>61</sup>

—They really are tangible, aren't they – the episode reconstructions, I mean? Loose Cannon Productions, in deference to the BBC's copyright, don't post their videos online. Although they are free, to get one you must buy a blank VHS tape or DVD, and send it to your local dubbing centre with a stamped addressed envelope. There's something fittingly nostalgic about this use of snail-mail.

—I can't be silent. Can anyone else hear a bad pun: a whispered, interrogative 'Doctor *Who?*' – in a feminine voice – that runs through one's head from time to time when

<sup>60</sup> This and further references from personal interviews with Derek Handley, London, 7 September 2011, and Chris Petts, London, 9 September, 2011. I am grateful to Derek Handley and Chris Petts for allowing me to quote them here.

<sup>61</sup> Petts, London, 9 September, 2011, personal interview.



writing a thesis? And like those tele-visionary reconstructions, a PhD thesis sits at a boundary between the amateur and the professional. Isn't this chapter about our own wish to be named doctor?

### **Blindness**

—*Tele-visionary* is our way of describing lost episodes, invisible in the actual world but seen in a vision.

—Near the beginning of Cixous's 'Savoir' we come across the disappearance of a work of art:

Every day she had to pass by the castle. Help came from the statue of Joan of Arc. The great golden woman brandished her flaming lance and showed her the way to the castle. By following the golden sign she would finally get there. Until the day when. One morning in the square there was nothing. The statue was not there. No trace of the castle. Instead of the sacred horse a world of shadow. All was lost. Every step increased the confusion. She stopped, petrified, deprived of the statue's help. She found herself stalled at the heart of the invisible. Everywhere she saw this limitless pale nothingness, as though by some false step she had entered, living, into death. (Cixous [1998] 2001, 3,6)

The disappearance of a public statue differs from that of a painting or an illustrated book. On the one hand, a public statue is formal, much less intimate. On the other hand, it is more approachable (we could even climb on it) – a landmark or signpost, rather than a museum piece.

—Isn't there also a 'sacred horse' statue in one of the lost *Doctor Whos*?

—Yes, the episode 'The Horse of Destruction' in the series *The Myth-Makers*.<sup>62</sup> The statue that the Trojans 'worship', which contains a lethal army. Lost art that can see. In

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<sup>62</sup> *The Myth-Makers*, written by Donald Cotton, directed by Michael Leeston-Smith, in *Doctor Who*, produced by John Wiles, BBC, first broadcast 16 October to 6 November 1965.

fact, it holds a host of seeing eyes, but is not visible, at least not (to the Trojans) for what it is. There are stills of the model, which looks rather frail and stick-like – but there are no *tele-snaps*, as they're called, these pictures from the programme itself, from the eye of the correct camera. And we can't see it move. When thinking about this lost video, we might hear the voices of the Doctor's companions, Steven and Vicki, as they watch and are watched by the statue rolling into Troy:

STEVEN: That's some horse.

VICKI: If you can call it that.

...

VICKI: ... That thing is so rickety it must be full of peep holes.<sup>63</sup>

—When I spoke to Derek Handley, he described how the lost horse became part of a new scene of domestic filming. Blindness becomes about the invisibility of fishing wire, about screwing up one's eyes and one's lens to shut out a garden and a conservatory, until a Trojan desert is created:

[David Howe had] actually got the sort of wooden horse prop that they'd used originally. He'd interviewed the designer, and he'd kept it in his garage ever since, and he said to David, 'Oh, I was about to chuck this out last week, do you want it?', and he said, 'Oh Great, wonderful.' ... It's about three foot high, and it's still in very good condition... I knew David had some pictures of it, and I said, 'Is there any chance to go and film a bit with it?' and he said, 'Well I'm just having a conservatory built at the back, so I've got a big table and piles of sand... if you want to film some stuff on that.' So we set up a big sort of 8 by 4 board on his back table, in the garden, holed it up with sand to make like sand dunes, and filmed... It was literally we just had a bit of fishing wire, and it was just pulling it along and trying not to get any of his garden, just a bit of blue sky.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> 'Horse of Destruction', *The Myth-Makers*, first broadcast 1965, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd). Transcripts of lost episodes are also available online in the Earthbound Timelords' *Scripts Project*, [http://homepages.bw.edu/~jcurtis/Scripts/scripts\\_project.htm#THE%20SCRIPTS](http://homepages.bw.edu/~jcurtis/Scripts/scripts_project.htm#THE%20SCRIPTS) (accessed 19 December 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Handley, London, 7 September, 2011, personal interview.

—Weren't we talking about Cixous' 'Savoir'? In her story, it turns out that it is *not* the statue that has done the disappearing, exactly, but the character's vision:

Later in the gap someone abruptly come from the nothing told her that things hadn't fled at all. They were definitely in their place. So was it she who could not see the statue or the castle or the edges of the world or the bus? A little veil of mist had got the better of existences in her poor credulous eyes. The great golden statue had not resisted. (Cixous [1998] 2001, 6)

What is the relation between lost art and blindness? Is that what lost art is? Art that we see blindly? Art that appeals to and refuses vision in the same gesture? On the final page of 'Savoir' we hear that 'Nostalgia for the secret non-seeing was rising' (Cixous [1998] 2001, 16). The myopic has become a seer through surgery. She has felt 'unexpected mourning', crying 'but I'm *losing* my myopia!' ([1998] 2001, 11).

—A re-writing of Cixous's story from the point of view of lost art would be a story that followed the narrative not, as it does, of the seer and the myopic, but rather of the fantastic, golden, invisible statue of Joan of Arc on horseback – the statue that was so *ready* to disappear, that 'had not resisted'. While Cixous explores 'non-seeing' with regard to blindness, the lost artwork offers a kind of visionary non-seeing for the sighted, for anyone with access to the internet or a newspaper. The reason lost television episodes are so crucial is that, while their documented past existence gives them cultural roots, their loss allows them to incorporate, in a new way, the element of 'non-seeing', the invisible (but 'not impossible') that is crucial for Cixous if we want to capture what she calls elsewhere "*the living of life*" (what else is there to want to draw?)' ([1998] 2005, 32):

It's not a question of drawing the contours, *but of what escapes the contour*, the secret movement, the breaking, the torment, the unexpected.

The drawing wants to draw what is invisible to the naked eye. It's very difficult.  
([1998] 2005, 30-32)

It is possible that a work of art might be let down by its own presence. Less is more, perhaps – at least a little less. We want works that don't reveal everything, but whose promises we can continue to believe.

—One thing that would be lost if there were no lost episodes is the creative work of animators and film-makers who create reconstructions.

—I sometimes suspect you think art is at its best when it's not seen? It sounds callous.

—Yes, that's what scares me. It is essential to explore the popular appeal of lost art – but it is hard not to cross the line into celebration. Loss is close to destruction. Lyse Doucet in her recent documentary *Afghanistan: The Unknown Country* had this to say:

No matter how many times you see these empty niches, they still take your breath away, and every time I come to Bamiyan, no matter where I am in this valley, you feel the presence of these Buddhas...  
Bamiyan is a place where Afghans can find space to dream, but dreams quickly run into limits here.<sup>65</sup>

## Chasing Grails

—Despite regular speculations that this will change, the doctor's randomly re-generating bodies have to date been white and male.<sup>66</sup> In the first series of 1963-4, he is grandfather to the character Susan. Prickly and cuddly at once, he is a manifestation of white patriarchy born in the last breaths of British colonialism, but one which has

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<sup>65</sup> *Afghanistan: The Unknown Country*, presented by Lyse Doucet, produced by Chris Alcock, BBC2, 6 July 2011.

<sup>66</sup> There are numerous speculations about female or black Doctor Whos. See e.g. Tom Lamont, 'Doctor Who: who will play the big-screen Doctor?', *The Observer*, 20 November, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2011/nov/20/doctor-who-big-screen-film?INTCMP=SRCH>; Simon Hattenstone, 'Meet Matt Smith: Star of the new Doctor Who', *The Guardian*, 6 March, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2010/mar/06/matt-smith-doctor-who-interview?INTCMP=SRCH>.

become so beloved it is hard to wish ‘to bring [him] to a speedy and unconditional end’ (as international law proclaims is a ‘necessity’ for ‘all... manifestations’ of colonialism (United Nations 1960)).

—This chapter will turn to the storyline *Marco Polo*, set in central Asia, which re-tells the story of Polo’s involvement with the empire of Kublai Khan.<sup>67</sup> These seven episodes are the first lost ones in *Doctor Who*’s history. *Marco Polo* tells the story of the Doctor and his companions, Barbara, Ian and Susan, arriving in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Cathay to find an inhospitable climate and the Tardis broken. They are taken in by Marco Polo, who protects them and treats them kindly. However, he also steals the Tardis, intending it as a political gift for Kublai Khan. Polo’s caravan travels with the Doctor over the Gobi desert towards Khan’s summer palace in Shang-tu, a variant spelling of Xanadu. There are two other main characters: the Lady Ping-Cho, a meek sixteen-year-old from Samarkand who is travelling to the Khan’s court for an arranged marriage; and the Mongolian warlord Tegana, who is supposedly a peace emissary to Kublai Khan but is actually plotting to overthrow him in favour of a rival. Tegana is the villain of the series, and makes numerous foiled attempts on the lives of Polo, the Doctor, and his companions.

Critical accounts of *Marco Polo* have avoided closely analysing its lost elements (as has often been seen in this thesis) as well as its postcolonial themes. The storyline has briefly been interpreted in terms of its narrative devices, the reliance on Polo’s *Il Milione* as a historical document, and its patchy attempt to fulfil the programme’s educational brief (O’Mahony 2007, 60-61; Chapman 2006, 32-33).

Before discussing *Marco Polo*’s representations of monsters and wargames, we might remember both the globally diverse audience that grew around *Doctor Who* in

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<sup>67</sup> *Marco Polo*, written by John Lucarotti, directed by Waris Hussein, in *Doctor Who*, produced by Verity Lambert, BBC, first broadcast 22 February to 4 April 1964.

the '60s, and also the fact that the loss of the episodes can spark neo-imperial narratives today.

Scholars of extant episodes have critiqued the 'liberal colonialism' of *Doctor Who* (Charles 2007, 117), giving subtle interpretations of its varying imperialistic and anti-imperialistic storylines and of the contexts of production within 'the [British] nation's postcolonial ambivalence' (Charles 2007, 117; see also Wood 2007, Orthia 2010). They have also noted that the Doctor himself, particularly the first Doctor under discussion here, played by William Hartnell, epitomised a 'conservative paternalism' (Charles 2007, 117). However – partly perhaps because their focus is on extant episodes – these scholars have neglected to notice that episodes of *Doctor Who* were not just being viewed by the British. *Doctor Who* was sold in the 60s to countries often composed of an A to Z of current and former parts of the British Empire. The lost 1964 storyline *Marco Polo* was purchased for broadcast in Aden, Australia, Barbados, Bermuda, Canada, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Ghana, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Kenya, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Rhodesia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda and Zambia (Molesworth 2010, 376-8).

Since Ian Levine recovered six episodes from Nigeria in 1985 (Molesworth 2010, 205, and see Chapman 2006, 204), a large proportion of re-discoveries of missing episodes have been from formerly colonised countries. However, if postcolonial accounts of *Doctor Who* have failed to notice its global audience, writers on lost episodes, focusing on the archive, have been well aware of this audience, but uninterested in its political dimensions.

Molesworth's recent book documents global sales as important evidence in the archival 'hunt' for missing episodes, but makes no reference to the relevance of this to the history of empire. Web forums such as *Lost Dr Who* have huge sections on the

global search, divided by continent and country, referring to articles about ‘Hunting in Africa’ and re-printing and discussing rumours such as *The Sun*’s claim that ‘LONG-lost Doctor Who episodes thought to be hidden away in Zimbabwe may never be recovered because despot Robert Mugabe hates the UK’.<sup>68</sup> BBC Radio 4’s documentary on the lost episodes emphasises the search in Zambia.<sup>69</sup> This neo-imperial narrative of exploration is emphasised by the unselfconscious use of language, such as the frequent description of the fourth episode of the storyline *The Tenth Planet* as the ‘holy grail’ of lost episodes, in interviews and numerous websites as well as a recent scholarly history (Chapman 2006, 204).<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Chapman, a Professor of Film at Leicester University felt able to publish this astonishing assessment of *Marco Polo* in 2006: ‘The characterisation of Polo (Mark Eden) as a civilised European who befriends the Doctor and his companions adds a note of psychological realism’ (2006, 32).

—Waris Hussein was the director of *Marco Polo*, as well as of the first *Doctor Who* storyline broadcast. He recently gave an interview in *Doctor Who Magazine* in which he described the challenges of working in the BBC in the 1960s:

As an Asian, I was a phenomenon. Nobody discussed it, almost out of self-consciousness, but that set off my own insecurities – being an outsider, dealing with subject matter that was non-Asian ... I didn’t do anything to do with my own origins until some time later – that was a *Play of the Month* of *A Passage to India* [in 1965]. Before that, I was purely doing British-based dramas.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See ‘The African Continent’ in *Lost Doctor Who*, <http://lostdrwho.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=africa&action=display&thread=64> (accessed 3 September 2011). I have been unable to locate the article referred to entitled ‘Hunting in Africa’, which may have been deleted from another forum. For the newspaper article see also Colin Robertson, ‘Evil Mugabe hoards lost Doctor Who tapes’, *The Sun*, 20 February 2009, <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/showbiz/tv/article2255640.ece> (accessed 3 September 2011).

<sup>69</sup> ‘Doctor Who: The Lost Episodes’, presented by Shaun Ley, first broadcast 2009, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>70</sup> See also ‘Doctor Who: The lost Episodes’, presented by Shaun Ley, first broadcast 2009, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>71</sup> Benjamin Cook ‘Making History’, *Doctor Who Magazine*, 21 July 2004, 14.

It is curious that Hussein saw his work on *Marco Polo* in 1964 – a trip over the Gobi desert towards Kublai Khan and Cathay – as being ‘non-Asian’ subject matter, ‘purely... British-based’.

—Perhaps Hussein’s *Marco Polo* addresses Cathay about as directly as Tennyson’s ‘The Holy Grail’ addresses the Middle East. That’s a text about lost art and the failure of vision, in which he who ‘has not seen the Grail’ repeatedly swears an oath on his blindness. The grail appears on a ‘long beam’ (a cinematic projection?), and is ‘all over cover’d with a luminous cloud’. The men who are blind to it watch each other’s gazes instead:

But every knight beheld his fellow’s face  
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,  
And staring each at other like dumb men  
Stood.

Their King is frustrated by their quest for the invisible, asking, “‘have ye seen a cloud? / What go ye into the wilderness to see?’”<sup>72</sup>

In a different way from Tennyson’s extant poem, the lost *Marco Polo* invites restitutions, visions and re-visions, narratives that could potentially put Asia back into the story at the level of both reception and production.

### **Footprints and telesnaps**

—So, what is the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation? The *OED* tells us that to *broadcast* means to sow widely – it was originally used of planting seeds. It is a metaphor that suggests constant change and development, not retention or conservation. The broadcast, like the seed-sowing, happens in an instant, irrecoverable, like a

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<sup>72</sup> For all quotations from ‘The Holy Grail’, see Tennyson ([2000] 2009, 418-20)



performance. It's unrepeatable – you can't sow the same seed twice – it would make a mockery of the whole thing.

—*Telesnaps* is a word for the photographs of episodes taken by John Cura as records for actors, directors, and others. They were taken by pointing a camera directly at the television screen. Telesnaps provide crucial evidence of what episodes looked like; they differ from other photographs, taken during recording or rehearsals, which might show a scene from a slightly different point of view.

—The BBC's patchy archives and missing stories are the result of a performance culture that did not value retention or repetition, as well as technical, financial and storage issues that made this unfeasible (see Molesworth 2010, 13-74). This contrasts with other producers for whom the screen was a book brought to life. Take Disney, for example, and the opening sequences of animations such as *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) and *The Jungle Book* (1967) in which the camera zooms into an illustrated book, tumbling its viewers into the pages. The screen becomes the ultimate illustrated book – the latest in print technology, in (moving) pictorial reproduction, word and music. But this familiar notion of the screen as *the* reproducible work of art (Benjamin [1936] 1969) is decisively rejected if you erase your tape after you have used it, as was common practice in the BBC.

—Funnily enough, *Marco Polo* actually begins by presenting us with a print that is impermanent, a print that was always destined to morph, become monstrous, fade and finally disappear. Here is the opening dialogue as printed in the camera script, in which the Doctor's companions examine a large print in the snow:

SUSAN: It must have been made by a giant!

IAN: It could be a perfectly normal print and the sun's rays have melted back the edges to make it much larger.<sup>73</sup>

Here, the lost episode describes a print that has been made by *something* plus the sun. This inevitably raises two ghosts. First, the notion of the sun having a hand in printmaking refers to photography itself, videotape – the medium we will no longer be able to watch because it has been erased.<sup>74</sup> Second, Susan's suspicion at the footprint appears to promise monsters (*Doctor Who* was already famous for its Daleks, which had first appeared in December 1963).

This suspicion returns insistently, later voiced by Barbara: 'A monster – an animal or something – it was standing there – staring at me... You don't believe me? Look! There are its prints.' At least, this is the version in the camera script. In the final audio, Barbara says: 'I – there was – there was an animal or something', and again refers to this creature 'staring', and to its footprints. If the recorded performance stutters over the word 'monster', erasing it, the monstrous possibility is still very much present in her description of an animal *or something*.<sup>75</sup>

—But there are absolutely no monsters in *Marco Polo*. It's well-known to be a straightforward 'historical' storyline.

—Yes, the print melts away, the storyline is wiped, the monster – disappointingly – does not materialise.

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<sup>73</sup> Quotations from camera scripts are all taken from the pdf documents in BBC (2010-11, 1: cd). The surviving audio offers a slightly altered version to the camera scripts, in this instance: 'SUSAN: Must've been made by a giant! What do you make of this? / IAN: Well, it could be a perfectly ordinary footprint, Susan, and the Sun's melted the edges and made it look a bit bigger'. 'The Roof of the World', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>74</sup> With this reference to e-ray-sure, I am thinking of Nicholas Royle's 'dictionaray' in *Quilt* (2010, 121-43).

<sup>75</sup> 'The Roof of the World', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, and camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cds).

—That’s wrong. The monster does materialise, in a way. Look at the scene when the Mongolians are introduced, from a thickly colonial viewpoint. Here are the camera directions: ‘STANDING A FEW FEET FROM HER IS A FUR-CLAD MONGOL. HE IS SO WRAPPED UP IN FURS THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT HE IS HUMAN’.<sup>76</sup>

—Tegana is incredibly human, then. Richard Kearney’s recent book *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* describes a ‘process of... estrangement’ in which ‘the Other passed from the horizon of reflective understanding into the invisible, unspeakable, unthinkable dark’ (2003, 7). Such an argument illuminates the way the Himalayan monster was always destined to be invisible; the loss of the episode fulfils this.

—But don’t forget that the ‘strange things’ Barbara sees on the mountain are always *also* connected with printmaking and its peculiar traces. Here is the audio:

BARBARA: Doctor, there are strange things on the mountain. I – I saw one of them!

DOCTOR: What's she talking about now?

IAN: Well, I only saw a print.

DOCTOR: Print? What sort of print: paws, hooves, what?

IAN: To tell you the truth, I thought it was made by a fur boot.

BARBARA: No, Ian, I – I'm sure it wasn't human!<sup>77</sup>

What sort of print? Paws, hooves, fingers, wood, copper, potato, photography, film?

—Prints on prints. The reason we are made to wear gloves when handling copperplates is that our sweat can have a chemical reaction with the copper and stain it. For this

<sup>76</sup> ‘The Roof of the World’, *Marco Polo*, camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>77</sup> ‘The Roof of the World’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

reason, you can see the prints of past fingertips lingering on some old copperplates. The swirling parallels of fingerprints uncannily echo the fine parallels on the picture.

—Have you noticed that it's only the female characters who suspect the presence of the monster, whereas Ian insists that he 'only' saw a print?

—The surviving evidence, in terms of audio, camera scripts and photographic stills, leads us to the conclusion (perhaps disappointing) that there's no actual monster in *Marco Polo*; the fur-clad Mongolian turns out to be a human villain. However, the loss of the episode opens a way for the monster's return. If you watch the Loose Cannon reconstructions of this and other storylines you will see how uncannily halting they are.<sup>78</sup> The audio continues in the normal manner, while numerous photographic stills and composite photographs give the narrative through a kind of slide show, synchronising with the audio in a complex rhythm to accentuate different voices and points of view. Watching stills instead of a moving image, we get a series of unnaturally extended moments. We have to imagine what comes between each of the pictures.

What happens when you blink? The 21st century series of *Doctor Who* makes a great deal of monsters who approach and attack during a blink. Deadly statues known as 'Weeping Angels', they first appeared in the episode 'Blink' (2007). But the lost 1960s episodes, as they appear in Loose Cannon reconstructions from telesnaps (the very word suggests a monster, snapping at our heels) are like the reverse of a blink – exceedingly long blinks, with frozen moments of vision. Why on earth should we watch the programme logically, obediently imagining the most obvious events unfolding between the shots? Surely it is in these dark moments that the monster *can* and *does* appear, hilariously unnoticed by the characters, unseen by anyone, looming comically and ineffectually over the story.

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<sup>78</sup> Recons are available for all lost storylines and can be requested via Loose Cannon's website, <http://www.recons.com/> (accessed 19 December 2011).

—When you say ‘composite photographs’ you should mention that there’s a curiously Frankensteinian labour in the creation of these missing stills, in which different bodies, heads, limbs and settings are pieced together from multiple extant photographs.<sup>79</sup>

—The BBC changed their minds about the value of recordings and repeats, and now plead for lost episodes to be returned to them. In 2006 they offered the reward of a life-size dalek.<sup>80</sup> If the BBC’s early antipathy towards recordings were to be interpreted in the light of Freud’s belief that repetition is a sign of the death drive, then the daleks are an apt reward. Self-perpetuating, unextinguishable, undistinguishable, these identical creatures/machines who repeat ‘exterminate’ across the decades are one of the most powerful images in popular culture to announce that repetition and sameness equals death.

—They’re also some of the most beloved monsters ever.

—And some of the most British – unlike the invisible Himalayan monster that we want to insert, like an impossible memory, into the blank stretches of *Marco Polo*.

## Drugs

—In episode one of *Marco Polo*, Tegana procures a drug to poison the caravan:

MAN: Be careful, my lord. One drop will poison an army!

TEGANA: I will use it well... on all but the first of Marco Polo's water gourds, for tomorrow, the caravan sets out to cross the Gobi Desert. Now, you will follow us and on the third night, I will walk back to you. Then we're going to ride back here to Lop, wait for two days and then return to the caravan to collect the thing of magic that will bring the mighty Kublai Khan to his knees!<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Handley, London, 7 September, 2011, personal interview.

<sup>80</sup> The reward was detailed on the BBC’s website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/news/cult/news/drwho/2006/04/20/31423.shtml> (webpage no longer available – last accessed 15 August 2007).

<sup>81</sup> ‘The Roof of the World’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

Placed at the end of the first episode, this is a prominent cliff-hanger, repeated at the start of episode two. Camera directions emphasise the drug: ‘PAN DOWN TO C[LOSE] U[P] phial in TEGANA’S hand’; then ‘TEGANA HOLDS UP THE PHIAL AND SMILES’; then ‘FADE OUT’. But after this, Tegana’s potion is never mentioned – at least not verbally – so it never appears in the surviving audio. Shortly later, as his plan suggested, Tegana abandons the camp and walks into the desert, but the camera script does not mention him administering drugs. He is forced to return to the caravan because of a sandstorm. Next, the script describes a speechless scene in which Tegana ‘COMES OUT FROM TENT, TAKES PHIAL FROM JERKIN, LOOKS AT IT. HE STANDS THERE’.<sup>82</sup> Is the phial empty or full? We don’t know. Tegana’s plan had been to administer the poison *before* leaving camp (he did not know bad weather would force him back), but the directions are silent. Later in the episode Tegana creates disaster by slashing the gourds and spilling the water from all but one. This does indeed sabotage the caravan, as he wished. However, while a plausible explanation could be concocted, the role of the poison remains obscure. If it was clearer in the televised version, the camera script does not suggest so.

—What’s the point of all this?

—Perhaps *Marco Polo* is a series on drugs.

—Reconstructions follow the camera directions by providing a close up of the phial – and more (figs. 57-60). The animated version posted on You Tube by Smiddylad shows three different views of the phial in Tegana’s hand, emphasising the relation of the drug to the body (figs. 58-60).<sup>83</sup> Curiously, the hand changes from the left hand to the right hand in the first two frames. There is no wider context shot to explain this handover. It

<sup>82</sup> For directions, see ‘The Roof of the World’, *Marco Polo*, camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>83</sup> For Smiddylad’s three-part animation, see <http://www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos> (accessed 19 December 2011).

is probably a discontinuity. But it may give a sense of the profound shift drugs can suggest – a different side of the brain, maybe? In the third image Tegana holds the bottle to his face to examine it. But there's a strange alienation, because this cannot be his own hand – if it were, the middle, fourth and little fingers would be directed towards the viewer. In a common gesture, Tegana closes one eye to peer more closely. However, he actually closes the wrong eye – the one that is looking *towards* the bottle. To look through drugs, this image suggests, you have to shut your eyes – you have to look blindly.

—Lost episodes require viewers to be tele-visionary, to be more active than usual in the production of visions.

—Derrida reminds us that 'drugs' encompasses medicine and poison ([1981] 2004, 75).

And more:

What do we hold against the drug addict?... [T]hat he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community; that he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction. He is reproached for his taste for something like hallucinations. No doubt, we should have to make some distinction between so-called hallucinogens and other drugs, but this distinction is wiped out in the rhetoric of fantasy that is at the root of the interdiction: drugs, it is said, make one lose any sense of true reality. In the end, it is always, I think, under this charge that the interdiction is declared. We do not object to the drug user's pleasure per se, but to a pleasure taken in an experience without truth. (Derrida 1995, 235-6)

—But – I've said this before – *Marco Polo* is a pure historical storyline. Designed to educate through entertainment, it sticks more or less to reality (with the exception of the time-travelling frame).

—Well, that's only the way some characters see it. For Tegana, the Doctor and his companions are 'evil spirits, sorcerers, magicians' and the Tardis is 'the thing of magic

that will bring the mighty Kublai Khan to his knees'.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, Barbara and Susan are quick to see supernatural causes. We have seen how in episode one Barbara attributes a footprint to an unseen monster, until Ian corrects her and proves it is human. Similarly in episode four, Susan sees the quartz eyes moving in the Cave of Five Hundred Eyes, but is quickly shouted down by the Doctor and Ian. Ian, by good empirical deduction, discovers a rational explanation: a concealed door and peepholes.<sup>85</sup> Predictably, visions, magic and fantasies belong to the non-white or female characters.

—Exclusively? Immediately before Tegana goes to buy drugs in episode one, the Doctor has been 'HELPLESS WITH LAUGHTER' at the thought of their predicament.<sup>86</sup>

—In episode three we hear about hashish, visions and dependency. In line with *Doctor Who*'s (sometimes half-hearted) mission to educate, this part of the story is taken from Marco Polo's *Travels*, which describes a hashish-eating sect called the Assassins. Here is the beginning:

MARCO POLO: Have you seen the drawings of the Cave of Five Hundred Eyes, Barbara?

BARBARA: I'm intrigued by this cave, Marco. Why is it called five hundred eyes?

POLO: On the walls are painted the faces of two hundred and fifty evil men who once lived there. They were the Hashashins.

SUSAN: Hashashins?

POLO: Yes, and they were so called because they used a drug – hashish.<sup>87</sup>

Predictably, the BBC is quick off the mark to condemn drug-use, which the script associates with 'evil men' – a view later echoed in a plot summary in *Doctor Who*

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<sup>84</sup> 'The Roof of the World', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>85</sup> 'Five Hundred Eyes' and 'The Wall of Lies', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>86</sup> 'The Roof of the World', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>87</sup> 'Five Hundred Eyes', *Marco Polo*, camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).



*Magazine*.<sup>88</sup>

—*Marco Polo*'s hashish story is associated with looking, drawing, representing and visions. Named after its 500 eyes rather than its 250 men, if this is a cave in a vision, it is also a cave that looks back at you. With its wall paintings, it is associated with visual art and the act of representation. Moreover, in Lucarotti's script, Polo does not refer to the cave but rather to 'drawings of the cave', specifically asking Barbara if she has seen works of visual art that represent a place that is itself full of paintings and eyes.<sup>89</sup>

—Ping-Cho then suggests that later in the day she could tell 'a story of Hulagu and the Hashashins'. Susan asks impatiently, 'Why not now?', and Ping-Cho explains that 'It needs preparation'.<sup>90</sup> The use of the word 'preparation' in this context may give pause, since the *OED*'s second definition of preparation describes 'the making of a chemical compound, drug, etc., from appropriate starting materials'.

—Ping-Cho's poem re-tells a narrative from Marco Polo's *Travels* (1958, 71-3). However, her text does not resemble this source, but rather Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'. This poem might have been on our minds from the beginning of *Marco Polo*, ever since we discovered our destination was that emperor's summer palace in Shang-tu / Xanadu. When Ping-cho starts reciting her poem about the Hashashins, echoes of Coleridge become still louder. Speaking to music, Ping-Cho becomes *Doctor Who*'s answer to Coleridge's 'damsel with a dulcimer' – an echo that resounds in her poem's reference to 'Hand-maidens, dulcet voiced'.<sup>91</sup> Whereas Coleridge's preface describes how 'an

<sup>88</sup> 'Living in the Past', *Doctor Who Magazine*, September 1981, 36.

<sup>89</sup> This alters slightly in the surviving audio. Actors often forgot or changed their lines slightly, and in the audio Polo asks if Barbara has 'heard of' the cave. See 'Five Hundred Eyes', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd). In fact, the loss of the episode puts the spotlight back on the original camera scripts; not normally seen by viewers, they are now widely available as pdfs as part of the BBC's newly released audio collection (BBC 2010-11).

<sup>90</sup> 'Five Hundred Eyes', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>91</sup> For the poem and preface to 'Kubla Khan', see Coleridge ([1985] 2008, 102-4). For Ping-Cho's poem, see 'Five Hundred Eyes', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair', the beginning of Ping-Cho's song describes a wicked ruler who 'gave his followers / A potent draught and whilst they slept / Transported them' to a marvellous place. The poem is full of vocabulary inspired by 'Kubla Khan'. One imagines the writer, John Lucarotti, dreaming up a medieval poem about Hashashins and anachronistically pulling Coleridge out to help. Ping-Cho's text 'promis[es] paradise' to the hashashins and 'a vale where streams / Of milk and honey, wine and water flowed'; all this is reminiscent of Coleridge's 'honey dew', 'milk of paradise' and 'sacred river'. Whereas Coleridge gives us a 'stately pleasure-dome', Ping-Cho describes 'golden pavilions'. Ping-Cho's landscape descriptions are structurally similar to Coleridge's too; look at the use of 'here' and 'there' in the following passages from 'Kubla Khan' –

And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

– and Ping-Cho:

Here were gardens and flowers of every hue  
And essence; here, too,  
Golden pavilions outshone the sun.

—There are compelling contexts for the orientalising hashish narrative in *Marco Polo*. Marcus Boon has shown how recreational drug use has a long history of being displaced to Asia when described in European literature (2002, 21). The 1960s saw publication of some of the most well-known literary criticism of Coleridge as a drugged writer. Alethea Hayter's landmark book *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* read 'Kubla Khan' and other texts with an awareness that, in 1967, 'the knowledge that the number

of drug takers of all kinds... is large and getting larger' (1968, 11). Academics complained about the impossibility of teaching Coleridge's poem without discussing drugs (see Landry 1967).

—Of course, 'Kubla Khan' also sells itself as a lost work of art, evidence of a composition supposedly interrupted by that legendary person from Porlock.

—After Ping-Cho's recital, the ever-educative Ian gives Susan a lesson in etymology:

IAN: Charming, Ping-Cho, charming. Susan, do you know that we use the word Hashashin in English today?

SUSAN: No.

IAN: Yes: assassins.

SUSAN: Assassin!

IAN: Yes.<sup>92</sup>

This particular etymology is also given in the *OED*, although Marcus Boon discredits it as part of a racist connection between crime, Asia and cannabis (2002, 156).

—*Marco Polo*'s final drugs reference also concerns Ping-Cho, and the death of her elderly bridegroom. It's a comic ending that gets her out of an unwanted marriage. It underlines the role of drugs in this series as an empty vision, an orientalising mirage:

KHAN: Your beloved husband-to-be, so anxious to be worthy of your love, drank a potion of quicksilver and sulphur – the Elixir of Life and Eternal Youth – and expired.<sup>93</sup>

### **Wargames: Chess**

—*Marco Polo*'s aptly named villain, the 'Warlord Tegana', is supposedly an emissary of peace from another Mongolian, Khan Noghai, who has been at war with Kublai Khan.

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<sup>92</sup> 'Five Hundred Eyes', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>93</sup> 'Assassin at Peking', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

When he hears this, the Doctor comments ‘Mongol fighting Mongol’, and laughs, as if such a battle were just silly.<sup>94</sup> Later, the Doctor’s British companion, Ian, sits down to play chess with Marco Polo, two European men challenging each other for dominance. The episode focuses rather intensely on the game, with detailed directions such as: ‘HE MAKES AN ATTACKING MOVE – A BISHOP FORK POSSIBLY’.<sup>95</sup>

—In Smiddylad’s animated *Marco Polo* recon, most characters are clearly derived from photographs of actors (see figs. 61-62), with the exception of the cartoon Tegana, who is little like his counterpart (for a photograph of Tegana, see figs. 71-2). Instead, stiff and wooden, he resembles a chess piece, and is uncannily similar to Marco Polo’s chess king in a photograph staged and set for a Loose Cannon reconstruction (figs. 63-64). Viewers of Smiddylad’s cartoon may begin to consider whether Tegana is really player or played.

—In 1964, when *Marco Polo* was first broadcast, wouldn’t a game of chess remind people of the cold war? Although its peak came in 1972, chess had been a high profile aspect of the US-Soviet conflict in the early 60s too, as Daniel Johnson has shown (2007). Moreover, the Doctor’s British companions don’t fail to remind viewers that Cathay is modern-day China. Of course, Britain and China were *the* two important marginal contestants in the Cold War, allied to the US and the USSR respectively.

—In his article about other Cold War narratives, mostly from the US, Steven Belletto writes:

The cold war has tended to be conceptualized as a two-person contest despite the fact that the “stakes” of this contest were, at least in part, the hearts and minds of the third world. According to the logic of the game theory narrative, the particularities of various third-world countries are less visible than their status as

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<sup>94</sup> ‘The Roof of the World’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>95</sup> ‘The Singing Sands’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, and camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

stakes, and thus the world is mapped as a ‘two-person, zero-sum’ game. (2009, 335).

Filmed in January to March and broadcast in February to April 1964, the *Marco Polo* storyline of *Doctor Who* could usefully be added to this narrative. It is located at a key moment of shifting thought about games and play and their role in culture, art, politics and intellectual thought. Belletto has shown that in the late 40s and the 50s game theory was seen in the United States as a key weapon with which the cold war could be won, and that an interest in game theory was simultaneously being explored in screen and literary science fiction, including Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove* (1964). The US journalist who made game theory popular, John McDonald, wrote that ‘Mathematicians are discovering a perfect, fool-proof system for playing all cut-throat games including poker, business—and war’ (quoted in Belletto 2009, 334).

—Let’s look at *Marco Polo*’s chess game:

POLO: A game of chess, Ian?

IAN: Oh, well I’m not very good, but I’ll give you a game.

POLO: I gladly accept your challenge.

BARBARA: What magnificent pieces!

POLO: Yes, I purchased them in Mamutz, on my first journey to Cathay. Now, they go with me everywhere.

TEGANA: Do you, ah...

SUSAN: (RETURNS) I’m sorry, Marco (SHE PUTS PLATE DOWN. EXITS TENT.)

TEGANA: Do you play chess, lady?

BARBARA: Not very well, Tegana. Excuse me. (EXITS TENT)

TEGANA: I find it a fascinating game of strategy of war. Two equally balanced armies deployed upon a field of battle, and each commander determined to be the one who cries ‘shah mat’.

IAN: Shah mat? Check mate?

TEGANA: It means the king is dead.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> ‘The Singing Sands’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, and camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

Tegana's final comments on battle strategy are pantomime-villain moments, prefiguring his later assassination attempt on Kublai Kahn – inevitably, this will be thwarted by our heroes. But Tegana's comments can also be read as an assertion of his right to be a player, despite his non-European status, and his use of the Persian ‘shah mat’ for ‘check mate’ as a reminder of the Asian origins of the game. Tegana invites Barbara to play; Barbara immediately leaves. She may be concerned about Susan, who has just left the room, worried about the Doctor. However, Barbara might equally leave because she is threatened by Tegana’s invitation, perhaps interpreting it as a predictable threat of a non-white man to a white woman. In early *Doctor Who* episodes, women and non-white characters are routinely de-valued and stereotyped, and we could read Tegana’s invitation to Barbara as a radical attempt to reconfigure the field of play, imagining a situation in which women and Mongolians can be contestants rather than game-pieces or trophies.

### **Dice**

—*Marco Polo*’s second game, played across episodes three and four, shifts considerably. Instead of a game of chess (connoting skill) played by white European men, it is a game of dice (connoting chance), played by unnamed Mongolian warriors. Barbara is the stake; she is captured, and they play to see who’ll have the pleasure of killing her.

The dice game is silent, described in one scene as follows: ‘BARBARA IS BOUND HAND AND FOOT AND GAGGED IN ONE CORNER OF THE CAVE. FOUR MONGOLS SQUAT ON FLOOR ROUND HER. THEY ARE ROLLING DICE. THE FOURTH MONGOL DRAWS HIS FINGER ACROSS HIS THROAT.

ALL OF THEM LAUGH AND GO BACK TO GAME OF DICE.’<sup>97</sup> In the next episode Barbara is rescued, just as one of her captors is about to cut her throat.

—In images of Roman soldiers playing dice for Christ’s clothes, the rules of the game are interrupted as dice and swordplay mix – sometimes it looks as if they’ll kill each other for the clothes (e.g. figs. 65-67). The blade’s threat of penetration prefigures the crucifixion. The violence in these images underlines the metonymic connection between clothing and the body that makes the division of Christ’s garments a kind of dismemberment. This dimension is often underlined by the anthropomorphised clothing of certain soldier-players, as folds of drapery morph into faces. In one image, one of the soldiers is punched or penetrated in the mouth, gagged; as with Barbara, a potential player has become a stake.

—On her rescue, Barbara interprets the silent narrative for us: ‘That dreadful man – There were four of them – They played dice to see who’d kill me. That dreadful man – and he won – he won’.<sup>98</sup>

‘They’ never speak. Killer becomes victim as the ‘winner’ is slain by Marco Polo. As with the crucifixion image, the rules morph; one cannot tell which player will suddenly receive the violence meant for the stake. In the script, the players are repetitions, generic ‘Mongols’. Barbara is the only individual, and she is not a player; rather, her death is the prize. In the episode broadcast in 1964, the embodiment of these players by actors would have individualised them. But in the lost episode, this does not happen.

—Loose Cannon have made two recons of *Marco Polo*: one in 2002, and another in 2011 following the discovery of telesnaps for this storyline. The 2002 version was made

<sup>97</sup> ‘Five Hundred Eyes’, *Marco Polo*, camera scripts, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>98</sup> ‘The Wall of Lies’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

in colour, due to the high percentage of colour stills available; restituting colour to a black-and-white production, a recon offers more, as well as less, than we started with. It is curious to compare the dice scene in both versions. The first (fig. 68) is a stunning composite created by Loose Cannon (and the edge of dismemberment that we feel in these pieced together photographs belongs in the scene). The second (fig. 69) is from an original telesnap. By chance, the victorious Mongol is different in these versions. Significantly, it does not matter who wins – the script represents these Mongols as the same, so there can only be one outcome. A horror of this sameness, of repetition between players, victors and stake, is apparent in Barbara's speech above ('that dreadful man – there were four of them... he won') in which *won/one* slips to *four* and *he* slips to *they*.

—Dice suggest chance, but if the players cannot be distinguished it's the most predictable game of all.

—It is more scary to be fought over by identical game players. It makes us believe that the unfolding narrative *cannot* be changed.

—But then she gets rescued.

—Going back to game theory, dice can offer a different view of it. Belletto explores how, to begin with, game theory had seemed to offer international politics 'the power of rationality to triumph over the threat of chance', while later there develops 'a growing reservation' (2009, 334, 340). Hope that game theory can win the Cold War goes alongside a fear that 'in the end chance cannot be manipulated' and, as can be seen in *Doctor Strangelove* 'by the early 1960s, this metaphor was flawed enough to be dangerous' (2009, 341, 346). The move from the chess game in *Marco Polo* episode 2,



to the dice game in episode 3 represents a shift from skill to chance: two radically different ways of thinking about games.

—You keep going on about the Cold War, but game theory's not the only theory about games in the sixties. If *Marco Polo* can be situated towards the end of a period of literary interest in war games, it can also be situated right at the beginning of a starkly different literary interest in games and play. Saussure's writings on language, including the famous chess analogy developed in 1916, began to be played out in literary theory in English. Literary critics in the 1960s were increasingly attuned to moments when the 'opposition of play and seriousness disappear' (Ehrmann 1968, 40), and questioned the privileging of seriousness over play.

At precisely the same time, as Samuel Weber has pointed out (1976) the whole game table was being overturned and the erratic play of language heightened, following Derrida's famous 1966 lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. Derrida said that 'anxiety [was] invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset' ([1978] 2001, 352). He talked about a field 'of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, ... because... there is something missing from it' ([1978] 2001, 365). As *Polo* arrives to kill the winner, Barbara and the dice players are caught in a situation in which the stability of a game's structure is undone by narrative. Players and stake – killers and victim – make disturbing substitutes.

*Marco Polo* is situated at a turn between two influential literary moments which both see play and games as crucial: first, the perception that games represent order, warfare, science and national policy; and second, the association of play and games with literary rebellion, intellectualism and disorder.

## Backgammon

—The final game in *Marco Polo*, backgammon, walks an edge between strategy and dice-play. The Doctor plays Kublai Khan to regain the Tardis. Among various stakes, Kublai puts in a sacred Bhuddist relic from India, ‘all the commerce from Burma for one year’ and ‘the island of Sumatra’. Once again, the series has fun with the idea of game theory as a way of conducting international conflicts. As players, the Doctor and Khan parody gentlemanliness – offering to forgive debts, and honourably refusing such offers – and we witness the ‘portrayal of the imperialist as... kind-hearted upper-class nitwit’ that Charles has discussed in other *Doctor Who* stories (2007, 116). Like the Doctor, Khan is almost portrayed as an honorary Brit, describing his style of imperialism rather stereotypically as that of ‘the planner, the tactician, the administrator’.<sup>99</sup>

— But his monstrously long fingernails scratch at the game, still managing, impossibly, to play (fig. 70).

—Yes. Don’t make it sound predictable, because it doesn’t end so. The rules of genre say we *need* the Doctor and his companions to win, to get back the lost Tardis. It seems certain that the Doctor will beat the Khan, especially when Khan later confesses to Polo, ‘We owe our friend half of Asia at backgammon,’ and Polo comments, ‘It’s unusual for you to lose’. The Doctor’s companions discuss his backgammon victory as a *fait accompli*. The Doctor is a ‘sly old fox’; ‘Grandfather will win’ and ‘this will solve everything’. But eventually the Doctor loses. With Polo’s help, they steal the Tardis back, instead of winning it. This ending seems to uphold the unpredictability of the game (in contrast to the unyielding demands of a popular serial narrative) – until the

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<sup>99</sup> ‘Assassin at Peking’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

Khan comments that ‘eventually the old man would have won it at backgammon’.<sup>100</sup>

—In *Marco Polo*, the first game, chess, sets the terms of a predictable battle. The second game, dice, disturbs us with its suggestion of the infinite substitutability of players, victors, and perhaps even stakes. The third game reinstates the unknowability of the game and the individualisation of players. But in the fudging of the ending – Lucarotti’s refusal to simply let the Doctor win – the game’s unpredictability is perhaps a little laboured. Despite it, we witness the inevitable recovery of the Tardis; the certain-uncertainty of the dice game comes back to haunt us.

### Caves

—Let’s end in the centre of the *Marco Polo* storyline, with the cave of five hundred eyes, which spans episodes 3 and 4 – that dark cave that blinds us even as it looks at us. In *Marco Polo* the cave is said to be ‘haunted’ by ‘the spirits of the Hashashins’, the 250 assassins who used to live there, ruled and manipulated by their ‘wicked lord’ Aladdin.<sup>101</sup> And in the episode’s present, the cave is similarly the haunt of Tegana and his allies, who meet there to plot against Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, and who kidnap and threaten to decapitate Barbara. *Doctor Who*’s reference to the hashashins is to an often discussed legend about a group of warriors on the Turkish-Iranian border who ‘spread terror in Christian Europe’ (Boon 2002, 125), although their appearance in *Doctor Who* has never been analysed. Today this aspect of the lost episode recalls more up-to-date villains. The Taliban has similarly been associated with drugs, fighting Christians and caves. Kearney has written about the war against terror as a confrontation with an intangible ‘Minotaur’, in which ‘the difficulty of tracking down the culprits in their cellars or caves... was further exacerbating the sense of uncanny anxiety’ (Kearney

<sup>100</sup> ‘Assassin at Peking’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

<sup>101</sup> ‘Five Hundred Eyes’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

2003, 114; see also Weber 2004, 332, 335). The recent media curiosity about the family home in which Bin Laden was discovered just underlined how ‘that whole Hollywood version of him running rock to rock and cave to cave’ existed to be debunked.<sup>102</sup>

—The figure of the cave also reminds us of Plato’s *Republic*. It is a place where, instead of reality, we see shadows and hear echoes (see e.g. Weber 2004, 3-8).

—One thing that has been enabled by the loss of *Marco Polo* is the re-creation of new versions in colour, despite the fact that the lost original is black and white. In particular, as well as Smidylad’s single, animated episode, there is the colour version released by Loose Cannon in 2002. However, as mentioned above, since this recon was completed a whole series of *Marco Polo* telesnaps has been discovered. With so much extra material now available, Loose Cannon wanted to make a new version (2011), and this time it made sense to do so in black and white. The cave comes to life in the new version (compare figs. 71-73). This is partly due to some amazing new pictures, but also, perhaps, a cave is suited to monochrome, with the grey palette flattening the angles and smoothing the cracks of the mocked-up set. The production stills in colour look more artificial, an effect heightened by framing and point of view. Unlike the telesnaps, production stills were taken from different cameras, and do not show a precise view from an episode. The wide shot of Tegana looks architectural, rather than geological, and a sense of loss is created by the awareness that we are seeing from the wrong camera, the wrong eyes.

—When I was very young, my teacher told us that when she was a girl, there had only been black and white – no colour. Presumably, she was talking about television, but I

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<sup>102</sup> From a telephone interview with Michael Scheuer at the CIA, quoted in Sam Jones and Ben Quinn, ‘Osama bin Laden dead: Aftermath’, in *The Guardian*, 2 May 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/02/osama-bin-laden-death-live?INTCMP=SRCH> (accessed 30 July 2011)

understood that she was referring to a change in the world. It seemed incredible – I asked her something like, ‘Is that really true? No colour at all?’ She confirmed it. The idea of history has never amazed me as much as it did in that moment.

—The cave of five hundred eyes is the hide-out of Tegana’s allies, but the Doctor’s female companions are also drawn to it. Barbara declares herself ‘intrigued’; later, it is Susan who persuades the Doctor to search there for Barbara. Polo’s response on hearing all this is a parody of patriarchy: ‘This is the most dangerous thing she could have done. What kind of country do you come from where a woman can wander alone through the streets at night?’<sup>103</sup>

—Samuel Weber’s discussion of terrorism and spectacle opposes caves and towers (2004, 326-335). Derrida’s ‘The Double Session’ brilliantly explores the linguistic connections between the cave (‘antre’), the verb ‘to enter’, and the hymen, understood as something ‘between’ (*entre* in French):

The hymen enters into the antre. *Entre* can just as easily be written with an *a*... Indeed, are these two (*e*) (*a*)ntres not really the same? Littré: “ANTRE, s.m. 1. Cave, natural grotto, deep dark cavern... 2. Fig. The antres of the police, of the Inquisition. 3. *Anatomy*: name given to certain bone cavities. – *Syn*: *Antre*, *cave*, *grotto*. *Cave*, an empty, hollow, concave space in the form of a vault, is the generic term.... *Etym*. Antrum, ἄντρον; Sanscrit, *antara*, cleft, cave. *Antara* properly signifies ‘interval’ and is thus related to the Latin preposition *inter* (see *entre*). Provenc. *antre*; Span. and Ital. *antro*.” And the entry for ENTRER [“to enter”] ends with the same etymological reference. The *interval* of the *entre*, the in-between of the hymen: one might be tempted to visualise these as the hollow or bed of a valley (*vallis*) without which there would be no mountains, like the sacred vale between the two flanks of the Parnassus, the dwelling place of the Muses and the site of Poetry... (Derrida [1981] 2004, 222-3)

I’m interested in the way the cave comes out here as like a ‘vault’, a container of secrets, and also, in the same breath, as ‘empty’. This might be a figure for lost art. I’m not

<sup>103</sup> ‘Five Hundred Eyes’, *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

thinking here about the familiar image of heists and empty vaults – although that might come into it. But we can also think less violently, about lost art with all the promise of a vault that is, like the cave, empty by definition. But this isn't a pure emptiness either. It's feeling in the darkness – it's the other side of blindness, a blindness that persists despite a surfeit of working eyes.

—The cave of five hundred eyes is magical. The wall paintings of Hashashins include 'human eyes' that move as they watch the terrified visitors. Susan screams at this, a cliff-hanger moment repeated between episodes. But the Doctor refuses to believe, declaring, 'It must be your imagination, child. These eyes didn't move - it's quartz'. Ian and the Doctor are the two scientists in the group, and significantly, they are the ones that carry lamps. The image of penetrating enlightenment, Ian 'ENTERS WITH A LAMP' (!) and unveils what turns out to be a terrorist ruse, uncovering a 'crack' that betrays a concealed chamber, where Barbara is being threatened with the sword.<sup>104</sup>

—The magic in the cave of five hundred eyes can be seen as the other side of Enlightenment. This kind of opposition between scientific reason and the monster, the observed and the invisible, might be used to think about lost episodes, which pull their viewers in two ways. With one hand, detective-like, we hold up a lamp to hunt; with the other hand, trying to see what's lost and perhaps to reconstruct it, we cover our eyes and look to see blindly.

—I interviewed a fan who has done preparatory work towards reconstructing clips from lost episodes. I am not naming him; he said he '[didn't] want to put all of [his] cards on the table to the *Doctor Who* public, because there'd be a lot of pressure'. When I asked him about *Marco Polo*, he said: 'Sometimes I've been searching on Ebay, looking for

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<sup>104</sup> 'Five Hundred Eyes' and 'The Wall of Lies', *Marco Polo*, first broadcast 1964, BBC (2010-11, 1: cd).

an exact duplicate of the lamp he's holding, in front of the Tardis. I've found out the sort of lamp it's supposed to be, but none of them look quite right.' He laughed. I asked him if it was the same lamp that appeared in the cave of five hundred eyes: 'I think it's possibly the same lamp. I think I remember him holding that lamp with Susan in the cave of five hundred eyes, yeah, probably one that he's taken from the Doctor, I'd guess... I'm looking for that one now.' He told me he had already acquired a lamp identical to one from a different lost storyline, *The Massacre*: 'So, I've found a perfect copy of the lamp from *The Massacre*... There's a very classic picture of Willaim Hartnell holding his monocle in one hand, and the lamp in the other, and I've found a perfect copy of that lamp.. which is actually Victorian, so how he found it in the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve I don't know!'

—It's tele-visionary, this fascination with looking, with lamps, monocles and illumination, when there's nothing to look at, when it's lost, invisible and dark.

**Letters from the Lost Museum:**

**A Novella**



## Letters from the Lost Museum

### Editor's Note

Not all of Charlotte Keppel's extraordinary correspondence survives, but what does, is thanks to the records of Stella Marsden, intimate friend and fellow student at University College London, in whose family home Charlotte had lodged.

These post-graduation letters begin full of confidence. Charlotte had been the only woman in her class to graduate with a first in History, from what was the pioneering university in terms of educational equality, regardless of gender, race or religion. Although her overriding intellectual passion, Art History, would not become a degree subject in Britain until 1932, Charlotte had been encouraged by the close proximity of the Slade School of Art and the British Museum, where she became acquainted with prints curator Laurence Binyon (1869–1943). In January 1913 *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* published her precocious essay 'Samuel Palmer in the 1840s and 50s'.

Unfortunately, Charlotte's early successes led to resentment at home, since they coincided with her twin brother Laurie Keppel's failures in the same field of endeavour. Domestic life in Ringmer, Sussex, was further complicated by financial worries, and presumably, although he is never mentioned in extant correspondence, by the continuing absence of Charlotte's father, for whom there is no record since the 1901 census (nor any death certificate).

My friends and family know how continually these letters have been in my thoughts since they came into my hands. I have provided brief annotations, mostly to demonstrate what a phenomenal collection William Forbes gathered. If found again, it would fill some gaping holes that have existed in scholarship until today. The reader may be interested to learn that the next stage in my project will be the search for

Forbes's collection in the field. The hunt is on, and in my view, the prize will be well worth the effort.

1. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel

4 Gore Street, London

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August

Dear Hal,<sup>\*</sup>

It made me sick to hear about this blow-up at your house on Sunday. I hope to goodness all is all right – that you feel it to be, that is.

Mr Johnson came to tea, drooling over the gossip. Characteristically, he ate a whole bowl of peaches for his trouble, ones from the de Morgans' garden,<sup>†</sup> small, furry and sweet. Given their source they were probably brim-full of poetic and painterly juices, and I had been hoping to eat them in the bath – or share them with you. I do not believe what is being said, of course, and neither does Mother. It is unpleasant and farcical.

Johnson heard from Mrs Fry that Binyon had brought an unnamed collector to see you at Ratsford,<sup>‡</sup> who had with him a case of drawings, which in your absence he refused to show to your oafish brother (sorry) on the grounds that he'd brought them to show you. In due course you appeared – supposedly – and the collector, Binyon and you began browsing a collection of obscene art, of which da Vinci's *Leda* was by far the tamest (it's laughable isn't it? Remember when we were visiting the printroom and teased Binyon to open up that secret cupboard and he just got red and redder and pretended there was no such thing?). Your brother is then said to have said, 'I think you'd better leave.' At which point poor Binyon becomes angry and says that your brother 'is deliberately standing in the way of your considerable budding talent as a connoisseur' and then – from this point it is pure Hollywoodian – your brother pulls out

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<sup>\*</sup> Stella's nickname for Charlotte, Hal or occasionally Henry, derives from Charlotte's role in an amateur production of *Henry IV* in 1912.

<sup>†</sup> Evelyn de Morgan (1855-1919), painter, and William de Morgan (1839-1917), potter / novelist.

<sup>‡</sup> Ratsford is the Keppels' house in Sussex, called variously Ratsford, Rats-haven and occasionally the Rats-hole by Stella and Charlotte.

a gun upon which the strange collector punches him hard on the wrist to make him drop it, and they both leave. Mrs Fry told Johnson it must be true since your brother is now going about the place with a bandaged wrist!

You imagine that I am agog to hear all from your own unique mouth. Is there any hope you can visit? Failing that, write this week. And tell it in detail: I want to be able to imagine that you're at my ear unfolding everything in hurried sentences. Also, perhaps you don't give a fig for wagging tongues, but if you do, I'd be delighted to be your ambassador and tell the true story.

And, Hal, please send a line today to say nothing is dreadfully wrong. My story is lunacy, I know. However, I must be certain that you are fine – or, I cannot sleep.

Mother sends love. She insists that I pass on her recommendation that you stay away from Binyon and the printroom for the time being. I was a bit angry with her for it sounds a stiff message but she claims the right to give you such advice because she loves you like a daughter. And of course you're loved like I-don't-know-what by

your Beamy Black Eyes<sup>\*</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> Stella's nickname 'Beamy Black Eyes' appears to be derived from Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (Sidney [1989] 2008, 155).

## 2. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Rathsford, Ringmer

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> August

Stella,

First, thank you for the chocolate. You shouldn't send such luxuries with your letters, you spoil me too much.

Second, despite your protestations and deceptive light-heartedness, I know you better than other people, and I sense you were taken aback at the story you told or – shall I say disturbed? You were clever to cover up your tracks, Black Eyes, and not leave much evidence of how you felt. But since you are not prone to spend (I won't say waste) paper on maternal advice, well I noted it. Honestly I was shocked at your shock. I especially mean at Leonardo's *Leda*, which did arise, though not present, at this much discussed and distorted tea. It wasn't the drawing, actually, but the lost painting we talked about.\* None of us has seen it nor ever will, so I don't see how it can be judged obscene unless, of course, what you really meant was our thoughts as we discussed it.

Sorry. It's unfair to be cross with you on a hunch about your feelings. In fact I am angry with other people but they don't give me freedom to express it.

The fantastic altercation you wrote me of sounds jolly compared with the reality. Incidentally, you don't mention if Johnson gave any hint as to where Mrs Fry got her story from. If he did please tell me (but don't enquire). Binyon did come to Ratshaven – and had already been twice before, while I was with you in London – they are staying with the Gills at Ditchling. Mummy was delighted and in a flutter, because she and Laurie had it settled between them that he had come to size Laurie up, informally, for the assistant keeper vacancy at the museum.

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\* Leonardo da Vinci's treatments of *Leda* and the Swan are assumed to have culminated in a lost oil painting of c. 1506-08 (see e.g. Meyer and Glover 1989). Speculations on the latter are based on contemporary copies by other artists, as well as Leonardo's own preparatory sketches.

Laurie now says works on paper are not worthy of a generous mind but I'll leave you to infer if this isn't a rather sudden about-turn. He told me all about Binyon's visits when I got home, adjusting his necktie and looking at himself in the hall mirror. 'I find it somewhat off,' said he, 'that the man would come twice and remain so damned shy. Of course he may be afraid I'll turn it down out of hand, and be trying to butter me up –' at this he leaned forward and, raising his upper lip, peered at his teeth – 'and it's true that I could really do better for myself, but still, it's odd he won't just ask.' I hate to be mean but it was really so odd and so blatant. It does set one's teeth on edge when someone who appears as a mirror image of one's self all unconsciously shows their repulsive side.

I tried to be glad for Laurie, but knowing Binyon to be quite direct when it's business, I couldn't help fearing he was visiting with another object in view entirely, only I couldn't bring myself to guess or hope what it might be. On Sunday he called a third time and I was home. He said he was happy to find me. He brought with him a collector who is also staying at Ditchling, a Mr William Forbes, whose mother is from South America and his father Scottish – he combines the most splendid features of each race. His parents lived in Kenya and made huge sums from coffee farms and now he travels Europe spending it on art. Guess what was pinned jauntily onto his lapel? A jewelled likeness of the poet who immortalised you, Black Eyes.

'My goodness,' I exclaimed – rudely, because they were describing the Gills' dining room to Mummy – 'you've found Hilliard's Sidney, haven't you?'\* I'm sure you must have. Wherever did that spring up?' And this Forbes gave a smugly charming smile and sort of pushed his chest forward, so I could sit forward on my seat and lean at him and look. And there Sidney sits. Talk about perfection of form: face, nose, eyes and

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\* There are some indications that Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586) sat for the miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard (1547?–1619): the rest of the Sidney family certainly did (see Strong 1985). However, this letter remains the only secure evidence of the resulting miniature.

eyebrows all repeating a sugar-almond shape, just marvellous. And naturally Hilliard's colours are a joy, with a stillness and intensity that today's artists sit around and talk about – whilst producing such murkiness, poor things.

'Well yes,' says Forbes, 'You know how collectors can be, my home is quite a magpie's nest when it comes to accumulating lost things,' and my dear amusing mother said 'Oh I'm sure you must be discerning in a way a magpie isn't,' and then poor Laurie put in importantly, 'Yes, I was admiring that little ivory when you walked in, it's really a decent example.' I felt like screaming. Don't you think that if he can neither see with his eyes nor remember with his brain that sixteenth-century miniatures are vellum and not ivory that a Cambridge BA is not worth the paper it's written on? Binyon and Forbes and I all went stiff with embarrassment while my brother leant back comfortably on the settee and crossed his legs, having delivered his expert opinion.

Binyon held forth all afternoon – he is fascinating. He was kind enough to ask my opinion and even asked some searching questions about my little piece in the Burlington. Which made Mummy reach too loudly for her teacup and was as uncomfortable as it was flattering, since it's an unmentionable subject. And then came the best and the worst moment at once – in short, he offered me the job. Well, almost. He did say it was a decision many of his colleagues had a hand in, and he didn't want to raise hopes, but urged me to write and that if I did he would personally back my application to the hilt. It made me awfully glad. Only for a moment though, because that's when Laurie exploded and punched the fireplace, which of course is marble. Everyone pretended to believe it was an unfortunate accident and they left straight away, Mummy dreadfully tight-lipped and polite. Laurie did it so hard he's broken three fingers and his knuckles were bleeding badly. The doctor was called. Mary [their servant] was so frightened I think she is thinking of leaving us.

There is little more to say. I am of course in a dilemma: it would be galling to give up everything for someone and then be bullied instead of thanked, which I know will be Laurie's reaction. And yet – this house settles in my bones like an old soul, and for lots of reasons selfish and otherwise I dread awakening displeasure.

Black Eyes, I have tried to love my brother. Tell me, have I hard enough? I tell myself that this does not concern anything really important, but as I sit in my room and the moments go by slowly and unwillingly, I cannot stop wishing I were part of another family, fantasising about it, how affectionate and easy we'd be with one another and how smoothly and successfully life would run its course. It is wicked of me, isn't it?

I know it is, Black Eyes, because I had to stop writing just then – my hand shook. Honestly, I wish I could avoid saying such things to you or anyone. You least of all because I don't want you to know bad things about me. But I have written at least three letters to you this week and destroyed them, and I know finally that I must mention my feelings or else not try to write at all.

What a hideously long letter I have written.

Love,

H



## 3. Charlotte Keppel to William Forbes

Rathsford, Ringmer

21<sup>st</sup> August

Dear Mr Forbes,

Thank you for your note. I'm glad you liked Rathsford, and I hope Sussex was everything you hoped it to be. We think it's lovely, but you may be used to more impressive scenery. Since you press for my opinion of *Leda*, I shall tell you what I think. I'll do so briefly, as it is a subject about which I am much more in the dark than yourself (how interesting what you say about Dr Freud's book)\*. What strikes me about the copies is that one can learn everything from them except expression. In terms of the S-forms, and the important aspects of composition, they must be very close to Leonardo's, if less well realised. But the only copy I have actually seen is the one at Wilton House. I must say in that the figures appear horribly sentimentalised, and the clumsy garland draped round the swan's neck is in terrible taste, un-Leonardo-ish and formally ruinous. I have seen reproductions of the Flemish copy by van Cleve and the one by Bugiardini at the Borghese Galleries. In van Cleve's the figures are intensely regretful, whereas in Bugiardini's, despite a mannered stillness, they are on the brink of violence, she about to gently break the swan's neck and he hers. That may have been a trick in the photograph, which is why I didn't like to mention it last week as I know both yourself and Mr Binyon must have often visited the Borghese gallery. Doubtless if Leonardo's own could be found it would say something more knotted and human than any of them. It strikes me that in his pencil study of her hair – in which the braids are like marshalled snakes and the escaping curls a breath of glorious life – the whole effect

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\* The first edition of Sigmund Freud's *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci* was published in 1910 in Vienna, but Charlotte probably did not read it until the English translation of 1916. William Forbes's letter does not survive, but he may have written to Charlotte that Leonardo's *Leda* marked a peculiar absence in Freud's account.

is both wilder and more ornately controlled than in any of the copies.

As to the botanical parts of the painting they are important I expect, but one cares rather less about them.

I am intrigued and full of admiration at your enquiries into lost works of art. It is a great service you are doing the whole world. Are your findings to be published? I am dying to know more about it and I shall look out for your name.

Yours sincerely,

Charlotte Keppel

## 4. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Rathsford, Ringmer

Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August

Dear Black Eyes,

Have you heard? Mr Arthur Waley has been appointed. I know you think I ought to have applied, but it's now too late, so we'd better drop the subject.

Pure gloom in the Rats-haven. This morning Laurie ate breakfast in his room which is not usual and even seems to go against this philosophy of muscularity that he has. I resisted hunting down his tray afterwards to see what he'd eaten. Mummy talks thinly and her voice doesn't resonate. She has put on a long frown, pretending to be angry not sad. Right now I believe she is scrubbing her knuckles white on the silver even though Mary already did it.

Of course it makes one feel guilty but I cannot see what I can do or could have done more than I did. And I am unsure if Laurie is slightly putting on a show or if he really feels that all his dreams have slipped away.

It is made worse by the fact, as Mummy told me yesterday, that we are broke. Of course, she should have said so a fortnight ago, rather than tacitly pushing me to drop my chance of employment. However, since it was tacit, I can't reproach her for what I did, but she can reproach me for it! Now she is urging me to find something else but pleads with me to make it in Sussex. It made her very low, she said, to be without us both these last years. Then she said she did not want to influence my plans if I felt really certain of anything. Which, naturally, made me feel certain of precisely nothing. She has suggested a vacant post to me, as the Downs girls' school need a teacher. My blood crawls at the thought. Why can't Laurie get a job first?

What really gets my spirits up when they can be got a little up is your letters, Black Eyes. Surprisingly, the other person keeping me sane has been Mr Forbes, who has written two amusing letters about the foundation of his new museum of lost art (tell no-one, by the way, for the moment, as it is a secret). What a curious principle for a museum, isn't it? Unfortunately it is to be in South America. He asked me, if I had the chance of saving one lost art work, which one it'd be. Such an inviting question I could write a new reply to it each week. What would you choose? I think mine is Miss Howitt's *Queen Boadicea*. I remember reading about it in your father's old issues of *The Athenaeum* when I was with you (incidentally, I meant to copy the review, but didn't – I wonder if you might send me some extracts, if you have the time?). It was '56 – June I think. Sitting as the rebel queen was the suffragist artist Barbara Leigh Smith (before she became Mrs Bodichon). Can you imagine her as Boadicea, with her great red-haired charisma? Do you know anyone else who could look so stately with a weak chin? Of course, Howitt was brave or foolish in this choice – Miss Smith was petitioning for Property Law reform, and a suffragist Boadicea was sure to have folk up in arms: insidious, quiet arms, that just squashed her.\* Indeed, Howitt's mother wrote that Ruskin's private response to this picture made her give up her career as a painter. He told her to leave such subjects alone – what on earth did she know about them? – and paint him a pheasant's wing. We all know Ruskin can paint a good dead pheasant but I'd rather have a walk in the woods and see one there. Howitt's *Boadicea* is a good ghost, a reminder not to be like her, never to give up.

I hope it is not too late for me to learn this lesson. I expect Waley is a better man for the job than I am. There will always be other things, won't there? I fear I have thrown everything away and will just float, intellectually speaking, for the rest of my

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\* The full title of Anna Howitt's painting is *Queen Boadicea Brooding over her Wrongs* (see Cherry 1993, 187-9).

life. Sorry I am rather muddled and keep zig-zagging back to the same thought. It is disappointing but not a calamity. In any case, I've never produced anything truly substantial, and almost certainly Binyon would have realised this and changed his mind. Don't make it worse by telling me what I should have done, please.

Nancy has not written at all. Has she to you? I daresay she is frantic.\*

Your

H.

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\* Charlotte and Stella's friend and fellow UCL student, Ann (Nancy) Fairfax, married Edward Campbell in Dundee, three weeks after the date of this letter.

5. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel

4 Gore Street, London

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August

Beloved Harry,

You are a good egg to send such honest letters. Do you remember writing three months ago that you had 'no interest in men in the abstract or in marrying' and that while you could accept 'the logic of preferring one man to another man' you supposed that something more were wanted that you didn't feel.\* Well you have rather laid yourself open to having this brought up. Mr Forbes, it seems, combines the 'most splendid features' of the continents of South America and Europe! Mr Forbes is a 'great man', is 'charming', his letters are 'amusing' and 'fascinating', his questions 'tantalising', you feel like writing to him 'each week'. Tell me very frankly: do you not fancy you are finding the 'something more'?

Since you have been so honest with me, I suppose I may be so with you and advise you to distrust the man at least a little. Why, first, does he keep his museum a secret? Is it because he is afraid of thieves, or is it something less acceptable? Darling, you have no way of knowing. I asked a few questions regarding him and all I can tell you is that in the last few weeks he has seriously fallen out with Mr Binyon, apparently about a provenance. I don't of course tell you what to feel, dear Hal. But I do feel alarmed that you don't seem to make an effort to know your feelings, especially at a time like now when you are particularly open to hurt. Do be sensible.

I wish you hadn't so many worries and that I could help with them in some way. Miss Charlotte Keppel to be sacrificed as a schoolteacher! It is astonishing. As to your question, 'Why can't Laurie get a job first?' I answer: because his work is important

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\* This letter does not survive.

and cannot be rushed into, for one thing. Another is: because he has a sister. Be so kind as to explain to me who would employ him while you are available? If the point needs illustrating, ask Mary this: would she buy an old hen to boil priced at 8s 6d if right next to it she saw a gorgeous plump one for roasting at 4s 8s?

As requested, I looked up the article in the *Athenaeum*. I haven't copied it all – I want to tantalise you with bits of it, to give you a reason to come and see me quickly. In it, the Sydenham Gallery is criticised as in danger of becoming 'a hospital of distorted limbs and coloured eruptions' – today, that would be high praise from certain reviewers! Miss Howitt's picture of Boadicea is described as 'the most promising' but is still savaged. The reviewer instead of describing the painting first flattens and hammers out all traces of either Boadicea's or Bodichon's faces: 'The face of the agonized and revengeful mother is only a variation of Gretchen's, and it is not a fresh idea nor is it a strongly individualized one'.<sup>\*</sup> Amazing, that Boadicea should be described first and foremost as a *mother*, rather than a leader! This male harpy then says that 'the subject is unhappy' – by which I suppose he means he'd rather forget female warriors – and 'does not suit Miss Howitt's genius' – perhaps he prefers her insipid wood-engraving of babes mourning a dead dove (have you seen that? My mother treasures an impression of it). He claims that 'by the A.D. 60 attached to the title we presume the dress and ornaments of the heroine are carefully studied' – really? Why may this not suggest a grander, broader grasp of history? There is then a peculiar description of the forest background which makes me extremely curious to see the picture – the forest is described as a 'wearisome greed salad' with a 'mincemeat of raw leaves'. What do you think, my dear? Father says you may consult his *Athenaeum* ad nauseam any day that you please.

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<sup>\*</sup> 'Fine Arts. The Sydenham Picture Gallery', *The Athenaeum*, 7 June 1856, 718-9. *Gretchen at the Fountain* (1853) was another painting by Howitt, after Goethe's *Faust*.

You tell me to keep silent about what you should have done in response to Binyon's offer, so silent I am, even though it costs me.

As for your brother, would he not consider going further afield? Cairo Museum, maybe, or Rangoon...

Your loving

Stella



## 6. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Rathsford, Ringmer

Wednesday 3rd September

Black Eyes,

The Downs' School was rather desperate, so I have begun, although I am not at all sure I am better than nothing. It started on Monday with the Tudor succession and a room of fourteen-year-olds (old enough, I think, to have developed rational thought processes, don't you?). At the beginning of the second Henry, one girl in the front row slumped forward onto her desk pretending to doze. Idiotically – as I've since been told countless times – I didn't say anything. Instead I blamed myself for being tedious, dashed ahead to the next suspense-filled moment of the narrative, and became unbearably conscious of my voice, varying the tone and pitch and livening up the pace. But as soon as they saw their naughty fellow was met with no reprisals, quite two-thirds of the room followed her example. In half an hour I turned the bright girls that had greeted me into a gaggle of mutineers. It shocked me that they were so impolite and without the facility for trying to understand a fellow human.

I don't know when I have felt quite so disconcerted.

It got worser and worser [*sic*], Beamy Black. On Tuesday a girl ate an apple in my class. I was unable to prevent her because she looked at me with cold eyes with no spirit behind them. For no good reason, I was physically afraid. In each class I tried to follow the advice my colleagues gave to keep discipline, but no matter what I did, gave off the aura of a frightened animal, I believe, so that they, animals themselves, could never hold back.

It's turned me a little mad: today, one of the littlest girls stole my chalk, a mischievous ball of smiles, she is, but for that moment I hated her as a monster. I

shouted dreadfully and I'm happy it wasn't a boys' school because I really did want to break the poor thing.

Anyway that's quite enough, to re-tell. I know objectively that I'm going through normal teething pains and must stick it out. I'm scared, though, that I'll never master these pupil-monsters and will shrivel trying. Already I feel some of my old self wiped away and am sure I will never be as confident and at ease as before. This, I don't doubt, is the natural result of experience, and I do not mean to be melodramatic. But it is hard, Beamy Black Eyes, and at night I have lain awake, shivering and panicking, dreading the day when the little chores of eating and dressing, even, will seem insuperable. Pray, darling, for your loving

Henry

I slightly despise myself for continually worrying you with the truth – sorry.

## 7. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Rathsford, Ringmer

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September

Beamy Black Eyes,

The really felt concern in your letter gave me such a consciousness of being loved that it warmed my blood. But your care could be no surprise, whereas Laurie's was. He has really touched me, Stella. Without saying anything to anyone, he was so anxious for me that he quietly phoned [Doctor] Green, who saw me this evening and says I can on no account go back to the school or I'll develop severe nervous exhaustion. It is an enormous relief as I was already beyond being able to extricate myself off my own bat. In fact, this experience has given me a notion: probably, in Hell, one of the punishments is to not have the presence of mind to try to escape.

Now, teaching ought to be blasted into obscurity, and never ever again mentioned between us. But one final word on a positive note: it has been gloriously chastening to witness something some people do with astonishing competence, and I just can't.

Oh, I have been forgetting to reply to your very silly previous letter. I expect you wrote it to make me laugh. It did. How on earth do you imagine I could 'find that something more' in a man I've met just once, on an unpleasant occasion? I naturally miss London and value Mr Forbes' letters largely because they keep me stimulated. I will concede only that we have made a favourable impression on each other intellectually. In fact, lately he sent me a print, a white-line metal cut of a woman bound to a knotted branch. Below, a fire licks her feet. It is unidentified and probably very early so look out for it if you have a chance. Her dress has eight buttons, her right

thumb is hidden and her left little finger has curled.<sup>\*</sup> Most of it is all black with the white-line used economically, no decoration at all. Mr Gill came specially to see it last weekend and is as excited as I am.<sup>†</sup> Mr Forbes wrote nothing about it so I half wondered if he had enclosed it by accident, and I must ask him. The print is a valuable thing to give away so carelessly, but then I suppose it is nothing to a rich man.

Do you miss me? I do you, greatly, and I'm going to accept your kind invitation. If it's convenient with your mother and father, I will arrive next Sunday afternoon. I warn you, I'm very seedy.

Your very loving

Hal

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<sup>\*</sup> This description is strikingly similar to one in the inventory of Ferdinand Columbus (1488-1539), son of Christopher, who collected 3,200 prints. Curator Mark McDonald has recently identified and reconstructed around half this collection, but the rest remain missing, some without an artist's name, or any attribution other than the inventory entries. If Charlotte received one of these, as I suspect (see McDonald 2004, 2: 450), it was a lost print whose rediscovery would be a remarkable find today. Unfortunately, while the envelope to this letter *does* survive in my own collection, the apparently enclosed metal cut does not.

<sup>†</sup> The artist Eric Gill (1882–1940) also lived in Sussex, in Ditchling.

## 8. Jaime Forbes to William Forbes

Tarapata

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> October

Will,

Ernesta is here and has locked us in and lost the key, so I'm writing to you while she looks for it. I'll be cross if she doesn't turn it up soon, because I want to go out.

The basement is beginning to look a little like a museum. That is to say, there are several works of art piled up in it. It is becoming more or less urgent to have someone to put things into a bit of order. I am glad you found the girl at the address I gave you. You needn't tell me what she looks like, brother – I know very well! And I'll say that your description of her brilliant yellow hair etcetera (was that it? your letter's in the other room) is faintly mortifying. There's a reason we need her here – *my* reason – and it's not for you to make a fool of yourself. You're a nut.

Little is new around here except acquisitions. Let me do a little swanking about the latest. Even if it were turned towards the wall – even if all the paint were scraped off it, the board itself would take your breath away. I don't exaggerate. Those four planks conjure up a younger and denser world. After all, when Apelles was flourishing, when these planks were cut and prepared for a painting – the tree from which they were taken was *already old*. Had already grown, lived and died, three centuries before Christ. I place my hand on the dry, pocked wood, and it's tremendous.

Yes, brother, I said Apelles – we have his *Calumny*! Does that light a fire at your heels to bring you home?\*

It has taken a lot out of me. I tell you, Lucian ought to feel sheepish in his grave, at how for so long his colourless prose has substituted for Apelles' glory.

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\* Apelles: a classical Greek painter, none of whose works survive. His *Calumny* was described in the ekphrasis of Lucian of Samosata, and, though lost, was imitated by several Renaissance artists including Botticelli (see e.g. Altrocchi 1921).

The background is murky – giving the indistinct impression of a cave – but this only throws into relief the bright parts of the composition – lurid in places. Calumny, and the innocent youth she drags towards Judgement, make a subtle pair. The youth is nude, as good as, and the spectacle of him being dragged along has all the pathos of an athletic body rendered powerless. This is the more striking as he is not chained but laid low by less tangible forces. His gesture to heaven is ambiguous: I think Lucian was too quick to interpret it as a call to the gods to witness innocence. It could just as easily be a brute defensive movement, born of instinct. At one moment, I see a death-wish in the boy's eyes, then a desire for vengeance, then I look a third time and see nothing at all – a surrendering blankness – and I conclude that at heart, this athleticism is only a kind of emptiness. Yet I recognise this may be my own prejudice talking. The little figure of Calumny is resplendent in a blue robe. Her fury is delineated in the veins of her neck, and in her wild, tense hands, one of which twists the youth's hair whilst the other brandishes a torch that sheds a thin pale light across the whole. Her face, however, is a different matter entirely. It is hard to say what is amiss, so expressionless are her features (a stillness that shows her beauty all the more). Yet the painter manages to give her a subtly wrong beauty, like a face that one has loved in the past but which subsequent events have made grotesque. You shall see, Will. The Judge is a lackless politician, his ass ears pettable; on the left, Penitence in mourning fades so nearly into the background that one grasps after her with the eyes, struggling to see more than her hands and spectre-grey visage. In contrast, Truth, beside her, is yellow bright – but I don't like the look of him – a sun that illumines only himself. I wonder how that can be done with paint. It is my belief that Apelles' true genius was in managing to bear testimony, through so many mere types, to how deeply he understood human relations and real human drama. In our modern age we wouldn't expect such subtlety from

allegory.

There is some sort of varnish over the whole, but it isn't like varnish – it's clear as spring water.

Can you begin to see how things are shaping up here? How much I can achieve even alone? But it's not enough. Come as soon as you can, and bring Miss Keppel.

Father would say this was too long a letter to send to a busy man.

J

## 9. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Rathsford, Ringmer

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October

Darling Black Eyes,

Thank you for taking *such* good care of the bedraggled weed that arrived at your door, and sending her home green and tall (if as thorny as ever!). You always make your home feel like mine, and it's a blessed gift. Returning here, I am in so much better spirits than when I left, that the air inside the house, even, is more breathable, as if all the windows had been open and a sweet April breeze had visited and tickled out its awkward corners. You will be anxious to hear what that telegram was all about. Well, the urgent event that brought me home was not a flood or a fire or a death-bed reconciliation but something much more dire – job-plotting.

Sadly, my absence has improved no-one's state of mind other than mine. Especially after my recent failures in London,\* I now seriously regret not having jumped at Binyon's offer. I don't mind squabbling with Laurie, but I hate when Mummy is cross. She has a way of preparing her voice for complaints – I don't know how, but one actually hears what's coming, not just in her voice as it pronounces the first word, but in the sound of the intake of breath before her voice even comes into play. Who knew it possible to breathe resentment? It must be ghastly for her, and if I believed I could cure her by being compliant... but deep down I suspect she is too old to turn happy. She walks around as though she is sucking herself all in. Her eyes cut holes in me.

The neighbourhood has been scoured in search of a worse fate than Downs' School, and it's been determined I'll be shunted, yelping, towards my destiny. But I am

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\* Charlotte had sent letters of application to the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum and the more newly established Tate and Whitechapel art galleries, with no success.



equally determined not to be. So please, in case it comes to absolute self-reliance, put your mental powers in play and think about how I will manage, if museums continue as unforthcoming as is likely to be the case. Perhaps I could work as a helper to some public figure – with the stipulation that it must be a truly admirable person. Or am I setting my sights too high yet again? Do, please, wrack your brains.

I am in the sitting room. On the wall opposite me are two framed engravings after Landseer, grey but colour haunts them, these stags, flames, beacons of poor taste and poor finances. In between them is five feet of blank wall: I claim it. Can one paint with eyes, Stella? One needn't own pictures if they are truly lost: dispossessed images have nothing to do with ownership anymore, and are everyone's, everywhere, like God. Isn't it true? After all, although, at the Rats-hole, I can no longer walk to the National to see Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*, his ecstatic *Magdalene*, with the original untraced, is in some sense floating in the ether: until there's proof to the contrary, it is as much here as anywhere.\* I hang it here, it looms large in the gap between the two little Landseers. Shh, wait. I am looking, Black Eyes, and when I can see it I will show it to you.

Here: the background is obscure and chinkless with no sign of anything: no brushstrokes, no location, no surroundings. Her red blanket is a decisive detail, it pours down from her arm like a weir, then sluggishly falls in on itself, settles on her lap, a memory of something before the desert. Above the blanket, her right hand entwines her left, little fingers casually knotted, but the hands are different colours which makes one double take, like her two hands do not belong to the same woman. It is the light itself that makes her neck naked, the light and shadows. Her eyes have been peacefully gouged, shadow-blinded. Her lips are quite white to show her spirit is elsewhere, that

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\* Charlotte is undoubtedly referring to Caravaggio's lost *Fainting Mary Magdalen* (see Moir 1976, cat. no. 69).

she has kissed it all out. Can you see it now, Black Eyes – will you hang it in your house too?

How I babble. It is Mr Forbes's letters that make me think along these lines. I'll get to it now. Laurie met me at the station and Mummy was waiting in the drawing room. Neither would say much, except offering evasive and vaguely threatening congratulations. Then a man named Mr Radcliffe arrived who – I know I can't claim to be a scrubbed paragon or anything but I'm not dirty – who stank appallingly. He can't have seen a bath since his wife died. Both Mummy and Laurie shook his hand awfully eagerly. I shook it too, needless to say, but I'm afraid I didn't quite leap at the gesture in the way they did. Then I learnt that he is writing a book on the 'Beauties' of the Sussex countryside, and that he has dreadful rheumatism in his hands, and that everyone's heart is set on me as his amanuensis.

The book may turn out to be a gem, as the descriptive passages are to be interspersed with authentic and colourful anecdotes from when his parents were farming. But he and his job offer are as repellent as is the treachery of the family that presented them to me.

The poor old man got tears in his eyes, so sure was he of his prize and also that fortune, after years of hardship, was finally rewarding him. He said happily that 'we would spend the days like two scholars together' and his cloudy eyes shone so bright it broke my heart that my mother had led him on so. I had to bite my tongue. I wanted to say, 'I am a scholar, sir, I am not like one.' In short I was put in a position where I couldn't give a firm 'no' without being a beast, and I had to prevaricate.

I must go, I hear Mummy coming.

Your loving

H

## 10. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Rathsford, Ringmer

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October

Dearest Beamy Black,

This house clings to the last century by its fingernails. I feel seasick just being here. At last Mummy and I had a frank woman-to-woman talk, and she is, as we've always known, anxious about Laurie's future – in fact she's prepared to go further and be touchingly concerned for the fate of all young men in the civilised world.

Mr Radcliffe is a relentless visitor. His likeness is stamped onto the air itself, especially his nose, an unappetising bruised fruit that is always the first part of him to protrude into my awareness. The house is wide open to him and his confidence and determination to carry me off in service to his nasty book have increased. He sat all afternoon yesterday on the old carved armchair with his beard defiantly thrust out. I amused myself imagining his fantasy of our work together. He pictures himself, I think, as God on a throne, and me an angel scribe with my wings meekly folded and my hair cropped (there will be no need for vanity then), kneeling at a stone slab near his feet, my back to him, eyes only on the quill with which I make a perfect record of his words. The angel's waving hair, wings, and back curled reverently over the writing, all trace the line of beauty. God's thumbs idly stoke the pages of a book on his lap, and he stares vacantly ahead. Do you know the picture? There is a lost version (you see how my thoughts run), reportedly touched with purple and gold.\*

Promise not to take this tone of bravado at face value, won't you?

Incidentally, you haven't answered your Astrophil's letter, you cruel thing.

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\* Surely Blake's *The Last Judgement*, as Stella suggests on 29 November. Frederick Tatham described the vast lost version as 'one of those alluded to in [Blake's] Catalogue as being spoiled by the spirits of departed artists, or "blotting and blurring demons"' (cited in Gilchrist 1880, 2:258).

p.m. The latest is too calamitous. I can hardly write for giggling. I am immobile from a wounded ankle. Mummy forgets we quarrelled and is coddling me, bringing lightly spiced custards and all my favourites, which taste like the past.

It happened just before lunch. I had been doubting myself, being particularly unforgiving of my rudeness and snobbery with Mr Radcliffe. So when he pressed me to go with him a little of his way home on my bicycle – to admire a copper beech he's in raptures about – I agreed. Despite myself, I felt my heart lift as I worked the pedals and shot ahead into the road. I love the bicycle: isn't there a tremendous sense of freedom and poise with the wind in one's face, like riding to battle? The joy of it must have distracted me, because a quarter mile from home I rode headlong into a large stone, flew over my handle-bar – seeming to fly forever, flailing and trying to right myself, but discovering the world was utterly out of my control – and landed face down in a ditch of soft stinking mud. My whole face was hot, smarting and humiliated, and I can still see in my mind's eye Mr Radcliffe pedalling avidly to catch up with my accident.

I don't know, sometimes, if it makes it better or worse to tell you things, Stella. But you demand that I do so.

He pulled me up. His shoulder nuzzled in my armpit to prop me up – he is short – and his hand hooked round my waist just as yours does. His grubby hair was under my filthy nose, two stinks mingling like a sow and a farmer. I felt – I was hardly in my right mind – that it was too late, that he had taken possession of me and I no longer had a choice. It turned out I was unable to walk. He picked me up and tried to carry me, wheezing, gripping, but then his arms started to shake and his face went purple and after ten yards he had to give up, and go for help. Laurie is still injured, so my rescue fell to Mary, who showed up everyone else's lack of common sense by realising that I could be propped on the intact bicycle (Mr Radcliffe's) and wheeled to the Ratshole.

It is hard to write when you're not there. I think I'll stop. I am sad, darling.

Hal

## 11. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Grand Harbour Hotel, Southampton

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November

My own Beamy Black Eyes,

I want you more than ever, but you are already in Exeter. Are you? I suppose so. You should have given me your aunt's address. If you do get this at the time of writing, you should read it quickly and send me any words you have, before it is too late. I am done, and so I've gone. I do not want to end up as a fiery female dragon who breathes resentment. You will have already noticed that I am writing from Southampton. Unless anything happens to change my mind, tomorrow I board the Bertha and we sail for South America.

I walk with a stick and will heal in no time. I did not say goodbye to my family, at least not in a satisfactory way. I already regret it. But it must be tomorrow, Forbes says, because of the weather. When I finish writing to you, I will try to write to them – I dread it. In fact I dread everything about leaving.

I do not know what to write to you, Stella. There are an awful lot of things I might say, but because you are not physically here, the words cool and die before I can write them down. I hope you will understand when I tell you that my feelings for you are warm and alive in a way paper just cannot be, and it makes me sad to be aware of all this love – what else can I call it? what more special term can I reach for? – evaporating into air.

Mr Forbes offered me a job. I'm to be the sole curator of the museum he has founded. I could not think of refusing, because I feel in my gut I will never get another chance like this. Already, as I told you in London, I have regretted saying no to Binyon more than I've ever regretted anything. In fact, I had never imagined that regret could

taste so bitter, a sinking, delirious reaching for what might have been, a dulling of senses and intellect. I hope you never feel it. I don't think it's an experience one even learns from (unless this rash bravery that I am acting on now has anything to do with wisdom – I have no idea if I am doing the right thing – I hope so, so much).

I am afraid, Black Eyes, but I am resolved. I plan to visit in two years if I can save the money. In fact, I will save the money. I promise.

Forbes is so overwhelmed with lost stuff that even art is beginning to seem less dependable to me than it once was. His history of lost art is more like a history of desire. Did you know that Dante himself (not Dante Gabriel, but the real original Dante) made several drawings of an angel's face which have been lost – or that Raphael had written a century of sonnets?\* Both these facts were new to me, and terribly exciting. For do you not think, after all, that Dante himself of all mankind since Adam is the person who more than anyone really saw angels in the flesh, darling? Think what it would be to possess those drawings. And yet, I think that having devoted his intellect to such ghosts, Mr Forbes must be sad and full of longing. I would like to discover what motivates him.

Just like saying goodbye, there is no way to end this letter without a wrench.

Write straight away, if you possibly can – I am enclosing Forbes's address.

With my love,

Charlotte

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\* Forbes was among several in the London art world to be intrigued by these losses. See for example Charles Ricketts's letters and journals (Ricketts 1939, 147). This interest was perhaps inspired by Robert Browning's description of Raphael's sonnets and Dante's drawings in 'One Word More' (Browning [1997] 2009, 288-94)

## 12. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel (undelivered)

4 Gore Street, London

22<sup>nd</sup> November

My dear,

I am almost speechless. Of all the plucky, *beastly* things to do in the teeth of everything! And not to be able to wait eight days for me – eight days! Caught between admiration, terror and pure fury, I am rattling this straight off before I have even unpacked my case.

What the Dickens else I can say? I repeat: I am thrilled for you but completely horrified. Pluck is one thing, but to take such a blind leap! I must trust you'll land on your feet – but Hal, how could you leave me like this, so suddenly?

So. I just unpacked a little to calm down. Mother and father are going to be devastated – you know, they always hold you up to me as a model of good behaviour, and now this! I shouldn't be surprised if they see it as an elopement. I'm trying to think myself into your state of mind. I know things at home had been rather keen, and I could see, when you were here, how caught up you were becoming with the idea of these lost works. But honestly Henry – how *can* you go off for two years without waiting to say goodbye?

You asked me quite seriously what one work I should like to find recovered in your museum (it is really yours now, I suppose), and I have a species of answer for you. I should like to see the library of Alexandria. It's not a work of art, and it wouldn't fit in a museum, but never mind. Should someone offer that to me, I suppose it is possible, though unlikely, that I might drop everything and go there.



Exeter was as dull as ever, and there is nothing else to say, except that I am trying very hard not to hate you.

Your Black Eyes

## 13. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel (undelivered)

4 Gore Street, London

29<sup>th</sup> November

Dearest Charlotte,

I'll call you that more often now, because I lack the levity to call you Hal. That's a name for notes that trundle reliably over a few tens of miles of English ground. Prince Hal, you see – she still has the flavour of our old theatricals, and for that I must conceive of you physically, in fine stockings and breeches. But so far away, you've become ethereal. Not tangible enough for breeches, dear. I picture you sitting in overdecorated rooms, wearing the most predictable of frocks.

Historically, I suppose, when Prince Hal was alive, people didn't know the Americas existed, and couldn't be made miserable by their dear ones disappearing there. Sorry, this is no way to write. Summoning up any connectedness, or even the will to try to cheer you as I should, is beyond me. I've counted the days that the mailboats take. I should hear from you soon. But this is useless – I'll try a new paragraph.

I've been bored. There's never an excuse for that, I know. However, now that you've been, just once, less than perfect, I feel *carte blanche* to confess any sins I like. I'm used to being away from you, of course, but this feels so much different. I've been ghosting your steps a bit. I went again to see the Post-Imps and Futts,\* but couldn't recapture the hilarity we felt when we saw them together. Nothing about that kind of art is uplifting, and that's the flaw that should really be held against them – they've lost sight of the role of art, which I think is a social or psychological one, though you'd disagree. Being by myself, I was too shy to linger by the pictures we laughed at most.

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\* Stella is abbreviating the Post-Impressionist and Futurist Exhibition that was at the Doré Galleries in autumn 1913, one of the controversial pre-war art shows. For the works exhibited see Robins (1997). Stella alludes to a lithograph, painting and etching by Cézanne, Fergusson and Picasso respectively.

Like those amazing bathers! And that *Rhythm*, that looked not truly nude, but an automaton, one of Mr Wells's peculiar nightmares. Do you remember? I speculated Fergusson was too squeamish to use a female model; you corrected me and said there was some sort of philosophical point to be drummed home about form. Well, yesterday each picture brought back your voice and your cleverness, but as I was also feeling anxious about you, the whole show took on a direr tone. Such as when I looked at that 'frugal meal' of Picasso's, those emaciated Spaniards wormed close to my heart – because I didn't know where *you* were and if you were alright and eating properly. Isn't it dreadful how selfish one can be, looking at suffering? I never realised it so clearly before.

Afterwards I went to the quiet of the print room, and called up the boxes for some of your favourite artists (you'll think me sentimental!). At least, I can confidently identify the image of the scribe described in your last letter but one. It's from Blake's *Vision of the Last Judgement*, and you fail to mention that as God stares into space and scribes divide our names into two different books, the dead awake, and half the universe claws its way to heaven, while the other half – twisted and scourged – are embraced by serpents. The keeper that I spoke to said that as well as some watercolours and prints, there is indeed a lost painted version, described as seven feet by five feet and lit with gold highlights as well as a hellish purple.\* If you *don't* find that big fresco, perhaps at least you'll see a curiosity – there is a Mexican print edition published in 1808 (near enough the right corner of the world, I think)!

I'm sure you'll have read Blake's peculiar description of the picture, although you may not have it with you now. He says some curious nonsense that struck me as relevant to your new interest in lost art: 'The nature of visionary fancy, or imagination,

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\* See the descriptions of J. T. Smith and George Cumberland Jnr, cited in Bentley ([1975] 2002, 81).

is very little known, and the eternal nature and permanence of its ever-existent images are considered as less permanent than the things of vegetable and generative nature. Yet the oak dies as well as the lettuce; but its eternal image or individuality never dies, but renews by its seed. Just so the imaginative image returns by the seed of contemplative thought.’\* Is this rather romantic tosh, or is there something in it – aside from the coincidence of salad appearing yet again in relation to lost works (remember Boadicea!). Blake’s words appeal to me despite their pomposity, and if it weren’t too late, I’d try to convince you of their truth in order to keep you near me. For me, this quotation says that you can achieve as much through dreaming as through archaeology, or detective-work – or whatever your Mr Forbes is engaged in.

I went home on the top of the bus, and the jewels in the windows in Bond Street mocked London for its drear. The air smacks of dung and petrol and coal, all at once. The atmosphere is so opaque, one sometimes wonders if our capital ought in fact to be classified as outside, or if it isn’t rather some awful kind of inside. I cannot be as gay as usual. It is also partly the weather, I expect. I suppose where you are everything is beautiful bright and blue? When your letter finally arrives, you’ll tell me. You might have telegraphed, or at least telegraphed Laurie and asked him to write to me, if you had thought.

I must go and dress. Mother and father have responded to your elopement, as they indeed call it (I will ask the next suffragist I come across but I’m sure this can’t be the right word, since you’ve run away for a profession) by insisting that I be as ‘out’ as possible. Mother is accompanying me to the most predictable balls and parties and tried to buy my cheerfulness with no fewer than *four* dresses made by Miss Hardwick.

It’s not the point of course, but I don’t look terrible in them.

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\* For the full text as Stella probably read it, see Gilchrist (1880, 2:185-200).

Please excuse the paper – a big pile has been dumped on me that I must use up.

Stella

This will go, although I see it's maybe pathetic, and slightly brutal– I promise the next one will be nicer.

## 14. Jaime Forbes to William Forbes

Tarapata

9<sup>th</sup> December

Will,

She is, I think, happiest when it is a print. She likes to sit at her desk and to know where she is with an object *physically*. With something larger and more conversationally challenging she gets off her chair and clucks around it like a hostess who feels her house cannot offer up honour sufficient to the guest. Whereas with a print, she is in control. All competence, she slices up the mounting board and makes a space in a solander box. Then she sits before the print and looks at it for a bit, and one may attempt to read her private world on her face.

She sees me watching. Wait – she is annoyed.

There – now I have come back into my study. This is what we want from her too: a description of our collection that can chill the blood, add to it. I think she might be approaching the state in which one could write such a thing. The print she's cataloguing now is your Giles Godet, *The Creation of the Worlde*.<sup>\*</sup> Tell me, Will, where did you rustle it up from? Sixteenth-century prints made for the masses are hard to find, and the colours on this are fresh and splendid as though they've just been whisked from beneath the brushes of the child colourists. Congratulations. I especially like the way that God appears to be stretching in his arm from without the frame, lending a hand as it were, pulling out Eve who slides like an eel or a mermaid from the rib-cage of the sleeping Adam. God's arm is a peculiar solution to the post-Reformation taboo around anthropomorphising the deity, don't you think? Such confidence that an arm represents less of a person than a face does – many would agree, but where's the logic to it? And

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<sup>\*</sup> See Watt (1991, 183-84, 354).

the animals don't impress me, Will – they don't look like couples at all, but like queer doubles.

Still, it was well found – but watch how you challenge me. I'll always best you! If someone found a reference to Noah himself bringing a picture into the ark to decorate his cabin – I'd be the man to find it. No hard feelings, brother – you know it's true.

Did I tell you that she'd christened me Bluebeard? I cannot think of a man *less* likely to harbour a room of dead girls, can you? No – the limit of my unkindness to her – and it is enough, I admit – has been to neglect to inform her that I speak English as well (or better?) than she. Yes, Will, I have indulged this strange request of yours. Your Miss Keppel believes herself on the Moon – or as likely to meet someone who can glean her meaning as if she were. Strewing her thoughts all over the place – not that she has any secrets worth keeping. But small things amuse me: the conceitedness she'd be too modest to express in the normal course of things. The pain on her face as she struggles with Spanish is quite engaging. One remembers what that can be like – communicating with words one doesn't possess, until one even begins to *think* in fragments, in the lack of a language. The brain flounders, thoughts blunt and dry up.

I appreciate that if she's slightly distressed, you'll be able to play the St George to my dragon, and I don't mind that. But I'm not satisfied *why* you think she's worth quite so much plotting –

She certainly thinks it odd that you've gone straight away again, and you'd better return soon, or she'll go mad. Already, while she works she rambles on to her friend 'Black Eyes' (Miss Marsden). Gathering up the letters she has left out to be sent, and the two that have already arrived for her, I am holding a whole friendship in my hands. It's palpable and almost weighs heavily on me. I'll be glad to hand over the whole correspondence, and one of the writers, into your hands.

For the long term, however, I advise you to remember *my* plans. Whatever may happen between Miss Keppel and you, she is not ultimately here for you, but for the museum. Take care brother, and remember what I said in my card.\* Beware of wild goose chases.

Jaime

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\* Untraced.



## 15. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (undelivered)

Tarapata

10<sup>th</sup> December

Stella,

Today was a red letter day, and I'm bubbling with pleasure. 'Bluebeard' arrived with loot. I did not look up but listened to his footsteps as he trod down the stairs and deposited my work on the table, looking at me (I felt). From time to time he forgets I don't understand Spanish, and raises his voice. This makes me nervous he's dissatisfied with my work, but surely he cannot be – he can't read a word of it. That irks him maybe – after all, Forbes is his half-brother and English educated – Bluebeard might feel he has a rum lot (but this is me in typical mode isn't it? – I'll stop speculating). Happily, today he left without speaking, although I heard his mouth open and flounder – there are sharp acoustics down there, my belief is that it's something to do with being underground at such a high altitude. As soon as I heard the door shut I went eagerly to the table. He is no common collector, but enters the flat pages of history to drag marvels into the real world.

The museum, by the way, is shaping up, despite the fact that I cannot magic display stuffs out of thin air, that curators do not bring their own glass cases with them, and that even the most luminous objects are not at their most colourful in underground vaults. But nevertheless I sense the onset of satisfaction. It's amazing what you can do with a typewriter, a few tables and some carefully placed kerosene lamps (no electricity, but they have the American 'Aladdin' lamps which aren't bad).

I opened a red flocked box, started to unwind some tissue and touched ivory, soft like petrified skin. Incidentally, Black Eyes, as a curator I still haven't attained the superb off-handedness of the professional male; you'll readily imagine my

conscientious timidity when handling art. I wish I could tell you all this in person – How I want to speak to you. I like to see your expressions growing and morphing one by one, especially when I really do have *news*. And the pace, Black Eyes. How can we characterise it in writing? How jog each other's memory about the delicious slow rhythm when we talk? ~~Read my mind Miss me and make much of me.~~ Thinking like this makes me feel negative about my decision – no career would be worth being misunderstood by you. It's not going to be like that, is it? This is my third letter to you,\* and already I'm feeling vexed that I haven't received one.

Anyway, the ivory – which is what made my day – turns out to be the lost miniature of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*!† Freed of the pyrotechnics of the large paintings – how wonderfully how *absurdly* private it is. In the foreground, instead of Nimrod (or his equivalent in bloodthirsty 16<sup>th</sup>-century political life) there is a man and wife. They stoop in the shelter of a hillock unwrapping their lunch from a handkerchief. Gay and banal, except that we know from their garb – his eastern, hers Roman – that when the story ends and language is confounded, they won't understand one another. Nearby, a pauper warms his hands at a fire, the little flames picked out in real gold. The tower, which I've held in my hands, is so mammoth it's falling into ruins even as building continues. Bruegel knew how it felt to have one's mother-tongue lose its effectiveness. He was a foreigner in Italy at the time (so was Clovio, the Slavic miniaturist he made the painting for). And by coincidence I'm in the same position myself – Forbes is still off on his unexpected trip, and I underestimated how lonely this adventure would be.

For example this morning I was a figure of fun. I may not know Spanish but at least thought I had 'Buenos Dias' down pretty well, so I tried it on the maid when she came in to make up my fire. She burst into happy laughter at the sounds of my words –

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\* The first two letters are apparently lost.

† See e.g. Mansbach (1982, 43)

an innocent, conniving jollity, as if she believed that I too must be aware how hilarious my syllables were. I smiled, but I felt really taken aback, as though she were my superior.

Do you know how when one is in a certain mood everything can seem to be of significance, and everything to have some more or less spiritual relation to whatever else, and things that are coincidental appear laden with meaning – messages even? I must stop writing and go to the window – the sun is about to set and here it does so swiftly and exquisitely. In any case I don't want to explain myself – I want you to tell me whether you see it, or to tell me off for being ridiculous. This city (I'm falling for it, Black Eyes, even from here, from the bedroom window) is wound up with jutting staircases and flushed stone. The gradient is such that the streets can't go straight up but ringlet around, so it starts off very bendy and the curves get gradually looser. Where we live, near the summit, it is quiet and rich. Small mountainous trees have been coaxed amongst cobbles and sewers. There is such a gentleness about the houses as though they were breathing in sleep. I can see a great deal from my window. It is impressive. In another part of the city, I can even see sky-scrapers – which I never thought to see in *South America* – like enormous misplaced stalagmites. After I finish work I often watch the cog railway labouring up the hill. I long for you, because all this would be so perfect if you were with me.

Love,

C

## 16. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (undelivered)

Tarapatá

17<sup>th</sup> December

Beamy Black,

Here's how the conversation went. 'I'll hire an English girl here in Southampton.' That's what I think I said, to Forbes. I fully intended to go to an agency. He replied something like 'yes of course, if that's what you want' – the conversation's repeating in my head, Stella, and making me hopping mad, because I cannot pinpoint *why* I blame him for my own foolish decision not to bring a servant with me. I remember he said an English girl would be expensive – the passage plus salary – but he also said she'd be *worth* the extra money. It was his tone of voice, I believe, that led me to think how *very* much more she'd cost and how good-for-nothing she might be. In justice, how can I be furious with him for the memory of a tone, when all he said was reasonable?

Right now, if I had the means, I would give for an English human being, provided she had a voice and an ear, her weight in gold, quite literally. If you can spare the time, Stella, I wonder if you could search someone out for me? And let me know what I might have to pay for her, and the price of a third-class passage? What I have noticed about these servants with whom I have no common language is that an unspoken hostility quickly develops. It turns out that all the normal civilities – the interest one takes, if only at arm's length, in one another's loves, losses, families – are absolutely essential. Here, we live intimately but as the days go by we don't understand each other one jot better. It makes me begin to feel hate, because one can't go on feeling nothing.

I just came from lunch with Bluebeard. Picture us: me reading the Bible as I eat (sorry my dear, I know you don't appreciate such a cavalier treatment of that book), and as usual, just the two of us at table, eating a dish we have regularly. A chicken soup, made with three varieties of potato that have distinct flavours and textures – some melting, others with a pleasant waxy resistance. The potatoes here are superb – one can't even compare them to at home. I picture the natives having wickedly given Sir Francis Drake the worst possible specimens.

Can you picture me here, darling? A penny for your mind's eye. The dining room is high and bright, if not large. The table and chairs are tropical hardwood, but the design would suit English oak. The soup is dramatic, served with several accompaniments: a bowl of rice, alligator-pear, a corn cob, caper berries and fried plantain. All these are eaten together in a culinary jamboree. I'd like to know what it is called. One of the peculiar things about being somewhere and having no language at all is that there are new things and they cannot be named.

If you were here with me we'd invent names – but alone, that's a deathly idea.

How very half-baptised I sound (do you know this expression? It's the Sussex for 'absurd'). To go across the world, and make partial discoveries about unidentifiable soups.

The reason I'm reading the Bible is that I am puzzling out the apocryphal books, to help me catalogue two new items in our museum: painted cloths, which in their day were known as 'stories'. Forbes traced them from the inventory of their Elizabethan owner, Wassell Wessells, where they are described succinctly: 'Item a storie of Susanna framed in wainscot with a fryndge of green say.... Item a storie of Tobias...'\* These

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\* The quotation from Wessells's inventory is actually the following : 'Item a storie of Tobias framed in wainscot with a fryndge of green say'. See inventory of Wassell Wessells, 1575, The National Archives, Kew, PROB 2/404A. There is no reference to Susanna. However, the inventory breaks off near this point, and part is missing, suggesting the possibility of other painted cloths – it may have

were the sixteenth-century equivalent of large chromolithographs: bright pictures created at speed for money. They survive in tiny numbers. (It's the great mystery of all ephemera - why are some things so short-lived, the winged ants of the art world? I would not have thought mother nature so very niggardly in creating hoarders.) They were made in imitation of a grander medium: tapestry. The effect is curious because paint – naturally verisimilous – does a clumsy job of imitating tapestry, its less realist cousin. Can you imagine?

Tobias and Susanna make intriguing subjects, as I discover over lunch. Apocryphal paintings were the rage in the reformation – anything to approach the deity blindly: a nice distance from sacred truth. Bluebeard mostly stares at space, but from time to time he gazes at me, and then I have to look at him to stop him doing this. These darts are what pass between us at mealtimes for a sort of conversation.

I must get back to work.

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It is evening now. Each day I stop work when the colours begin to look dull.

In the Tobias, the sky is uniform blue, with a stuttering cloud layered like mille-feuille (just the sort of cloud a weaver would excel at). The scene is the homecoming. To the right, the cottage door stands ajar; Tobias's mother lingers near. In the foreground, her husband Tobit has flung himself onto the neck of Tobias. Tobit is covering his eyes, his restored sight too much to bear (his sight has recovered by means of the miraculous fish gall Tobias brings from his travels - but you know the story better than I do). To the left, by the road, stands Raphael, with stiff wings – he is the agent of the happy event, but momentarily overlooked by the family. It's not unlike other Renaissance depictions.

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been more complete when Forbes looked at it in 1913. For a discussion of Wessells' and other inventories see Foister (1981).

The Susanna, howsumdever, is a little unexpected, not showing the pivotal moment when the elders spy on the undressing heroine (I am glad – a tired excuse for a titillating subject). Instead we have the courtroom scene. It's a pre-perspectival vision of a crowd – figures lined up like a chess set. At the front, one of the decrepit elders raises a hand to Susanna's veil. We can't even see her face, just that hand-that-will-unveil, and her own staring blue blue eyes.

In search of a quote for the catalogue, I went back to King James and found this: 'So she came with her father and mother, her children, and all her kindred. Now Susanna was a very delicate woman, and beauteous to behold. And these wicked men commanded to uncover her *face*, (for she was covered) that they might be filled with her beauty. Therefore her friends and all that saw her wept. Then the two elders stood up... and laid their hands upon her head' [Sus. 1:30-34].

Now tell me, isn't that a strange and terrible description of the effect of showing and beholding? Perhaps you can imagine it, Black Eyes. Your face uncovered, and the sight of your beauty making everyone weep – parents, relatives and all your friends. But there's a curious choice of words: the beauty 'fills' the men. Do the parents 'therefore' weep because of an unnatural sex inversion – men filled by a woman? Or does everyone weep because there is something secret about beauty, and secrets are inevitably destroyed by revelation? Or simply because the unveiling is reminiscent of tearing flesh? As a keeper of pictures, I'm also fascinated by the elders' special privilege to move from looking to touching.

This is foolishness, undoubtedly, but the language intrigues me. I wish you could read with me, and explain (and stop me from interpreting preposterously, as I know you would). Tonight I will read both books again from beginning to end, in the bath. Hush – don't say a word – you know it is delicious to read in the bath.

Your prince,

Hal

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p.s. I am in my bedroom now, shaken. I stayed in the museum longer than usual, writing to you at my desk. As I came upstairs I saw a light was lit in Bluebeard's workshop, and the door being ajar, I peered in. He had his back to me, and I saw a Napoleon cannon in the workshop, on wooden wheels that looked about to creak into animal life any moment. Picture it: a cocky brass beast, sure of its own perpetual survival. I haven't the foggiest how he got it down the stairs. Then Bluebeard separated the cannon from its wooden frame and picked up a marble jar; he started to pour on the brass what may have been some chemical variation of aqua fortis. The cannon immediately started to fizzle away, as though it had some skin disease, as the bluish-white zinc separated from the copper and ran away with the acid. He then took a second jar and poured another acid on the resultant more pure copper-coloured mess of the disintegrating cannon. Here is where the magic happened. As it was eaten away, the copper became bright and formed a pool on the floor. Slowly, pictures began to ghost up, and forms – I was not close enough to see them clearly. When each copper plate looked complete he picked it up with his bare fingers and ran it to the sink in the corner, where he washed it. When he seemed to have finished, I ran away.

Do you think there may be something wrong with my mind? The real bind is Forbes's continuing absence has left me thrown back on myself. I read art books, and talk crazily to the works, and write about them, and the life of human interaction is distant. I've *still* received nothing from you. The very shape of my mind alters – it is hard to describe, darling, but even writing to you now I begin to feel I am pulling too hard at the breaking threads of another self. I never would have imagined how necessary



and absolutely fundamental small talk really is. Somewhat astonishingly, in the whole library there is not a single Spanish dictionary. No-one until me has felt the lack of one, I suppose. Periodically I rail against Forbes, internally, for leaving as soon as we arrived here. Which is ridiculous: I have to keep telling myself that I am an employee here and not a guest.

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18<sup>th</sup> December

p.p.s. I'm unsealing this to tell you that this morning on my table I found waiting for me all the lost copper plates of William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. As is common with copperplates, they have one or two impressions of finger-prints stained onto themselves, thanks to the oils secreted by the hand – the lines of the fingerprint echoing the sweeping parallels of the etching – I wonder if the fingers were Blake's or Bluebeard's?

I have since been in the library checking the history of the plates. Most of them went after Blake's death to the sculptor Frederick Tatham, and Gilchrist says that 'all save ten were stolen by an ungrateful black he had befriended, who sold them to a smith as old metal'\* – and that they most probably ended up in armaments for the American Civil War.

Remember these lines from the *Marriage*: 'But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid'.† Sorry, I know you think long postscripts bad form. H

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\* See Gilchrist (1880, 1:123).

† See Blake ([1965] 1988), 39.

17. William Forbes to Jaime Forbes

18<sup>th</sup> December

Dear Jaime,

You know how livid you make me? Monna Lisa was *not* a wild goose chase.\* I saw your eyes spark when we first read of her disappearance. You discouraged me from pure envy – it's always been like that.

I am sending a parcel with a couple of novels for you recommended by Mr Lewis, and a drawing for our collection. It is David's sketch of the French revolutionary martyr Lepeletier. Do you know the story? Lepeletier was stabbed by one of the deposed King's bodyguards. As a tribute from his fellow revolutionaries, his corpse took its place in a prime spot usually reserved for objets d'art. It lay in the Place des Piques on an empty plinth that had formerly supported an equestrian sculpture of the Sun King. The painter David was responsible for displaying the body – he laid it out like a pieta, naked, bloody and handsome.

Sitting at its feet, on the steps of the plinth, David drew the body from life. I enclose for you the picture that resulted. It has been untraced for many years – Lepeletier's family later became royalists. Not wanting to destroy it – images of him were few and far between – his daughter hid it in a custom-built cabinet. Her descendant, Marie Anisson du Perron, charmingly gave me the run of Saint-Fargeau, where I found the drawing after several days' hard work.†

Write and tell me what you think of it and what Miss Keppel thinks of it.

I don't expect you to understand how I feel about her. I've certainly met no-one like her. I need to discover that she loves me – I really do. I'm a beast, I suppose – but I

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\* In fact, it had been : Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* was stolen from the Louvre on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1911 and recovered – not by William Forbes – on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1913, one week before the date of this letter.

† For the drawing and later painting, both untraced, see Flick (2003, 208-31). Forbes is not mentioned in Flick's account of the drawing's provenance.

am an addict of sorts. I know she's unhappy, but it's not as if I'm pippy myself. And anyway, you were the one who found her for us, brother, so none of this plotting would have come about without you.

There is one thing I need to get off my chest: if I am completely honest, now that she is with us, some of my urgency regarding her is gone.

Make sure there is a good meal on Christmas day.

Will

p.s. Please tell me what she says in her letters. Why haven't you forwarded them to me?

18. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel (undelivered)

4 Gore Street

25<sup>th</sup> December

My darling Henry,

Well I'm having a miserable Christmas and unless you're completely heartless, so are you (horror to think of the alternative – not your heartlessness, which even despite your running away, I can't fully believe in, but of your being somehow incapable of writing – I batter it out of my brain). I have written to Rathsford hoping for news of you, and although they don't say so in so many words, they are clearly beside themselves.

Nancy's cousin Donald Wallis (remember him?) has just come down from Oxford and has a job in the foreign office (through merit). He has made himself indispensable through his good advice, and promises to look into your case. Meanwhile, every day I torment myself reading the most lurid articles in the paper about the white slave trade etcetera, just in case I'll see any clues – which *of course* I don't. I keep repeating to myself that there will have been some mundane explanation as to why your letters haven't reached me. I have made an appointment with Mr Binyon for the new year and will ask him to write to Mr Forbes too.

You know Henry, if I discover that it's through some fault of yours that letters haven't arrived, I will be *possessed* with fury.

This morning I discovered something that further confounded me. Your self portrait – your *carte de visite*, as we christened it – has gone. Do you remember when you took the picture, the same day I gave you the Brownie?\* It made you look very much primmer than you are, but I loved it, and I used to look at it greedily whenever I

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\* A Kodak camera – a generous gift

most missed you. Seeing the empty space, I felt irrationally afraid, and have been wracking my brains to see how I could have misplaced it. My own stupid portrait – the one that you also have a print of – lay safe in its place, mocking me. I became aware of myself confronting an old enemy. Have you also lost mine? Superstitiously, I believe you might have. Indeed, if you do not possess it anymore, if this substitute has escaped you, I can almost be glad. I wish it to be my *real* face that you remember. You love works of art so much, I fear a *picture* of your friend might be enough for you, if it were a *good* picture.

I want to leave it at that – I don't see how I can write much else – but it seems cruel. So let me tell you that Mother and Father are fine, although worried about me, I think. After I have finished writing this I shall summon a happier face and go down for breakfast with them. Father has decided I need to be occupied, and wants to make the most of having an educated daughter. He has given me Uncle Frank's letters and a typewriting machine (do *you* have one of these? It's a great noisy monster, and I have to keep telling father that a woman with a BA is *not* educated to use one!). We have inherited a whole bunch of letters that Uncle Frank wrote from Persia and Malay, and which he addressed to no-one. They are much freer and more amusing than the letters my uncle wrote to real people. Sometimes they are indiscreet, and Father is trusting me to edit them! I think he might even envisage this as a sort of reward for not running away! I don't want to sadden you, but you know that my family loved you like family, and in their own way they've been almost as befuddled by your disappearance as I have.

If you get this, you *must* telegraph *immediately*. Why have you not done so already?

Your loving friend,

Stella

## 19. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (undelivered)

Tarapatá

2<sup>nd</sup> January

Beamy Black Eyes,

Each evening here I feel more than a day older. I think back to when we two decided the chief purpose of life should be friendship. With that in mind, my existence alone in these vaults is a purgatory and a reproach. I am like a deaf composer. My faith fails, even as I pray for the strength to survive on the traces of people's love, as Beethoven managed on vibrations, the empty footprints of sound. What a lot of nonsense I write, and how melodramatic you'll find it. I don't wish to vex you and even though I want you to read this, I am unsure if I should send it. It is an unanswerable dilemma: do I want you to love me, or know me? This is the kind of question, Black Eyes, that occurs across distances. It is strange, today, to write to you and conceive of you as a person. I have gone from people, and almost cannot tolerate them anymore. It is almost easier to think of you – still with your own dear spirit, but as the character in Sidney's poem, or better yet, as a painting. I can picture your black eyes on a dark background. Drawn so, I'd be the only one who would recognise you, and you'd speak to me, volumes.

It has been an unsettling day. At first, I almost left the house. I came downstairs to leave my letter for you,\* and the front door gaped. One of the maids was scrubbing the steep steps. Drawn by the prospect of exploring, I stood at the threshold, looking out. The sun shone on the honey-coloured house opposite ours, and there was no-one around. Not that it was extraordinarily early, but I expect it was just one of those moments one gets in even the busiest cities, when for a patch of time and of space no-one happens to

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\* Charlotte's new year letter to her friend remains untraced.

be walking, or working, or driving, or calling out their wares. The light here – have I told you of the light, Beamy Eyes? It is clearer than I have known in my life before (although *you* may have seen its like – I’ll always envy you Italy). I cast one careless glance over the road, and saw a host of black objects were lit up on the slabs – a colony of enormous beetles, I thought, visiting from the forests that I can see in the distance from my window. Then I looked again and had to smile, because what I’d taken for beetles were the shadows of some loose scree on the surface of the road. The scree was the same red-streaked-grey as the rest of the street surface, but the shadows glowed the most dramatic black. Shadows from *pebbles*, Beamy Black – they looked alive. Actually, we’re so high up I believe it’s too cool for many insects. The sun doesn’t heat, but it burns – it’s very strange.

Opposite me were the neighbours’ tall spare houses, looking like those old Alsatian terraces (I didn’t know Northern Europe had been so influential on this continent). They are thin as old maids, and their clay roofs curve up at the brim like batting eyelashes; ours – Forbes’s – must be the width of at least five of those, as near as I can judge from the inside. You know, up until now I’ve been put off exploring by thoughts of bandits, but today – well, I felt everything was safe and peaceful, and that I myself would be a giant in this strange world, invulnerable. I lifted my foot to venture, thinking only to walk out and look up towards the summit and down towards the foot of the mountain, to stand in the middle of the street and breathe and turn a full circle on myself and return.

But just as I was about to, I heard a galumphing percussion of traffic, and hung back in the shadows of the doorway. A motorcar appeared around the corner, driven by a man I recognised from the house, but empty of passengers. Behind it an open cart was being pulled by a couple of nags, an enormous wooden crate within, and Bluebeard and

another gentleman crouching incongruously on either side of the crate, each with one long arm draped across its top. I deduced that Bluebeard had gone down in the car but his parcel did not fit inside, and he didn't trust it to travel unaccompanied. Of course I suspected sculpture and was immediately curious. Incidentally, Black Eyes, even apart from the sight of two hatted gentlemen squatting in a cart, it made a comic picture.

While the men presented the face of European civility – the merest shade darker – the cart driver was rigged out in a poncho and blue striped trousers, like a child's toy (the Indians or their partial descendants have compact bodies and round chiselled faces). It is an incongruity that I suppose must be mundane in the new world but is a novelty to me.

I have already described Bluebeard, I know – but seeing that I'm beginning to suspect you don't receive my letters, this is like a narrative into the wind. Remember that he is tall and slightly stout (though young) – with ordinary moustaches on his lip and his suit of clothes just slightly the wrong shade of black. Large hands. In fact his appearance is now more familiar to me than my own – I haven't a glass – so that I wonder what made me christen him as I did.

As they neared the door I stepped back again so that I could not be seen – I don't know why. Nor could I see them. But imagine my shock when I heard a voice speak in English – saying, 'Thank you, Russell, you're always a brick' – the slang very peculiar sounding in the cultured local accent. But it was the reply – a brief, friendly 'don't mention it', that truly knocked me for six, coming as it did in a British accent. I wanted to cry it was so beautiful, Stella. I haven't heard that sound in so long. He said something else too, and I couldn't pick out the words, but there it was, that melody. So staccato, chaotic-prosaic – nothing like the grantedly elegant rhythm of Spanish, which is predictable as classical music. That sound of English spoken with a British accent was as welcome as the most delicious glass of water you have ever tasted, Stella. I



didn't think for a moment, just leant against the wall and enjoyed the feeling of the sounds. Then it stopped and there followed the noise of the packing case scraping along the bottom of the cart. I wracked my brains as to who could possibly have been speaking other than the unknown gentleman and Bluebeard (or Mr Jaime Forbes, I suppose I should call him). It was unthinkable that either of the speakers could have been the coachman – much less the Indian driver – and I was certain the carriage had been empty – I'd seen right through it. Could someone else have appeared on the street, which had seemed so empty just a moment before?

I ran down to my cellar – on the presumption that the packing case was for the museum – and waited. A few minutes later, Bluebeard, the coachman and the Indian staggered awkwardly down the stairs with it. Usually I'd be having kittens – shouting ineffectually at their lack of care – but my rather dreadful suspicions made me silent. They put the larger-than-life crate on the floor and started cracking the lid. I noticed the address label was in Forbes's hand. I could hardly bear it – I felt, indeed, like a different animal from them. I nosed forward and began to peel off the soft rags protecting the contents. A clay surface was revealed, dry as a desert. I touched it and felt kinship. I peeled off more rags, and saw that I had touched a wingtip, of a bird whose magnificent span spread from corner to corner of the crate. In another corner we found an elbow. Then the men, knowing, I suppose, that this was mine, or perhaps simply sensing and respecting my passion, backed off and looked on. I discovered the top of a curly head, and some knees, which were twisted up and askew from the elbow and head. The vulture's body was slowly revealed, until we could see its cruel beak tearing at liver. Prometheus lay in the rags half bent and half supine, trying to twist away. I wanted to have him lifted out of the box, which seemed like a prison cell.

The men used a sort of pulley to heave the sculpture out. I stood back, ignored. (Is it just the ghost of me that is here in this museum, Black Eyes? Is my body with you?) Each muscle is delineated with precision, the whole classical beauty of form alluded to, but deliberately marred and twisted. It is as if in defiance of Lessing,<sup>\*</sup> and I fancy I can actually hear the Titan calling in pain. I have found a signature: Thomas Banks, presumably the lost clay model for which he won a prize at the Society of Arts in 1769.<sup>†</sup>

Strangely, my suspicion that Bluebeard can understand me makes me feel ashamed, where I have the right to be indignant. However, I have made myself a promise that I will keep. *This* letter will reach the post office by my own hand. To be afraid of going out to find a post office: that would be the stupidest thing.

Hal

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<sup>\*</sup> Charlotte refers to the art critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), who argued that too much painful contortion went against the beauty of visual art. See Lessing ([1962] 1984, 7-44)

<sup>†</sup> Banks's receipt of this prize is noted, for example, in Bell ([1938], 12).

## 20. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (undelivered)

Tarapatá

3<sup>rd</sup> January

Dearest, distant Stella,

Well, today I got myself into a jam. I went out brandishing my letter, to search for a post office or embassy in order to post it. It was frankly an ordeal. I had calculated that if I went out quietly and kept taking lefts and gradually expanded my arena, as it were, I could not fail – that surely, in this quarter (it is a bit of a swank), there would be *oodles* of embassies and post offices, all offering themselves up to me. I had fantasies of staff speaking unbroken English and every crumb of their vast competency put smilingly at my service (am I boring you, Black Eyes, with all these complaints about the language? Am I becoming a moaner?). But of course like all Prince Hal's plans this one was a bit of a fudge up and I got lost. It was a beautiful fresh day, and the streets with their little brave trees, were charming, and I trembled with absurd horror. I'm sure that every passer-by was just gay and at one with the world, if I'd had the wits to see it. But every well-dressed fellow looked a bandit – the more well-to-do he seemed, the bigger I imagined that he figured in an organised crime syndicate, and even the women seemed suspicious. It didn't help that your Hal looks like *such* an Englishman. Then, with infinite relief, I saw a gaggle of policemen. Of course, I started to approach them, but then I spotted their guns (they were armed to the teeth), and one of them, who was facing me, happened at that moment to perform an extremely arrogant laugh. It occurred to me that police in a country like this are very probably corrupt and I felt sick to think of how they might respond to a request for help. I was almost upon them and had to contrive a way to make it look natural that I turned away – to cap it all, in the process I almost ran into a rather impatient horse!

To cut a long story shorter, I eventually got into such a fix that I was walking repeatedly around the same loop of streets – not looking for the post anymore – just desperate to find a way home. I was afraid people would notice I was walking around and around like a limp sausage. I tried to appear ever so gay, as though I were relishing air and exercise. I had remembered to bring a parasol, which not only shielded me, but I felt lent a certain authenticity to the idea that I was merrily (but inside – manically) strolling. I almost lost control when I saw how stained my shoes were getting. The stone that the streets are built from is very crumbly, with a distinct, orange hue. Also we do get such alternating extremes of sun and rain, and I suppose this compounds the problem. Anyway the sudden sight of my shoes and sore stockinged feet almost finished me.

I can hardly bear to tell you what the denouement is. Without even recognising it I had been walking past our own house. Eventually Bluebeard came out, with a strange soft look, and led me inside.

It never rains but it pours, they say. Later this afternoon Bluebeard actually *did* take me out. You can imagine I was apprehensive when he started to shepherd me out of the house and into the motor. However I went, like a lamb. We went at speed through the city. It was very disappointing because not only did it get poorer and poorer as we descended, with shoddily built houses, but the looks people gave me were distinctly hostile, freezing my smiles.

We drove to an aeroplane hangar! My first idea was that I was to be taken up in one – this thought actually thrilled me. But no – Bluebeard has got hold of an Egyptian colossus, and I suppose this is the only space big enough for it. It is as wonderful as you might imagine – quite uncanny in fact, all pink and sparkling under a canvas shroud,

and I viewed it with an electric torch – a steady little beam for the most part, flickering infrequently.

I am very curious to know *how* this colossus was brought here. If legitimately, I think one ought to have seen journalists and photographers in the hangar – it is no mean feat of engineering to transport such a work. And then if things *weren't* all above board it is rather nerve-wracking to think of the power required to perform such a feat covertly. But then, if it was Jaime rather than William Forbes who procured the Pharaoh, I wouldn't be surprised if it arrived in a *supernatural* fashion. Laugh all you like – if this letter only arrives, I shan't mind you laughing one bit.

When I emerged from under the canvas, I caught Bluebeard's eye and I saw he knew I've been afraid – I can't explain how. There was a sort of triumph that I thought reflected a fear of his own. This made me angry. I looked him steadily in the eye and I said something like - 'I don't know how we're going to display it, unless you plan to knock down half the house.' It made me realise that when I had previously spoken to him in English – or spoken to myself in his presence, I should rather say – I rarely looked him in the eye, and never so deliberately. It is most peculiar, Black Eyes, I can't explain it (perhaps one day you'll have the opportunity to experience this for yourself) – but you can actually *see* linguistic comprehension in somebody's eyes, and I could even see that he *saw* that I saw. It was a tense moment in which I felt marvellously victorious. I just said to him then, 'I know that you can understand me.' He didn't say a word, but he blushed to his hairline.

I thought about not returning to the museum, of staying in the hangar and asking

help from whomever arrived. But I did return. I cannot explain why, except that my desire to do my job is strong.

Love,

Prince Hal

## 21. Jaime Forbes to William Forbes

Tarapata

3<sup>rd</sup> January

Brother,

Today I took Miss Keppel out the house for the first time. We corkscrewed down and out of the city, because my latest acquisition is so big I've had to rent space in an aeroplane hangar. Driving her through the town one sees people staring. Some of us in this city are in the habit of thinking ourselves white, but her colour is something else: a great sheet of paper, a block of marble, a ghost.

Inside the hangar are specimens of the balloon, the airship and the aeroplane – everything from wishful experiments to military prototypes. My own property is the biggest, the only one under canvas. I gave her an electric torch and motioned her under. I waited impatiently for her to understand – to interpret the sedimentary rock, to recognise some fingers or an ear, to discover the colossus bit by bit. He lies on his back with his knees in the air: Ramesses II, the God, carved from a glorious piece of quartzite longer than even a granite obelisk. It was His Majesty himself who uncovered the stone, in Heliopolis, when it glittered like his Horizon.\* On the same occasion, he is recorded as making a boasting speech to his sculptors, addressing them as: 'you good fellows, tireless, who are vigilant at work every day, to fulfil their tasks energetically and efficiently, you who say "they'll do it!"... benefits shall be yours, for your deeds have matched your words! Supplies abound before you and there is no 'Oh for more of it!' – food is in plenty all around you! I shall deal with your needs in every respect, so that you shall work for me devotedly. For you the Southland ferries to the North and for you

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\* Jaime Forbes's wording here, as well as the quotation below it, is adapted from an ancient inscription that recounts the making of this colossus. For the Egyptian inscription, see Kitchen (1996, 193-5).

the Northland ferries to the South, with barley, emmer, wheat, salt and beans without limit. I have done all this so that you may be united in working for me.’

Isn’t it charming?

It’s also a lesson, brother, in *how to treat employees*. Come home or I’ll take matters into my own hands. You are a childish, incompetent plotter, doing everything by halves. Miss Keppel is suspicious, and thanks to you I can’t get out of this hole you’ve dug. I’ll be plain: it doesn’t matter to me if Miss Keppel is made miserable, nor if you seduce her. But remember that it was *I* who located her and sent you to fetch her, and ultimately she is for the museum. I don’t want her running away.

According to the latest letter from London, Miss Marsden is mobilising authorities to get news of us, and I for one don’t want to get on the wrong side of anyone. You *planned* this. So why give Miss Keppel our correct names and addresses to pass on to her friend? We have a couple of weeks’ grace since most of the embassy staff are in the mountains for the holidays. Then, if you’re not here, I’ll straighten things out myself.

Jaime



## 22. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Tarapatá

11<sup>th</sup> January

Dear Black Eyes,

What glorious pleasure: I have just this minute received your telegram in reply to mine.\* For you this is old news – at least a week, I should think – but to me, I'm still hugging the telegram form like a treasure. It is sad that there is no money for sweetness in them, isn't it? However, I'm in heaven to know that you're simply alive – that London still exists, even! And I am relieved you'll contact my family. I hope you don't think it queer that I telegraphed *you* rather than them.

Mr Forbes is back. Will, actually. We are to be on first name terms. It was a peculiar meeting, plenty of goodwill but rather stiff, as if we had each been anticipating it for too long. Eventually I confronted him on how nothing seems to have got through – how I should have heard from you, and he relieved me as to his character by being indignant on my behalf (apparently genuinely, for I watched his face carefully) – as well as offering to arrange the telegram, quite off his own bat. While I was at it, I almost voiced my suspicion – conviction – about his brother's secret knowledge of English. After all, perhaps Bluebeard has hidden this fact from his own brother – his half-brother, I should say – and who knows, really, what fraternal plotting might be going on. However I kept silent: it would have sounded so silly.

With this, I will send my own earlier letters – I have copies of most of them. Will has promised to take personal responsibility for sending the packet through safe channels. Now I know you're finally going to have a full account of me, I feel strange. Since we've been distant, a mere flash of time has passed, but so much life in it. It

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\* These do not survive.

makes me understand that writing to you via an *unreliable* post was more like writing to an *idea* of you than to my *real* friend. Now I have switched back to the latter, and I'm trepidatious. Will you still love me when you read me? How anxious I am for your reply! You'll think me changed – but how can I be so nervous about *you*, Black Eyes? I tell you, I *am* – so much that the blood going round my hands and arms is buzzing, as if electrified.

I must go down again – we are to spend the afternoon with a new work Will has brought.

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Evening.

Will brought any number of things back with him from Europe, but only means to deliver them to me one at a time. He *says* that he is afraid of overwhelming me with work, but the real reason I believe is that he's a showman and wants a spectator – he doesn't want to use up all my admiration at once.

He and his man brought down the stairs (fortunately they do not bend) an enormous wheel wrapped in a sheet. We uncovered it to reveal a medieval mappa mundi, stretched onto a revolving frame. It is not very map-like. In the centre is a vision of the city of Siena, with its quaint wall, its fine towers and dome (the copper is represented with gold leaf). Around it are the surrounding Italian cities. All this is topographical rather than bird's eye, yet there is no fixed orientation to the map. Mounted high on the wall, one is meant to spin it so the city one is curious about comes into view. With that in mind, the 'top' of the map is always the centre, and the roofs of all the different towns are orientated towards Siena. But this is done irregularly, and some towns look askew. The entire thing is dizzying, as if an Italian god had picked up his cities and thrown them down on a board game. Between urban centres, the map

offers a swirling conglomerate of pleasant greens and blue-grey fissures, some of which must be rivers (testified to by depictions of a handful of small boats and one extraordinarily large fish) but some must be roads, I think – although many of them curl into aesthetically pleasing dead ends, ending where no town lies.

The colour combination of green, blue and ochre is just gorgeous, and it must have looked splendid in the Palazzo Pubblico, where it once was. Last heard of in the eighteenth century, the only traces of the map in the Palazzo have been rings scraped where it used to turn, faintly visible through the whitewash. Sadly, we've only got seven feet in diameter of it – it was initially much larger (showing, presumably, the rest of the world, since it's known as a *mappa mundi*) but at some point it was cut down in order to showcase Sodoma's charmless frescoes of Saints Ansanus and Victor, which were painted on either side of the map.\*

I asked Will if it had been his own research or his brother's that had led to the unearthing of the map. He said, bitterly, that it was his, and that if Jaime had taken it into his head to go after it, undoubtedly we'd have 'the whole damned thing', not just a portion. Bluebeard was also in the room at the time, pretending not to speak his brother's language, and I thought again what a queer relationship these siblings have – one that makes my own with Laurie seem normal and affectionate. I asked Will what in the world he meant – surely a cut picture is a cut picture, and no different research methods will alter it. He replied, poetically (by which I mean opaquely) that he himself hunted down objects lost in space, whereas his brother pretended to seek those that were lost in time.

Anyhow, it's late and I should sleep. It is not my business how strange these brothers are. Having already made a fuss about telegraphing, I don't want to ask today

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\* For an excellent account of this map (though with no reference to Keppel's correspondence), see Kupfer (1996).

about my salary, but as long as they *do* pay me, I shall stick at my job and keep questions to a minimum.

Write quick, Stella. I am somehow so afraid of what you'll say.

With love,

Harry

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12<sup>th</sup> Jan.

p.s. I must just tell you. This morning we went back downstairs to work on the map. Having cleared a high wall to hang it in the gallery, we started examining its back to find out how we'd manage. It is truly amazing what we found! Where the cloth stretches over the frame there was a sort of false back, laid on to protect the whole affair, and this false back seems fairly old but is certainly not contemporary with the painting. At one place it was coming away from the wheel, and I thought I glimpsed some bunched up cloth under it. To look more closely, we wheeled the map over to the window (with some difficulty, at each stage laying felt in its path to protect it, like the palm leaves that were laid down for Christ) and glued our eyes to the crack. Distinctly, one could see rolled up cloth, with flakes of blue and silver paint. It was immediately decided to sacrifice the backing and see what was underneath. Lo and behold, the thing was achieved, and we unrolled the missing extra five feet of the map that we'd spoken of yesterday! There it was - turquoise seas and monsters, Europe and a squashed Africa, slivers of America and Asia, and the whole cosmos - planets and constellations – stunning. Will didn't even seem pleased, just tired. They are a strange pair. Must go now and rest – everything had to be done slowly with immense care, so it's been a long day.

23. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel

4 Gore Street

20<sup>th</sup> January

Dear Hal,

How maddening – our letters crossed so I *still* don't know what you say to my news!\*

I'll answer your packet swiftly, one by one. What a joy to do so, after such months of nothing. I see now how you have *tried* to stay in touch – have written and believed your letters posted. But I can't help being annoyed. The hall table is *not* a postbox – and you should know that. What can we learn from history and old novels if not that women who think it *is* should watch out?

The first of yours has made me turn to Susanna and Tobias, with all the zeal of a graduate whose thoughts are turned too much to social and domestic affairs (again – Hal – I'll say this in every letter – you *must* be here for my wedding).

After noting what you say about the unveiling of Susanna's face, I felt some obligation to look again at the more famous bathing scene, when her *body* is unveiled. I have been sitting here trying to puzzle out the following passage: 'And it fell out, as they watched a fit time, she went in as before with two maids only, and she was desirous to wash herself in the garden: for it was hot. And there was no body there save the two elders, that had hid themselves, and watched her. Then she said to her maids, Bring me oil and washing balls, and shut the garden doors, that I may wash me. And they did as she bade them, and shut the garden doors, and went out themselves at privy doors to fetch the things that she had commanded them: but they saw not the elders, because they were hid. Now when the maids were gone forth, the two elders rose up,

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\* Presumably, this lost earlier letter must have given an account of Stella Marsden's engagement to their mutual acquaintance Donald Wallis.

and ran unto her, saying, Behold, the garden doors are shut, that no man can see us, and we are in love with thee; therefore consent unto us, and lie with us' [Sus. 1:15-20].

Watch out for these maids, dearest. As you say, there's nothing worse than a silent one. Perhaps they were aware, all along, who was in the garden.

And then I noticed there's not a single thing in this passage to indicate the nudity that painters love to show. Perhaps it is implied. But nowhere do we get that direct unveiling that you mentioned in the courtroom with the face. Susanna is *planning* to bathe; she *may* have begun to undress. But it's much likelier that she'd wait for her maid to return with the bathing things and get some assistance. Read it again and you'll see what I mean. Who on earth would *either* get into a tub before the maid brought the bath salts *or* stand there naked and lemon-faced waiting for the salts to arrive? To this may be argued that the elders would have waited to enjoy Susanna's nudity before revealing themselves. But I think not. Their first aim, after all, was to get Susanna alone, for their blackmail – and this would have been a rare opportunity. No, in my view, on reading this passage, Susanna may *never* have been naked. And what light does this cast on all those thousands of painters that treat the subject indecently, from Rubens to Gentileschi?

Some would see this modest lack as *merely* that – a kind of prudery of language. But I think it's more. The book refuses really to unveil Susanna (or at least to unveil her body – for her face is unmasked – one daren't say it's *only* a face). It tempts the reader to imagine an immoral picture, but then refuses to authorise our vision, turns the responsibility back upon us. The Book of Susanna is a slippery thing, I discovered, trying to trick. I appreciated reading it because it taught me something; I felt I understood why it belonged in the Apocrypha.

As I have these thoughts, and more – well, I can't tell you properly. I'd need to be there, holding your hands. If I could see in your eyes that you found my ideas exciting, I'd have the courage to follow them much further. But you must imagine me here – missing you – the only one to whom I dare go on like this – and imagine me sort of bubbling, spilling over with thoughts, so that I can't believe it all stays inside me – it must affect the airwaves, in some way.

It infuriates me that you didn't receive my previous letters. I wish I had kept copies. I think perhaps there were some sweet things in them, and I want you to catch up with *my* heart, as you've let me do with *yours*. I feel at a loss, to introduce you to the Stella who is writing, the Stella who is still your dear Black Eyes but has changed in small important ways.

But I suppose, I have been so busy that I haven't had the time to write things out twice.

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I can't stop reading these books! It's already mid-afternoon! I have to tell you something else: there's an absurd obsession with vision in Susanna and Tobit. I'm not just talking about the plots of both, but the way they spawn looking-words! Go and read them again and you'll see. For example, the wicked elders waiting for their opportunity '*watched* a fit time'. The men's friendship is one of displaying, looking and concealing: they '*durst not one shew another his grief*'. Their perversion is described in this way: they '*turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven*'. When they do *really* look, Black Eyes, it's an odd double vision. Look at this: they '*watched diligently from day to day to see her*'.\* Note that they are watching to see: it's both her and sight

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\* For these quotations, see Sus. 1:9-15

itself that they are waiting for. Perhaps that's what she represents to them: she promises to deliver sight itself, that's the mirage that inflames these old men: perfect vision.

Tobit's very like: just glance at a page and you'll see it doubles its verbs of looking: 'Seeing I have seen thee, my son, from henceforth I am content to die. And they wept both.' Seeing is excessive, and bodily – at the moment Tobit is healed we hear 'when he saw his son, he fell upon his neck.' Sight is the best and worst of senses. All seek to be 'pleasing in God's sight'. Raphael reveals his angelicness with the words: 'All these days I did appear unto you; but I did neither eat nor drink, but ye did see a vision.' In other words, the angelic, the godly, is *all vision*. But throughout this book, blindness seems safer. Tobias has fine eyesight, but he learns from his good blind father. Wisely, he chooses his wife before ever entering her presence: 'Now when Tobias had heard these things, he loved her, and his heart was effectually joined to her.' He falls in love through his ears, taking Sara 'not [...] for lush but uprightly'.<sup>\*</sup> What do you think?

Let me add here, in a rush, something about *you*, Hal. In your work, you obviously allow yourself to be tied by bonds of obligation where *none exist*. Also I'm afraid you have, from time to time, an *unnatural* attachment to works of art. Is it peculiar to seek to glut ourselves with sight, sight, more sight, only sight? It is as though they're people to you – like they've become your family members. Having taken responsibility for a collection, I imagine you wanting to stay with it through thick and thin – for you, curatorship really is a job of care – you see yourself as a sort of curate. But still, remember yourself, Charlotte. If you have doubts about the provenance of these works, and I sense you do, come home. No beautiful view, no fine painting, is worth forgetting the sense of uprightness without which my own dear Prince Hal would crumble and disappear – would not be herself anymore. And are you really certain that

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<sup>\*</sup> For these quotations, see Tob. 11:9, Tob. 11:13, Tob. 4:21 (Stella is misquoting – actually 'pleasing in *his* sight'), Tob. 12:19, Tob. 6:17 and Tob. 8:7.



Jaime Forbes *deliberately* deceived you and knows English? Or could this have been a mistake? If the former, I say you really must leave.

Darling, forgive me for what must seem a very unnecessary lecture to *you*.

I wonder – if you decide, after all that I have said, to stay in your post – if you might sail home for our wedding, so you and Donald can meet properly? Perhaps it sounds spoiled and extravagant even to suggest it – I know people can't sail the Atlantic at the drop of a hat. But who else could be my bridesmaid? I *must* see you again before I become Mrs Wallis. Few friends have the sort of closeness we have, and I cannot do this happily without you blessing it (if you will, we'd be prepared to postpone for ever so long – you must tell me as soon as you can if it's worth doing so).

I've been through some black moments since you left – I suppose there's little left to say about it – but now I'm gay as can be. Do I *sound* happy? Tell me that you hear that I do, and echo it. Tell me that you are coming home for my wedding.

With all my love, as ever,

Your Black Eyes

p.s. I do not mean to alarm you, my angel, but Mr Binyon, when he heard you'd accepted Forbes's job offer, went quite white with emotion. He really blamed himself that they had not been able to employ you in the museum.

## 24. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Tarapata

1<sup>st</sup> February

Dear Beamy Black,

It's a frightful thing to ask, but are you sure? I've never met a man who deserves you, and I can barely imagine he exists!

I'd love to see you – to see you so happy – but I'm not sure I can come. There's quantities to do here, and I've hardly begun. Also, there's been some nasty mix-up at Will's English bank, and I have offered to wait for my salary. I am afraid coming to you would mean I'd have to sell your gifts to me – the camera *and* relic – probably for less than they are worth.

I have little real news. Will is researching locally, and already has his first South American find. It is a death portrait of an abbess, Josefa de la Concepcion. A copy has been known, but this the original by Pablo Antonio García del Campo, which disappeared from the convent soon after it was painted in 1803.\* A portrait of the dead – it is a peculiar thing to lose or to steal, or to paint in the first place. She has the face of a chalked weasel, done in shadows. On her head is a stiff papish crown decorated with red roses. A miniature portrait rests on her linen breast, with indistinct features – surely the Virgin – and her hand clutches lilies.

I have a fondness for the dead thing because she was the one who gave me the idea that I could sell your relic for my passage – *if* need be. I love the relic you gave me – such an *extraordinary* gift. It was when I was just beginning to discover how I loved you. You knew I was jealous of your trip to Italy, and you promised to bring something unique. Your promise touched me – but I didn't expect you'd keep it. I thought you'd

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\* The copy is by the painter's son, Victorino García Romero (1791-1870), and is presently displayed in the Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Bogotá, Colombia (reg. no. 3024). This letter represents the first confident attribution of the lost original to the father.

find me a small antique – a marble arm, leg, or finger, depending on your budget – whatever those old grand tourists left unscavenged. In short, I expected something similar to the ‘unique’ gifts *everybody* receives from Italy (although I’d have loved that finger – I would have). English protestants don’t buy relics for each other – it thrilled me! Now it is the only jewellery I wear regularly, and that lump of garnet just looks like a normal pendant, but I touch it and know I can open it to find that crude cartoon-face of the Virgin (is it mediaeval? a fake? we didn’t want to know, did we?), and then – untouchable but visible through the copper slot – that old thorn – that fraudulent old thorn that never touched Christ’s head.

I don’t know what the shopkeepers here would make of it. And I don’t think I could sell it.

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The above was written in a fearful sulk, for some reason. Forgive me. I’ll answer, directly, your question about Susanna and Tobit, and what I think about sight. It’s glorious to know you’ll receive this, that we can truly co-respond. Before, writing to you was already changing me, but you could see nothing of it. Your thoughts are the stuff of my life, and I can’t help relating them in curious ways *to* my life. For me, the single most perfect vision is yourself, and yet that is what I willingly left behind, simply to learn to see better. There are many things I miss about your *presence*, but one of them is the sight of you. This is something quite distinct from other feelings. It’s looking at you and being overwhelmed by my pleasure in how you look, held in a moment that can seem to last forever. And with an odd dissociation, because although in those instants the sight of you – your beauty – is bound up with our complete familiarity, at the same time in witnessing your loveliness I seem to experience a universal truth – that this is, quite objectively and unquestionably – one of the best views this world has to offer, to

*anyone*. And yet, of course, I never think all these things through in the moment – there is a more spiritual absorption in play.

Here, far away, *I* watch to see *you*, darling.

When it comes to Susanna, seeing a picture of her is not the way; close your eyes, or turn and look at mine, through them. Find a way to watch to see it.

I'll write better and more to the point very soon.

Your

Hal

## 25. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Tarapata

3<sup>rd</sup> February

Dear Black Eyes,

I started off feeling despondent again, partly because of the work that Will gave me this morning. It's one of the things that he brought back from Europe – a self-portrait of the eighteenth-century artist Mary Grace. Unfortunately there's something so mean about it – a modest head and shoulders of a woman who wears her bow and her lace awkwardly, who is too obviously wearing her good jewellery, whose mouth puckers, whose nose is too big and whose chin disappears. She looks at me knowing she's no Rembrandt, and I look at *her* wondering if Will dug her up for my sake, because he knows I'm keen on women artists.

This is still no way to begin. I will just finish this job (I am at my desk) and try again.

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In that gap I was thinking. You must do a wireless picture of me here, thinking. I have come up with these thoughts, which I'll present you quite as clearly as I can. And you must reply quick, my dear, and I must wait for you to reply. It will be hard. I have never found it so hard to write. If you knew how often my hand goes still and my eyes wander. To say such important things – to blurt them out onto paper – when I can't see your dear face responding – it is terrible. But the fact remains that I value my Brownie and my little relic so very highly. I cannot think of selling them. Or at least, I can only do so if you assure me that *you* are mine. Or else I'll have nothing.

You have always known how much I love you. We have always shown our affection, and let the other know they were loved. You know, probably, that here you

are in my dreams – as you always are, for good or ill. Just last night you were at the window here and I looked at you and you smiled and called me over and put your arm around me and we gazed out at the funny roofs and I knew my life here was perfect. But I woke and it wasn't true.

The sound of your voice – the feel of your waist – the very smell of you – are life itself to me. Without you – they'd have to stop calling it living and call it something else instead.

On this basis, logic dictates, you would tell me, that I sell my valuables – they're only objects – and leave. I should abandon my eccentric and slightly perplexing job, and get the next steamer home where I can tell you all this face to face.

But Stella, I cannot do it that way, I really cannot. If you want me I am yours, always. But I have a deep conviction – a rather terrible, wonderful knowledge, that I do not want you married. I know this is an awful thing to say to one's closest friend – people would think I wished you not to have your own life. But I take this leap of faith that you'll understand me. Flirtations are one thing – let everyone admire you dancing, I'll hang back in endless pleasure at the sight, but neither of us can marry, not without the irreparable loss of something we share.

This sounds like melodrama – petulance – goodness knows what. I know I do not have the grace of some writers; I know that in the capacity of – what? lover? – I can never be bold, or dashing, or shiver you up with my words, or whatever. But I must say quite clearly that whatever you think of my job, it is something to me. It is not much, and yes, I do at times suspect all is not above board. Life isn't perfect – oh but life *could* be perfect with you, Stella. The job is something – but *you are everything* – you are my chance of real happiness. But not if you marry. I *do* love my job a little, and if I run away from it, how can I return? I am not due a holiday. People abroad wait *years* before

they take one. So I won't be your maid of honour, Black Eyes. I won't sell up and leave unless you write to tell me you will *not* get married. Then I'll do it, for you, like a shot.

I think I've come to the end of what I have to say. I'm not going to read it through, because I'd be left in the same frightful and indecisive state I was an hour ago. I'm sorry I couldn't put things in better language, be more persuasive. But you see, I'm in a strange sort of mood and feel I must say what's on my heart and in my mind. I must trust that you *know*, that your *remember*, how sweetly I do love you, how completely I am your

Prince Hal

p.s. I won't write again until I hear from you, you know.

## 26. Charlotte Keppel to Nancy Fairfax

Tarapata

12<sup>th</sup> February

Dear Nancy,

I've owed you a letter for an age, and I'm sorry it's taken me so long. Life as a working woman is as busy as I'd hoped it would be – wonderfully busy, I hardly have time to think about a thing! When I do start to think, it can become rather lonely, and I miss my friends. How are you? How is your family? Tell me everything about life in the Lake District.

This city is beautiful, but working abroad hasn't made me a woman of the world! I do indeed have a magical view such as you'd never see in England – I'm at the top of a mountain that is covered with mad old houses – clay-red – and just over there I can see other mountains, covered with the greenest of trees. We are so high and the air is so thin that I am truly living in the sky; I know *you* would love it and talk with fairies at every turn. However, when one gets in the motorcar and drives through the streets, one is disappointed with half-built houses, hole-infested roads, and all the banalities of poverty.

*Inside* is another matter. The museum is special. Of course, my tasks occasionally feel repetitive, and cataloguing can be sedentary and lonely (although you know me – I've been known to talk to the artworks, and to imagine they reply!). It would be wrong to imply it was all glamour. But at the core of my being I'm *all right*. It gives me a thrill to have the key to this place, to be surrounded by such beauty, to spend time with it every day, and even to be able to call it *mine*, in a small way (that sounds too grasping).



William Forbes is a gem as an employer, although still rather a stranger to me. Did you meet him last year when he was in London? He loses none of his charm when one sees him more frequently, and when he comes down he makes work like a game. This morning he arrived with a box. He asked me to guess what was inside – I hadn't the faintest idea, and said so.

'At least try to guess' – from time to time he talks to me as if we're children.

For some reason what sprang to mind was Edward Williams' lost miniature portrait of Percy Shelley (whom I've been re-reading), and so I said so.\*

'Very cold – it's not a picture.' At this point I confess I became nervous in case he had brought a present for me; it wouldn't be unlike him and I never know how to respond to such things. But then he said, 'Think French Revolution,' and I knew it wasn't. I asked for another clue.

'Have you read Carlyle?'

'Of course I have – like a fiend, as a child.' I started to wrack my brains.

'Think of a scandal that wrecked everything for Marie Antoinette, though she was innocent.'

I thought. 'Well, you're making me think the Affair of the Necklace, but that was taken apart – the stones were sold.' The dear boy was already almost jumping in his excitement – I had guessed right. Do you know the story?† It's gripping. The wicked Countess de la Motte fraudulently buys a diamond necklace in the name of Marie Antoinette – the priciest necklace the world ever saw. La Motte ends up branded and jailed, while her husband flees and sells the gems in London and Holland. Poor Antoinette (innocent of this particular indiscretion, at least) is left looking like she was a

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\* To my knowledge, this is the only lost work documented in these letters that has since been found. The portrait was published in White (1940, 1:frontispiece).

† For 'The Diamond Necklace', see Carlyle (2002, 85-151).

party to it all – despite the fact that when the jeweller originally offered her the necklace, she refused, saying it would be more sensible to buy a warship.

William has combed through the papers of notorious jewellers from that time, following up the stories of their correspondents and their correspondents' descendants, and he has found not the necklace, but a skeleton of it. Continuing the tease, he insisted on putting it round my neck before he'd let me see it – in the glass. It is rather gruesome. It glitters emptily – hundreds of linked golden settings, scalloped and layered and full of fal-de-lals, each cradling nothing.

William has been spending an age reading 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century account books because nothing will deter him from trying to find the *actual* diamonds – all 500-plus of them – originally set in the necklace. By my calculations, even if it only takes him two months to track down each one, that will be *at least* eighty-three years' work. So it's to be hoped that he'll give up. I believe it's a reaction to recent disappointments – he has been a long time in Europe and hoped to be the one to find the lost Monna Lisa, and of course he wasn't.

So you see, dear Nancy, that even if we are all occasionally glum here, we make the best and have a gay time. I miss my mother and brother dreadfully, and you heard we parted on bad terms. But I don't regret my decision, not for a minute.

Forgive me all the weeks of silence, and write back as quickly as you like. Tell me all about *you*, now – I long to hear.

Your friend,

Charlotte

27. William Forbes to Ernesta Maria Reyes (postcard)

25<sup>th</sup> February

Dear Ernesta,

How are you, favourite cousin? Marvellous to see you Sunday. I've had an idea which will be right up your street. Jaime and I want to show off our little museum to a select crowd: it'd be fine to have a do, with you the hostess to bring it off – what do you say? There'd be food and flowers and all rest – only it must be perfect – and we wondered about a series of tableaux after the paintings. You'd direct these, my dear, in co-operation with our curator Miss Keppel, who is charming, and in any case I want to introduce you. I suspect she'll need a dress – something up to the minute so that people see she has excellent taste. What do you say? If it appeals, come one afternoon and we'll show you the paintings.

W

28. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Tarapatá

27<sup>th</sup> February

Dear Black Eyes,

There's been plenty of time since my letter, and I have had some forlorn moments. But the post is unreliable, so I'm trying to be rational and cheerful. Also – surely – even if you thought I'd written foolishly and selfishly, you wouldn't be angry with me for *very* long. Even if I misjudged our friendship, I trust it will still be *there*.

I had intended to wait for your letter; it is hard to write in this uncertainty. But I don't want you to miss out, such an awful lot is happening. Later, you'll tell me you love me – you will, won't you, darling, in one way or another? I could as soon believe red was yellow, as that *you'd* break my heart.

Of all the things occurring to distract me, one topping bit of news is that we're to host a party on Saturday. Will wants to show off the museum to the local great and good. It'll be on a small scale. No dancing, but there'll be a series of tableaux to foreshadow the unveiling of the paintings. I'll suddenly be in the company of *several* people who speak English, and obviously that idea's as miraculous to me now as breathing underwater.

Will has come up with a cousin (he has cousins! who knew?) to superintend everything. You'll imagine I would be a deal less sanguine if that role had fallen to me. She's been walking around opening connecting doors I'd never paid attention to (everything's always shut here, like a hotel). The rooms have become like little lozenges tacked onto one another which is not ideal but it can be made quite splendid. Amongst other luxuries, a chef has arrived.

Ernesta (the cousin) is really quite something, although I think she's undecided about me. This morning a host of flowers was delivered – white lilies and pink and orange paradise flowers – a splendid mass (I'm insisting *no* flowers in the museum itself, because they're spilling pollen, and will carry my point that far, with Will backing me up). Ernesta, helped by another cousin and two of our maids, carefully directed the arrangements. I couldn't understand what they were saying, but it looked as though she were creating the masterpiece of the century. I was confused and a bit alarmed in case I had the day wrong (we still have three days until the 'event'). So I asked Ernesta if it weren't rather soon for the flowers, that surely they wouldn't be at their best in three days time. She stared at me as if I were a piece of rubber, and said, 'But this is only a rehearsal!' I think I paused with my mouth agape, and then I couldn't help exclaiming that it must be rather expensive. She replied warmly, 'Do you think that my flowers are more expensive than your pictures? That the composition and form and colour of them are somehow simpler? How will I make a beautiful display without planning it?' I apologised – she had made me feel like a profligate encouraging Will and Jaime to spend all the family money on art! I couldn't help adding that I was only writing a catalogue, and that I have little idea of the artworks' financial worth or what is spent on them. Later Will reassured me that she *had* misunderstood, and that flowers *are* very much cheaper here than in Europe. But tomorrow I must try to be more tactful.

This afternoon, Ernesta, Will, Bluebeard and I had a long conversation about the tableaux. I was thrown because all of a sudden Bluebeard joined the talk in English, which he speaks perfectly – a slight accent, but perhaps rather better than Will, even. Of course this was a blow – not because I didn't know – but that, if he did deceive me, he could be so callous as to have no qualms owning it – though Will, I am sure, was unaware. Having to swallow this whilst keeping up with an animated debate was rather

too much. Even on top form, I think the diplomacy of casting would have been beyond me (isn't it interesting, how this word 'casting' applies to both acting and sculpture?). There are obvious problems – potential jealousies around who will play Venus. Then the fact that we only have three men willing to take part, and the ladies (she never says *women*) won't appear alongside servants, unless we just need to co-opt one little black boy – we were discussing the possibility of *A Harlot's Progress* – in which case it would be alright.

We're going to start with our so-called Apelles\* (I cannot believe it is genuine, whatever they say). It is ideal, with numerous figures in attitudes that vary in form and height, a plain background with no landscape, strong colours in the drapes, and much of the drama arising from strong facial expressions.

Will and I, who love Blake, were initially keen to do a plate from Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.† We could also have given an impression to each of the guests – we've no press, but you know I am proficient at printing with the back of a spoon. However, Blake is difficult because most of his figures are deployed in humanly impossible attitudes. I suggested the plate with Count Ugolino and his children in prison, which is basically just a row of five clothed figures sitting huddled on the floor. I rather fancied putting a white beard on Bluebeard and making him play the cannibal count! However, even this image is unachievable: the second figure on the left has his (her?) knees angled forward in a way that none of us could begin to re-enact without having broken our ankles or stretched our thighs on a rack. It is interesting, Beamy Black, how planning tableaux gives one a kind of bodily empathy with the pictures that one cannot have through other means. Also, although Blake's print is full of emotion, we did not

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\* See letter 8.

† See letter 16.

see how we could get the claustrophobia into the setting, nor, with most of the faces hidden, recreate the foreboding that Blake magically conveys.

Then Will said he had a couple of new pieces we could use, and went to fetch the first. I felt a pang not to be the sole viewer, especially when I saw what it was: Titian's *Venus* admiring herself in a mirror.\* Ours is the lost clothed one; you'll certainly know the nude versions from photographs. Cupid holds the mirror, and Venus looks: we see her left eye in the glass. Her nude torso faces us, one hand on her breast; the other hand holds a cloak on her lap, and there is sumptuous drapery all around. There are different versions: in some she wears a quantity of jewellery, including a pearl bracelet, pearl earrings, and pearls plaited into her hair. The best surviving one is in Washington, and I once saw a copy by Van Dyck in his sketchbook at Chatsworth, in which Venus's arms are bizarrely muscular and she has no jewellery at all.

In *ours*, in any case, she's wearing a shift. Surprisingly, this one drew great censure from Richard Cumberland, who saw it at the Royal Palace in Madrid. He complained about 'the person half-uncovered, half-concealed, with such a studied negligence of dress, and so much playfulness of expression and attitude, that the draperies seem introduced for no other purpose but to attract the attention more strongly to the charms they do not serve to hide.'<sup>†</sup> However, this is not true – she's very decent. Will and I believe the breasts may have been painted over in the late 18th century under orders of Charles IV of Spain, who threatened to burn all the royal nudes.<sup>‡</sup> Ernesta said it was ever so lucky they had been painted over, because otherwise we couldn't use it in the tableaux! What makes the picture special, in my view, is a certain cosiness; one feels as if one's in the room with the grand goddess. Will tracked it down in northern

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\* For all versions of this *Venus* and their provenances, see Wethey (1969-75, 3:242-245).

<sup>†</sup> See Cumberland (1787, 17-19).

<sup>‡</sup> This letter is the first evidence that the breasts were painted over. For the threat of burning see Wethey (1969-75, 3: 244).

Portugal – it hasn't been seen since it was looted by Joseph Bonaparte, and then got lost in a battle.

Will had one more show-stopper for us, too heavy for him to carry. He took us over and unlocked a cupboard. Upright in one of the narrow, vertical sections (our cupboards are subdivided for safe storage) was a stone bas-relief. Its surface could only be seen obliquely, at the edge, but Will gave me a heart attack by asking casually, 'Can you recognise it?' All eyes turned away from the work, to look at my eyes, and I've never had a more daunting test of connoisseurship.

It was certainly marble. I thought that the top of what I saw might be a ball of leaves – the v-shaped points, even seen sideways, were lovingly carved. Then below it – was that a finger? The profile of a hand, with some sort of bracelet (a vine?) wrapped around the wrist, which sloped back in toward the invisible centre. Downwards from there, the side of the stone was blank, until, at the bottom, there was a brief moment, an explosion of drapery, carved with verve – with such pleasure, one could tell drapery had only just been discovered, by artists.

I felt I knew, but to be wrong, with this name, would be ridiculous. Sure and yet unsure, I had to try something.

'Can this be one of Calymachus's maenads?' (these, Black Eyes, adorned an Athenian monument to Dionysus – there are copies, but the originals have never been seen).\*

'Ha ha! You are marvellous, Charlotte,' he said that – and I felt, not proud, but just relieved.

Finally Will suggested a funny painting, Le Sueur's *Sacrifice to Juno* for the finale.\* It's true it has good qualities for staging. Gruesomely, Will wanted the

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\* Original reliefs attributed to Calymachus (40 B.C.). There are Roman copies in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain (ref. nos. E00042, E00043, E00045 and E00046).



crouching men in the left foreground (Bluebeard and Ernesta's young brother) to slit the throat of an animal before the spectators' very eyes, but none of the rest of us would have it. I was afraid of the unpredictability of spilling blood in a museum, and, as the other two pointed out, it would be in terrible taste. So we'll use a stuffed horse (apparently there is a taxidermist in town who lends things to artists). Behind that, there is a young flutist who can be played by a girl, and then in the centre we'll have a grandly draped priestess with her arms outstretched like that Christ in the Raphael cartoons. The real problem, in my view, as I pointed out, is a prominent statue of Juno. It's one thing having a human actor pretending to be a sculpture, but in my view we can't produce a scene that contains statues *and* real people. Whatever we use in terms of clothes or paint, it's much too obvious that all is flesh. Will said to leave that to him – he is sure he can get his scene painter to mock something up in plaster. I have doubts – rough painting of back-drops is one thing, but no scene painter could create a plausible antique statue from plaster in two days. However, I let the matter drop – it is not so very significant, is it?

I'm relieved that I'm not appearing in the tableaux myself; the curator will be present in her own character! As will Will. And now, though it has been an exhausting day, my work is not over: I have bas-reliefs and a Titian to research. This work should be a pleasure, but I am so tired I just want to go to bed. But Saturday will be a flop if the curator can't talk intelligibly about the art.

Excuse me for going on so, if it is dull. As long as I receive nothing from you, I have nothing to reply to. Nobody here knows anything real about me. Black Eyes, I am so afraid you haven't written because you're angry. You wouldn't be so mean, not if you knew *really* what things have been like here.

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\* There is a print of this painting by an anonymous engraver after an intermediary drawing by a Mrs Soyer; see Mérot (2000, 389, and fig. 533).

Watching to see you, I imagine you: a wish.

I am patient, and I am stubborn – you can't be silent forever.

Harry

## 29. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Tarapata

2<sup>nd</sup> March

Dear Stella,

But you must write to me: you *must*, you know. I'm giving you this one chance, stretching my faith as far as I'm able. It is late on Saturday night, or perhaps early Sunday morning. I am alone, and I am disturbed, and there is no-one I can tell it to unless I can tell you.

From the start, I was worried, at first by my dress. Like everything, it was organised in a rush, so Ernesta brought a seamstress to sew me into it. It felt like a second skin, I wasn't sure I'd ever shrug it off – not the feeling of it, anyhow. It is a copy of a Parisian frock by Paul Poiret, and I have the height for it, but not the confidence. Apparently my own dresses were not good enough. One part falls black and slender to the floor, and then there is an upper layer of cream and black, with a v-neck, a soft pink scarf tied at the empire line, and wide oriental sleeves. The skirt of this upper layer is held wide at mid-thigh with a fur-edged hoop, tilting jauntily and generally meaning one can't see one's own feet. This section is hand-painted with large pink peonies – the whole thing looks like a piece of modern art. Also you know I've always been thin, and I have become thinner here – I did look a freak. Then there was a black helmet-like turban that cut my face off at the eyebrows!

I looked at my reflection and told Ernesta: 'I feel a clown.'

She replied, 'I know why you say that' – a fine beginning! – 'but you are lovely. For example, you have a peculiarly English look about your eyes – you don't know that, do you? It's not their colour; it's the shape. They droop down at the corners – pull down, so your two eyes make the shape of a roof. When you go home and you're among your

countrypeople again you'll notice how common this is there – you'll see things about the English you'd not noticed before. I will tell you a secret – many people say it's an ugly shape, but you're one of the few who suit it – your eyes droop down like they'll turn to tears, and of course you're so white. That's why you think you resemble a clown.'

'Thank you,' I said – though it was the most mixed up compliment I've ever heard – 'but I still don't feel myself.'

'You know,' she said, 'as a curator you must be able to mix socially with the rich – you are not like a governess who can hide away.'

'Goodness,' – I think I had the spirit to sound cross – 'perhaps I'd be better off teaching drawing at a working men's club.' And I got away. I don't think she's a mean person at all, but she irritates me. After my last letter we had another polite row – about the tableaux. Ernesta desired the pictures to serve as a frame for the ladies' beauty, and I wanted the opposite. Her idea was to begin with a picture that would – with clever use of the fading electric lighting that is now installed – magically quicken, come to warmth and life. My preference was to start with a living breathing tableau that would then freeze into the eternal masterpiece. My idea won out, and this has confirmed her poor opinion of me.

Then the party began. I drank too much champagne, and each glass made me more sober. Although people apparently *could* speak English, they were reluctant to do so. Perhaps they lacked the courage, doubted how their language skills would compare to their neighbours. Also, I think they have not met a female scholar before. I met tons of people, but didn't have a single meaty conversation.

Incidentally, Black Eyes, Bluebeard's behaviour has been *most* peculiar. He still has not spoken a word to me directly, and I think his silence has become a sort of penance.

The tableaux were magical, and greatly improved my opinion of Ernesta. She was a terrific Venus – and frankly, I can't help admiring a woman who casts herself in that role. Her tiny godson played the cherub, and managed to stay tremendously still. The electric lighting worked beautifully, and the artworks were on wheeled platforms, so we could get each one quickly into place. The finale, which was the *Sacrifice to Juno*, had more scenery than any other tableau, and Ernesta thought up a marvellous expedient to buy us time at that point. One of the ladies who has strong features and curly hair acted the part of Hilliard's miniature of Sir Philip Sidney (you remember, the one Will was wearing when I first met him).<sup>\*</sup> She wore a magnificent ruffled shirt and passed well. She posed behind a simple black screen with an oval hole cut out of it, made by the scene painter, who painted an ornate frame around the hole. With subdued lighting – hey presto! – a huge, floating, miniature portrait. I walked around with a lamp and showed people the original. Meanwhile, behind the screen, Will set up the finale.

It was as marvellous as it promised to be. The scene painter had managed pillars and an excellent statue, it seemed, on a pedestal, and a stuffed peacock had its head on the statue's lap. Did you know the peacock was sacred to Juno? After her pet dog Argus was killed, she salvaged its hundred eyes and put them on the peacock's tail. The seamstress had done a marvellous job with everyone's robes, and there was a real fire burning on the altar, suitably tamely. The stuffed horse beneath the knife looked gloriously savage. Then the lights faded and we wheeled the painting in front, and everyone sighed. Sueur's work is full of light, and even grey stone seems heavenly. The

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<sup>\*</sup> For Hilliard see letter 2. For the other tableaux mentioned here, see letter 28.

robes are the most luminous blues, reds, peaches and olive greens, and the altar flames appeared to crackle just as fiercely as our real fire.

Afterwards, Will escorted everyone back upstairs for some music, and I lingered in the museum to catch my breath. I had already noticed, in the statue, small black holes in the nostrils, and thought this a lifelike touch. But as I lingered, I saw Juno move, helped down from the pedestal by a servant, who broke her out of her drapes (some white fabric hardened by a layer of plaster) and used a wet towel to rub the layer of plaster from her eyes so she could open them. Her dark eyes, amid the fresh plaster, looked uncanny, and I fled. I don't know who it was – one of our maids? – no-one would be recognisable in that state.

Finally, the evening is over, Black Eyes, and I'm in my room and don't know what to do. I know that in former colonies – especially Spanish ones – servants may not be treated with the same level of human dignity we give them at home. But this is beyond the pale. It didn't only wrong the girl, but deceived the audience, who were unaware we were watching something indecent (the torso is nude). I want to know who was responsible, but I am uncertain if I can bring myself to speak of the affair. I must, I suppose, see about getting my wages, and coming home.

The only thing that can delay me now is your letter: the uncertainty of travelling without knowing what is waiting for me would be intolerable.

It is late, and I am so tired. Pray for me, and write to me.

Hal

p.s. I have written to Nancy and she hasn't replied. I oughtn't to read anything into it. After all, I made *her* wait long enough for a letter. But you haven't said anything to her, have you?

30. Laurence Keppel to Charlotte Keppel

Rathsford, Ringmer

10<sup>th</sup> March

Dear Lottie,

I take up my pen to write to you reluctantly – but not because I don't want to. If you imagine that, you're unjust. You often judge me harshly. But that doesn't matter. You'll see that I don't judge you half so strictly.

Since I found out where you are, I have been unwilling to write because as you'll soon discover, hearing from me is likely to hurt you. But receiving your latest letters – letters not addressed to me – and scanning them for news of your well-being like someone seeking crumbs from another's table, is not tolerable.

And I know, sister, that what you showed there of your heart was not meant for me. If you'll allow me to put it frankly, and for once, sentimentally, I'll say that I've remembered our hearts used to beat together before we were even born. It saddens me to read you so affectionate – it's been a time since you showed me that side of you – and to know that I am myself cut off from it.

As for any part of your letters that you might feel awkward about another seeing, even a twin, don't think of it anymore.

Mother is fine although I am not going to hide from you that worrying about you has not been good for her health. But you needn't worry, all is alright with us. I have a good job as the second manager in Lloyd's auctioneers which means I am able to stay at home – so you see, after all your caterwauling, it was I who ended up attached to the apron-strings. I don't say this because I'm not happy – I am – but simply to make a point. Perhaps you'll think me mean-spirited. But I'm not one to linger over letters as

you do, with your draft copies, and a scrawl-out here, and there a blot where your thoughts have frozen with the pen still carelessly on the paper.

I wish you'd come home, Lottie, because however good, in some ways, the opportunity may seem to you to be, I do not like the sound of it. Although I'm sure you are safe, I would not exactly call it well. I am going to send a servant out to you as soon as I can find someone suitable, and if, as I hope, you would like to come home, she will accompany you and I'll arrange money at the embassy.

The oddest thing, actually, thinking about lost art, is that your photographic portrait has gone missing – which must add to the many arguments that should bring the original home to us as soon as is practically possible.

I just realise I did not perhaps spell it out – Miss Marsden has forwarded the whole packet of your letters here with a note that she'll not be receiving any more.

Sorry, Lottie, you know. Do keep writing to *me* now – you know you have to write to someone.

Laurie



## 31. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden

Tarapata

17<sup>th</sup> March

Stella,

I'm not heart-broken – don't dare to imagine it. I am *furious*. This is your last chance to reply to me. If you don't, you are cut out of my life forever. Do you hear?

I am so livid that I have been unable to sleep or eat. I don't know if things are out of order here or if I am seeing things. If I am, *you* are to blame.

Last night I sat at my desk till morning, and eventually walked up past Bluebeard's workshop. A strange sight within. Bluebeard sighing and laughing to himself, looking at a wall, on which everything was blackened and destroyed. He raised a hand. A huge gush of water erupted from the wall and disappeared. As the water flowed, flames gradually emerged too. I swear this happened. I shrieked, but everything was so noisy that Bluebeard didn't hear. The flames raged and grew, but confined themselves to that wall. Then the flames spluttered and died – not suddenly, as if extinguished, but slowly shrinking. I was witnessing a fire in reverse. And what was left in its place was astonishing. Usually that workshop wall is blank – the whole room is mundane and manly, a laboratory with benches, bottles and tools. But now that the fire had run or reversed its course, the wall left in its place was it was pure rococo swank – the flounciest mirrors, and duck-egg green everywhere. In the midst were a couple of paintings, which Bluebeard calmly took off the wall – the whole wall then disappeared.

I ran. But I got enough of a glimpse of the paintings to recognise one of them on my desk this morning. It is Hogarth's *Danae*. Do you know of it, traitor? Walpole stuffily condemned the Danae as 'a meer nymph of drury' (he also didn't like the jaded

nurse in the foreground, who bites down on one of the gold coins to test it).<sup>\*</sup> But honestly, what did Walpole know about hilarity or about the beauty of lower-class girls? She is ravishing, gently laughable– the best combination, for one should always be able to laugh at the beloved. Don't you think? Dr Parsons lectured in 1746 that this painting was exemplary of the Passion of Desire no less. He specified: 1. the pupil was turned up and only the bottom of it visible 2. the eyelids tended to close slightly 3. the mouth was open 4. the tongue-tip was visible at the edge of the teeth and 5. both lips and cheeks were redder than usual. Now, traitor, try to achieve this effect in front of a mirror, won't you? You will have to tip your head forward in order to see your reflection. I just did it, and the effect was Zombi-like and an excellent warning against passion.

I'm warning you again: this is your last chance to be decent, or you're beyond the pale for good. And *don't* go telling people I said things that I didn't say.

Charlotte Keppel

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<sup>\*</sup> For Hogarth's *Danae*, Walpole's comment and Parson's lecture, see e.g. Paulson (1991, 2:104-5).

## 32. Laurence Keppel to Charlotte Keppel (postcard)

25<sup>th</sup> March

Dearest Lottie,

You must write to me or to no-one, you know deary? So be a doll, and write to me.

Love,

Laurie

## 33. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (postcard)

2<sup>nd</sup> April

You know why I'm sending a pc. Topping weather here but some things are peculiar. I have seen my own face in the cupboard. I'd like to write and tell you about it but expect it's simpler to write direct to my brother isn't it? I'm thinking of taking a long trip by 'bus'. You can write c/o Laurie if you think there's anything to say. C

## 34. William Forbes to Jaime Forbes

La Posada de San Antonio

10<sup>th</sup> April

Dear Jaime,

Today I felt so close I thought I could smell her.

Oh I am mad – how I am mad! At last I have found a track of her – she is in Villa de Leyva. *Is?* I didn't mean to write *is*. Her ghost is here, and she's left some other treasure – *herself* is long gone. I found her ghost in attractive lodgings not far from the town square: one of these rural colonial hotels in which the indoors and outdoors blend. It has a courtyard with flowers and a little pond that is complete with fountain and bored fish.

I stayed the night – it is pleasant. The bed is spread with a lace counterpane made by the owners, who try to sell one bits of lace as souvenirs.

But do you know what sign that angel-devil of mine left behind her? Only my Bruegel behind the counter in the reception! *My Bruegel!*\* Its value is more than their whole town put together. I lost my self-possession when I saw it, and didn't talk to the patron about it sensibly, so I am afraid they now suspect its worth. They confirmed that she had brought it to them, and not *sold* it – oh no, not she – but exchanged it for some nights' board! They told me – with a horrible air of smug charity – that they had even given her some pesos for her onward journey. A few pesos! I offered immediately to buy the little darling back from them, but oh no – they have become *attached* to it! They had initially been opposed to accepting art instead of good money, but she stood patiently at their counter – so they told me – pointing out all the exceptional marvels of the miniature: they were particularly taken by the cat with the arched back warming

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\* See letter 15.

itself in front of the beggar's gilded fire. They said that she mostly just pointed and let them look, but that she did use a few words of Spanish. A few words of *Spanish*? Where has she got them from? I resent her having them, I do.

I tried to intimidate the good couple into parting with my miniature – offered them many times the value of lodging – but they wouldn't budge – have fallen for Bruegel head over heels. I think they could see quite well I wasn't going to fetch the constable.

Don't I deserve to find her? Am I not carrying around Mary Queen of Scots' ring to propose to her? And it is an excellent ring, lost for a hundred years, with a splendid ruby supported by twin caryatids (they look like alien children), with a hidden compartment enamelled with clasping hands. Why, oh why, did I lose time waiting? She was *always* a wife to me – nothing else – *always*. And I never admired her more, or thought her so worth loving, as when I saw the canvases cut from all the frames, the solander boxes empty of prints and the miniatures gone from their cases. If *she*, who is neither a thief nor a magician, who knows neither this place nor its language, could rob you and me and disappear so successfully, what could she *not* do? Oh I am so furious at myself that I didn't act differently.

I hate to leave the Bruegel here, but I'll have to do so for the time being. I must pursue her before the trail goes cold.

Don't be idle, brother, by yourself. And don't dare to reproach me. It is *you* who frightened her away, and she was never *yours*.

Will

## 35. Charlotte Keppel to Laurence Keppel

An omnibus, horses resting

10<sup>th</sup> April

Dear Laurie,

It made me mad and sad at once to get your letter. And I'm only talking about that part of it that referred to your own feelings and my relationship with *you* (I can't comment about Miss Marsden and you won't expect me to). You made some good points and I am sorry, dear brother, if I have been selfish. I truly am. I think it is a weakness in me, that there are some goals that I have, some desires, and I go straight towards these blindly.

As for what made me mad, it was your dear stupid old arrogance – I hadn't realised how much I missed you, Laurie.

Sorry, too, that I didn't reply straight away. As well as being literally on the move, my mind has been at sixes and sevens. You were right in your conjecture that all was not well in my job. There was something unnatural about it. I believed that they needed a scholar and that I fitted the bill, and I still do believe that, but I have also suspected, in fits and starts, that there was more to it.

You may imagine that I became rather desperate after receiving your letter. At least, you may *not* be able to imagine it, but you should try. Many nights, instead of trying to sleep, I went down to the museum and worked under the new electric lights. Much of my work can be done with the mind of an automaton – measuring edges and counting figures and so forth – I daresay yours is similar. That sort of thing can lull one into a trance-like state, if real sleep is not available. Finally there was a night when I ran out of work. I felt frustrated because I knew Forbes had more pieces that he was keeping back from me, so I found his keys and set about searching the other cupboards.

I started looking gleefully, like a child in a toyshop. Until I found something that shouldn't exist. I'm not certain you'll believe what I saw, but I checked a dozen times. I opened a cupboard containing five oil paintings slotted perpendicularly into shelf. And there I was, in the second painting from the right, raising my hands to my head and stuck on a plinth, in the attitude of Galatea. Pygmalion was at work finishing chiselling my feet. It was so *like*, Laurie, I was shocked beyond thought. And yet it was *certainly* four centuries or so old, and I recognised the sharp bright intensity of Primaticcio. There is a print after this painting by Léon Davent – you can see it in the British Museum.\* Don't doubt my connoisseurship here, Laurie.

What I did, quickly and cowardly, was to shove the painting back in the cupboard and lock the door. I did not want it known, you see, that I had seen it.

After that I went upstairs and packed a small bag. I'm not ashamed to admit I was afraid. I waited until the very first rays of dawn, when some indirect sunlight would enter through the hatches and give a purer light in my museum. I went in, and checked the Primaticcio one more time, to determine that what I had seen was precisely my own face in a sixteenth-century painting – that every feature and freckle and expression and twisted joint was *mine* – and as soon as I was certain, I left.

However, I am not coming straight back to Sussex. I don't want to sound heartless, but I've seen enough of prisons to learn that one is very, very foolish if one enters them readily. Be assured that I have means, and that wherever I go, as long as there is a postal service, I'll write. You can send to me c/o the embassy if you like, but bear in mind there may be *considerable* delay before I get things.

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\* Léon Davent (flourished 1540-1556) after Francesco Primaticcio (1504-1570), *Pygmalion and Galatea*, etching, British Museum, reg. no. 1851,0208.96.



Travelling by 'bus' here is quite an experience. Yesterday I sat beside the window where I got thrown against the frame at every bend, and I now have a most impressive bruise, the colour of the bitten flesh of a cherry, and the size of a large potato.

Thanks, brother, for all the expressions of kindness and care in your last letter. We will drive again soon, so I must go.

Lottie

## 36. Charlotte Keppel to Laurence Keppel

Hotel \_\_\_\_\_

13<sup>th</sup> April

Dear Laurie,

I am writing to you again, old dear, from a peculiar position. I am in a *lovely* place in the Andes, in a small and very hospitable hotel, hiding in a concealed cupboard off a pantry (I happened to have pen and paper in my pocket, but please excuse the handwriting). My employer is chasing me around the country. Don't worry though – I am making friends here, and I am absolutely not in the wrong, and the fact that he hasn't called the police means that everything at the museum was frightfully crooked and he won't do so. Sorry brother dear, this is a bit of bravado, which I *need*.

It is only thanks to my cleverness and his foolishness that I knew he was coming. You see, he travelled in the family motor car, probably not imagining I would recognise it. But it's a fine, red-and-black fellow with the family coat of arms etched on the side (what an affectation to put them on a motor!). I even recognised the arms from the silver which was used recently at our party. Funny that he wouldn't realise an art historian would remember details like that.

Of course some townspeople will have directed him to the hotel where the 'Englishwoman' is staying. Luckily, I have been here a few days, and am pally with my hosts, who have agreed to hide me. They seem full of goodwill, but I have also let them know that I have gold (I brought Marie Antoinette's necklace with me)\* in case it comes to a bribery contest. As I await the result I thought it would be a good time to fill you in on my doings and assure you of my safety.

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\* See letter 26.

Bus travel in this country is glorious. One sees such masses of mountains, forests etc – and everyone is tremendously friendly. I don't know why I ever had the opposite impression. We go at a lick; I feel sorry for the poor horses when it's uphill. Whenever we stop for refreshments I save my sugar for them as a reward (the locals think this mad – they're addicted to sugar). They are a people with peculiar habits, like soup for breakfast! A thin kind of broth, with various potatoes and yams in it. I have not seen the Alps, of course, as you have, Laurie, but these mountain roads are stunning, with great green vistas and thin air, red rock and pale skies – trees and forests clinging determinedly, higher than one would have thought possible. Every now and then when the bus winds under a particularly sheer cliff, all the travellers go silent and hold their breath. On my first trip, I thought this was for fear of robbers, but I have learnt it is in fact a fear of rockfalls, which cause a great deal of damage.

I have been making some good swaps and have got hold of two small souvenirs for you and mother – adorable anthropomorphised pottery – fat squat pots with round cheeks, big ears and ear-rings, pursed lips and protruding arms, very funny things, pre-Columbian.

What else? Oh, my Spanish is improving daily. It is easy to learn because people are curious about me (they see few foreigners, especially single women) and they want to communicate, and so one learns. One of the maids in this hotel christened me 'Sabanita' almost as once, though I kept telling them my real name. Finally I learnt what it means – 'little sheet', because of my colour!

I see I'm making it sound all very idyllic, and certainly there have been the usual inconveniences of travel: bad food and stomach aches, awful cold rooms (nights up in the Andes are cold – in the day the sun is fierce). But the truth is, brother, I've been most awfully *happy* these last weeks. It's perhaps a rather brittle happiness – I do feel a

hole in my heart – and it's madness that I'm writing to *you* like this, and not to Stella.

Still, yes, I'm happy – yes, I feel free as a bird.

And at last I'm feeling the *benefits* of not receiving my mail – no one can ask me any questions! I suppose there are letters from you waiting for me at the embassy, but they'll have to keep waiting.

Sorry, all the same, if I'm still causing heartache. And love, much love,

Lottie

p.s. not to worry – Forbes is gone. They referred to him as an English gentleman! Funny – I don't really think of him as English any more. I'll move on again tomorrow.

## 37. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (unsent)

Hotel \_\_\_\_\_

14<sup>th</sup> April

Dear Black Eyes,

I have decided to write, just this one letter. I have little to say to you; I just want to tell you about a dream I've had. I am a stupid thing I suppose. You've made it clear you don't cherish me, but I still trust you with a dream. Just that.

Funny how I truly thought our friendship was unassailable. Did you think so, too?

Let me see (I wonder why I so much want to tell you this). I was back in the museum. I was cataloguing a painting by Primaticcio,<sup>\*</sup> in which one of the figures is uncannily like me (this painting really exists: in it, Pymalion puts the finishing touches to his sculpture of Galatea, just before she comes to life). I stood up to measure the picture, and I started to feel heavy and sluggish. Bluebeard was there, looking at me. He spoke to me for the very first time. He said he thought I had a strange way of looking. I asked him to explain. He said that in those moments between us – here he became Will (and there *have been* moments between us) – he saw that I looked at his desire, that I understood what it was like to find a woman so achingly beautiful and strange, that there was a sort of camaraderie, as though I were outside myself, able to see myself as another, an object. Because of you, darling, I know how it feels to be a man, and I can play both parts, see with both eyes. There is a 'yes' in eyes. e-yes. I've only just noticed. Bluebeard – it was him again – knew how I felt about you. He had read all my letters, you see. I was furious, but my body felt so sluggish, unlike itself.

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\* See letter 35.

I said to Bluebeard, ridiculously frank, as one can only be in dreams (and occasionally, in letters, when one knows there is a long time before they will arrive) that he had explained, perhaps, what his brother saw in me, but what about himself – why did *he* look at me so queerly? And my body felt more and more sluggish, Black Eyes. I felt it stiffening in a certain attitude, and I was cold. I moved my legs, and then it was as though I could never move them again – would never want to nor be able to. I was terribly cold, and heavy. Even my eyes started to droop. I looked down towards Primaticcio's painting of Pygmalion carving Galatea, and just as I realised I was standing in her posture, my own vision started to blur and fade. I wanted to ask Bluebeard about it, but I found that I couldn't open my mouth to ask him, and I couldn't hear if he said anything either.

I woke up in my little hotel room in a cold sweat. How funny dreams are, and how terrible. Do you have ones like that? I felt like a child. I dried my body off with a towel (I was so *cold*) and wrapped the blankets around and around me.

It's for you decide, Stella, when you see the hotel envelope, if you'll open this and read it or not. It's for you to decide if you send it on to my brother, or if you keep my trust, as, again and again, I keep hoping you will.

Charlotte

## 38. Charlotte Keppel to Laurence Keppel

Hotel \_\_\_\_\_

15<sup>th</sup> April

Dear Laurie,

Although I love this country, I feel I'm coming to the end of things here – and not just because I am running out of things to barter for my board. I am tired of being stared at, seen as an alien. Here in the countryside, people respond to my features and voice with a good natured hilarity, as though my ridiculousness was so obvious that I could not possibly be hurt by their response. And then, as swiftly as one makes friends, on the road, so swiftly one drifts away again, and there's never anyone who really *knows* you – no-one to remind you what your own qualities are, so that I start to feel disorientated, forgetting myself. Even *you*, Laurie, who have made a habit of ignoring and laughing at me and pig-headedly refusing to understand me – you have always been there as someone in relation to whom I exist. I am anxious to see you; I think we are already better friends, don't you?

I wish you hadn't read my letters to Stella Marsden. Don't look at them again, please. I was so footy.\* I am livid with myself and her, on alternate days, that we let such a half-baptised moment ruin a perfectly good friendship. I even wrote another letter to her yesterday, but I've decided I certainly shan't send it – I think it's too late to fix things. That won't be the only hard thing to come home to. I am nervous to face Mother.

Perhaps I'll stay here after all, but in a slightly bigger city – try to build a life. But I really don't know. A little bit of me regrets running away from my job. I hope I

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\* An old Sussex expression, meaning something like 'foolish'.

can find another one. Sorry, Laurie, my letters are hideously self-absorbed. I should ask you about you. It's just it will be such an age before I see your replies.

I'll let you know what happens.

Your,

Lottie



39. Stella Marsden to Charlotte Keppel

4 Gore Street

15<sup>th</sup> April

Dear Prince Hal,

May I still call you that? I am going to send this direct to the British Embassy, and trust you'll pick it up eventually. I won't send it to your brother, you know. I tremble at the thought you will not forgive me, for several things, and one of them is for sending your letters to him. I confess that I knew it was a spiteful thing to do. I am so sorry.

I have many things to say, and once again, you can't hear them. How is your bus trip? I hope it's full of marvels. I know how you've longed to travel.

It is awful trying to find words, isn't it? It actually makes one realise that one doesn't know with any precision how one feels. I'm sorry I wrote so coldly, so stiffly and so unlike myself. I was shocked. I felt that *you* had written unlike *yourself*. In your latest letters, I'd felt you'd changed, and I didn't like it. I think it frightened me, or perhaps made me slightly envious. I was afraid you had lost your keen sense of right and wrong (you know I felt that), and actually this was one of the things I've always loved about you: you're a truly *moral* person.

After a lot of reflection, and a lot of sadness, I have come to realise that you cannot have changed that much, so I'm sorry I doubted you. Also I should say how madly I love you for your courage in writing to me like that. We think to ourselves that it is very much in the course of things to love a woman, as I love you and you me. But it's a vast step – a real gulf – between that love, and then following it through to its logical conclusion. And that seems to me to be what *you*, with all your usual tenacity, are trying, honestly, to do.

I won't say I'm sorry that I planned to get married. I know that we used to dream of spending our lives together, but you *did* leave. Did you think I could freeze things here? But I *have* called it off. I won't pretend I haven't felt miserable about it too – I miss Donald. But I've called it off because of your letter, if that means anything to you. I can't say I'll never get married, but it would be dishonest to do so at this moment, because of the way you've made me feel.

One of the things you've made me feel, darling Hal, is left behind – so very left behind. Not just in England. Something that delighted and excited me about you was how we'd break all the old rules together. I feel that you have been off breaking them by yourself, and have left me to get staid, and defensive, and lost.

Come home, and talk to me. I'll be miserable until you do. Until you smile and say you forgive me.

Stella

40. Charlotte Keppel to Stella Marsden (postcard)

1<sup>st</sup> May

Thanks for your letter I am coming on the next steamer. Don't you like this topping view of the opera house? It is one of the many things here I have *not* seen and yet I am coming *home*. CK

41. Charlotte Keppel to Laurence Keppel (postcard)

1<sup>st</sup> May

Hope you and mother well, I am on the next steamer. Arrive Southampton May 10<sup>th</sup>.

You needn't meet me, but please save a cold meal. CK

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## Conclusion

### Lost Lines

Even before you turned your head  
 you knew it was one of them---  
 neither woman nor man  
 but one of those images  
 that sweep through revolving doors  
 into thinner air,  
 leaving a draught where you stand,  
 a shiver down your spine.

Your life isn't long enough  
 to follow where they are going.  
 You will come to an end, die  
 and be forgotten about  
 and they will be tapping a little foot  
 on the other side of town,  
 where someone half turns their head,  
 knowing it is one of them.

Hugo Williams (1990, 46)

This thesis has explored what lost art *is*, discussing how and with what consequences art persists when no longer extant. I have shown how lost artworks survive through acts of reception, and how these can extend to acts of restitution. To begin with, in my introduction, I demonstrate what a vital role lost art plays in our cultural heritage, both because numerous individual works have key positions in the high art canon, and indeed, because lost works of art have a widespread popular appeal. Nevertheless, the distinctive nature of lost art, and the reasons it means so much to us, have not until now been the subject of sustained critical attention.

My first chapter focuses on a lost oil painting, Vanessa Bell's *The Nursery*.

While previous readings of this have been curtailed by its unavailability for examination, I have given a close reading that acknowledges and explores elements for which there is

no sensory evidence – such as colour and scale. I present *The Nursery* as – no longer a painting – but instead a conglomeration of various visual and verbal texts that become memorials to it, particularly a black and white photograph in the archive of the art dealers Agnew's. I trace a dynamic relationship between lost art and memory, arguing that lost art gives rise to a unique kind of nostalgia, haunted by the idea of memory loss. I think through the special conditions around visual reproduction of lost works, showing how these are peculiarly ghostly, frozen in time.

The reception of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* during its disappearance from the Louvre in 1911-13 is the focus of my second chapter. Whereas the first emphasised the idea of *visual* reproduction, here I investigate the *literary* representation of lost artworks, and the relationship of this to the genre and theory of ekphrasis. Exploring journalistic responses to the *Mona Lisa* and other lost paintings, I argue that the loss of art opens the way for new, accessible kinds of writing, which I call spekphrasis. I discuss how the popular appeal of art loss has impacted upon museums. Thinking through some enduring metaphors for the museum – home, cemetery – I demonstrate how the loss of art, like the risen dead, reinvigorates these metaphors in disturbing ways.

In my third chapter I move on to a work that isn't usually thought of as lost – William Blake's series of *Virgil* woodcuts. I focus on the lost elements of this: the edges of the images, three lost woodcuts, drawings, and a possible relief-etched version. By concentrating on these elements I produce a new reading of the images as uncontained miniatures, with a fraught and productive relationship to scale – to frames and unboundedness. I propose that key aspects of Blake's images had escaped attention because scholars give an understandable weight to the extant aspects of artworks, only briefly exploring what can no longer be seen. In contrast, this thesis calls for a new kind of criticism that is not afraid to dwell a little longer with the lost bits.

My fourth case study looks at the first lost *Doctor Who* storyline: *Marco Polo*, directed by Waris Hussein. Here the idea of recuperation of lost works moves from the critical to the creative. I discuss the reconstructions of lost episodes by fans – televisionaries – and the way such responses have cut a line between the amateur and the professional. Exploring theories of blindness and replication alongside *Doctor Who*'s unique (lost) postcolonialism, I offered a more fragmented narrative, tentatively re-appropriating the memories of the lost episodes and exploring the critical and creative possibilities they open up.

Finally, in my novella, I bring a series of real lost works into a fictional narrative. The epistolary form, with its relish for misdirected and stolen letters, provides narrative opportunity to explore the possession, reception and absence of art differently. Here, I zoom out from the case study and seek a kind of museum of words, trying to give a sense of the vast number of disparate lost artworks that exist (or not) in our visual culture. The starting point for my fiction was the idea of lost art as misplaced, out of joint. A kind of Bloomsbury gothic set at an unspecified time and in an unnamed country – also a love story – my novella draws on some of the nostalgia that I have argued is crucial for understanding lost art. My narrative deliberately predates some of the major events that have sparked international interest in art loss – world wars and widespread decolonisation, for example – but it is haunted by these things, by an uneasy relation to ethics and internationalism. I also try to show how, with lost art, the *public* space of the museum disappears, replaced by an imaginary museum that is private and fantastical.

Lost works need to be thought of differently from extant ones, both theoretically and methodologically. I hope this thesis has made a start on this project by bringing together, analysing and developing some key ideas about how we respond to works that

are out of our reach. Paying attention to the lost qualities of lost art can enrich both our visual and literary cultures – it can also bring these closer together, with lost art creating a bridge between art and literature. Much remains to be done in this area. I have not considered lost works of literature, but as the epigraph to this conclusion suggests, these could be productively brought into the debate. The memory loss of art could also be developed more broadly in relation to lost objects, for example in relation to Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory' and our perception of things as 'what's encountered as opposed to what's thought' (Brown 2001, 5). Lost art is what is *not* encountered – or at least, not yet, not now. Lost works have a fascinating status as immaterial things. The approach outlined in this thesis could also be fruitfully introduced to debates about cultural property and art theft currently dominated by legal scholars, archaeologists and journalists. By paying more attention to the artistic, literary and affective qualities created by loss, and exploring in greater detail how loss modifies artworks, much can be learnt about the nature of objects, presence, ownership, nationalism and internationalism, and the interrelation of knowledge and desire.





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Fig. 1.  
Christoph Gerigk,  
untitled photograph.  
Published in Goddio  
and Claus (2006, 32).



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Figs. 2 & 3.  
Ministerio de Cultura,  
República de  
Colombia, *No dejes  
que se fugue nuestro  
patrimonio* [Don't let  
our heritage run  
away],  
c. 2003. Posters,  
Eldorado Airport,  
Bogotá.



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Fig. 4.  
Vanessa Bell, *The Nursery*,  
1930-32. Photograph by  
A. C. Cooper of lost oil  
painting.  
Agnew's Gallery Archive.

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Fig. 5.  
Jean Béraud, *La Brasserie*, 1883.  
Lithograph (?) after oil painting.  
Published in Dumas (1883, 169).

The caption in the Hayward Gallery  
catalogue is as follows: 'Jean Béraud,  
*La Brasserie*, Salon 1883, painting,  
location unknown' (Frèches-Thory,  
Roquebert and Thomson, 1992, 243)



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Fig. 6.  
Julian Bell at  
Asheham, 1914.  
Photograph. Tate  
Archive (Bell Album  
3, p. 11, X40)



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Fig. 7.  
Quentin Bell, 1915-6.  
Photograph. Published  
in Bell and Garnett  
(1981, 47)



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Fig. 8.  
Leonardo da Vinci, *The  
Virgin and Child with  
Saint Anne and Saint  
John the Baptist*, c.  
1499-1500. Cartoon. The  
National Gallery, London  
(inv. no. NG6337).



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Fig. 9.  
Fireplace with painted  
tiles by Vanessa Bell.  
Monks House, The  
National Trust





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Fig. 10.  
Vanessa Bell, *The  
Nursery*, another  
version. Photograph of  
lost oil painting.  
Agnew's Gallery  
Archive.



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Fig. 11.  
Lucian Freud,  
*Wanted*, 2001. Poster  
appealing for return of  
lost portrait of Francis  
Bacon. Posted around  
Berlin, and published  
in e.g. *The Guardian*  
and *The Telegraph*, 22  
June 2001.



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Fig. 12.  
Sophie Calle, *Last  
Seen* (Rembrandt, *The  
Storm in the Sea of  
Galilee*), 1991.  
Ektachrome print and  
text. Published in  
McShine (1999, 139).



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Fig. 13.  
'Vacant Space in the  
Louvre where the lost  
"Mona Lisa" hung',  
*The Daily Mirror*, 29  
August, 1911, 8.

The caption below the  
photograph notes that all  
that remains of the *Mona  
Lisa* is 'the vacant space  
on the wall of the  
museum and the four  
hooks which were the  
sole defence of the  
picture'.

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Fig. 14.  
William Nicholson, *Le  
Retour de la Joconde*  
[*The Return of the  
Mona Lisa*], 1914. Oil  
painting. Private  
Collection.



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Fig. 15.  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
1821. Woodcut.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 12)



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Figs. 16-19.  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
1821. Woodcuts.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 14)



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Figs. 20-23.  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
1821. Woodcuts.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 15)





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Figs. 24-27.  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
1821. Woodcuts.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 16)



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Figs. 28-30.  
Anonymous engraver  
after William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
1821. Wood engravings.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 17)



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Figs. 31-34.  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
1821. Woodcuts.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 16)



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copyright restrictions

Figs. 35-38.  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
c. 1821. Woodcut, proof  
impression. British  
Museum (reg. no.  
1919,0528.3).



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Figs. 39-42.  
William Blake, 'Imitation  
of Eclogue 1', c. 1821.  
Woodcut, proof  
impression. British  
Museum (reg. no.  
1919,0528.2).



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Figs. 43-46  
(with detail of fig. 45).  
William Blake,  
'Imitation of Eclogue 1',  
c. 1821. Relief etching,  
trial version. Collection  
of Robert Essick.



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Fig. 47.  
John Byfield after  
William Blake, 'The  
Giant Polypheme,  
from a famous picture  
by N. Poussin', 1821.  
Wood engraving.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 21)

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Fig. 48.  
Étienne Baudet after  
Nicolas Poussin,  
*Landscape with  
Polyphemus*, 1701.  
Etching and  
engraving. British  
Museum (reg. no.  
U,8.66).





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Fig. 49.  
Anonymous engraver,  
'The Cyclops, Polypheme',  
1821. Wood engraving.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 20).



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Fig. 50.  
Anonymous engraver,  
'The Golden Age', 1821.  
Wood engraving.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 86).



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Fig. 51.  
Anonymous engraver,  
'Orpheus and Eurydice',  
1821. Wood engraving.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 101)




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Fig. 52.  
Anonymous engraver,  
'Illustrations to Eclogue 2',  
1821. Wood engravings.  
Published in Thornton  
(1821, facing p. 23).



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Fig. 53.  
William Blake,  
'William', from the  
illuminated book  
*Milton a Poem*, c.  
1804-11. Hand-  
coloured relief etching.  
British Museum (reg.  
no. 1859,0625.29).



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Fig. 54.  
William Blake,  
'Robert', from the  
illuminated book  
*Milton a Poem*, c.  
1804-11. Hand-  
coloured relief  
etching. British  
Museum (reg. no.  
1859,0625.33).



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Fig. 55 (with detail).  
William Blake, 'And I  
only am escaped along  
to tell thee', c. 1825.  
Engraving.  
Published in Blake  
(1825, plate 4)



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Above:  
Fig. 56.  
William Blake,  
drawing for the 'First  
Comparison' for  
'Imitation of Eclogue  
1', c. 1820-21, pencil,  
sepia and wash.  
Photograph of  
untraced drawing.

Below: detail of fig. 28.





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Fig. 57. Still from 'The  
Roof of the World',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Loose Cannon  
reconstruction (2011)  
of lost BBC episode  
(1964).



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copyright restrictions

Fig. 58. Still from 'The  
Roof of the World',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Reconstruction by  
Smiddylad  
([www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos),  
accessed 19 December  
2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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copyright restrictions

Fig. 59. Still from ‘The  
Roof of the World’,  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Reconstruction by  
Smiddylad  
([www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos),  
accessed 19 December  
2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).




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Fig. 60. Still from ‘The  
Roof of the World’,  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Reconstruction by  
Smiddylad  
([www.youtube.com/user/  
Smiddylad/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos),  
accessed 19 December  
2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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Fig. 61. Still from 'The  
Roof of the World',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Loose Cannon  
reconstruction (2011)  
of lost BBC episode  
(1964).



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Fig. 62. Still from ‘The  
Roof of the World’,  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Reconstruction by  
Smiddylad  
([www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos),  
accessed 19 December  
2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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copyright restrictions

Fig. 63. Still from 'The  
Roof of the World',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Reconstruction by  
Smiddylad  
([www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/Smiddylad/videos),  
accessed 19 December  
2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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Fig. 64. Still from 'The  
Roof of the World',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Loose Cannon  
reconstruction (2002)  
of lost BBC episode  
(1964).





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Fig. 65 (detail).  
After Maarten van  
Heemskerck,  
Crucifixion,  
1513-1574. Pen and  
ink drawing, over  
chalk. The British  
Museum (reg. no.  
1914,0901.9).



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Fig. 66.  
Anonymous, Christ on  
the cross, 1500-1525.  
Hand-coloured  
engraving. The British  
Museum (reg. no.  
1868,1114.70).

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copyright restrictions

Fig. 67.  
Anonymous, Christ as  
the man of sorrows  
standing in his tomb, c.  
1500. Engraving. The  
British Museum (reg.  
no. 1874,0711.1850).



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Fig. 68.  
Still from 'The Wall of  
Lies', *Marco Polo*,  
*Doctor Who*. Loose  
Canon reconstruction  
(2002) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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Fig. 69.  
Still from 'The Wall of  
Lies', *Marco Polo*,  
*Doctor Who*. Loose  
Canon reconstruction  
(2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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Fig. 70.  
Still from 'Assassin at  
Peking', *Marco Polo*,  
*Doctor Who*. Loose  
Cannon reconstruction  
(2011) of lost BBC  
episode (1964).



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Fig. 71.  
Still from  
'Five Hundred Eyes',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Loose Cannon  
reconstruction (2002)  
of lost BBC episode  
(1964).



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Fig. 72.  
Still from  
'Five Hundred Eyes',  
*Marco Polo, Doctor  
Who*. Loose Cannon  
reconstruction (2011)  
of lost BBC episode  
(1964).



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