

THE BIRKBECK  
EARLY MODERN  
SOCIETY

BULLETIN

Issue 9  
Winter 2008



# **CONTENTS**

| <b>Section</b>                   | <b>Page</b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Message from the President       | 3           |
| The Bulletin: Editor's Welcome   | 4           |
| Recent Events                    | 5           |
| Film Night                       | 12          |
| Visits                           | 14          |
| Arts Report                      | 16          |
| Theatre                          | 16          |
| Opera                            | 20          |
| Art Exhibitions                  | 22          |
| Television                       | 39          |
| Forthcoming Society Events       | 40          |
| Forthcoming Events (non-society) | 42          |
| Book Review                      | 44          |
| Non-fiction books                | 44          |
| Fiction books                    | 46          |
| Problem Page                     | 48          |
| Winter Quiz                      | 49          |
| Answers to Winter Quiz           | 50          |
| Society Personnel and Contacts   | 51          |

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Early Modernists,

Happy New Year! Welcome to the ninth edition of our bulletin. We ended last term on a very high note, viz. Lady Antonia Fraser's lecture 'Is historical biography worth it?' and our Christmas party. Both events were lively and particularly well attended, with vast quantities of alcohol consumed at the party! It is sad to report that since then, as I'm sure we're all aware, Antonia Fraser's husband, the playwright Harold Pinter, has died. As this sad event was so close to our stimulating evening with Antonia Fraser, I have sent her a card from all of the Birkbeck Early Modern Society members to express our sympathy with her loss.

Moving on to this term: we have three papers scheduled that will examine the Catholic musician at the Elizabethan court, William Byrd; the philosopher, Spinoza; and Madame Palatine, sister-in-law to Louis XIV. The details for these can be found inside this issue and on our web page. It promises to be an exciting term! We also plan to have more film nights, guided walks and other more recreational-type events, and will forward details of these as they are planned. Please don't forget that the committee is always happy to hear suggestions from members, be they connected to a speaker that you have in mind that you'd like us to book, or another type of event such as a trip to the theatre or a gallery etc. Suggestions can be e-mailed to our secretary Laura Jacobs at [l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk](mailto:l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk)

Finally, I wish to thank the committee members for their hard work, and the staff in the Students' Union and History offices for their help in promoting our events.

With best wishes,

Stephen Brogan  
President, Birkbeck Early Modern Society  
<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hca/current/societies/#earlymodern>  
<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/susocieties/earlymodern/index.htm>

## THE BULLETIN: EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to Issue Nine of the *Birkbeck Early Modern Society Bulletin*. This edition contains a mixture of reviews, articles and features on a range of topics concerned with the early modern era and I hope that you find it just as interesting and entertaining as previous editions.

I was pleased to include another review from a non-committee member and if any particular topics interest you then why not write an article? With the present economic crisis set to dominate television, radio, newspapers and everyday conversation over the next year, are there any previous recessions that you would like to write about? After all, there are numerous examples in history when a loss of confidence and a sudden refusal to lend money have hit various European countries. Likewise, our 'Visits' section is another ideal opportunity for an article. The only real criteria being that it deals with a subject within our date range of 1450-1815.

Please contact me for any information regarding the *Bulletin*. The next issue will be out in the spring of 2009. I hope that you shake off any winter colds and I wish you all a very happy 2009.

John Croxon  
Editor  
[johnmcroxon@googlemail.com](mailto:johnmcroxon@googlemail.com)



**Early Modern life writing: the case of the almanac, a talk by Dr Adam Smyth,  
Birkbeck October 21, 2008**



**Dr Adam Smyth**

Birkbeck Early Modern Society's first event of the year kicked off with a talk by Dr Adam Smyth (Reading University) on how people annotated their almanacs, a subject which has received scant scholarly attention. Printed almanacs were sold at the end of each year. They provided information on the coming year such as details of local events, weather forecasts, astrological, agricultural and medical notes, micro chronitions or lists of important historical events and other useful information. Almanacs often contained pages that were deliberately empty. These pages were known as blanks. Sometimes the owner would commission the printer to insert extra blanks to be filled with the owner's notes. Almanacs were extremely popular in the seventeenth century especially during the period 1640-1700. Yet they were viewed as low status, disposable objects and often ended up ignominiously as toilet paper, or as a lining for pie dishes.

Adam Smyth showed us a range of examples of the ways in which almanacs were inscribed with handwritten notes by both men and women. We were treated to a close analysis of the annotations to Isabella Twysden's almanacs of 1647- 1649. Isabella, Lady Twysden (1605–1657) was the wife of the antiquary Sir Roger Twysden, second baronet (1597–1672), of Roydon Hall, East Peckham, Kent. Isabella used her almanac to record deaths for which she used the euphemism 'left this life'. Apparently male annotators also used similar stock phrases, showing how generic pressure influences the content of the annotations.

Isabella Twysden also made notes on topical events such as 'the 21 of august ...the K. came to hamton corte' or that on 'the 15 [April 1647] the independence petition was burnt'. Records of her own personal activities such as the journeys she made are cast in the first person, typically beginning with the phrase 'I came to' followed by a place name and ending with 'I thank god'. Isabella Twysden's annotations encompass both a public and a private sphere and reflect the personal impact of the Civil War.

Adam Smyth explained how almanac annotations were written retrospectively and deliberately. He challenged the view that such writing is necessarily spontaneous and immediate. What is more, the almanac was often used as a conduit for a diary. Adam Smyth gave us examples taken from John Evelyn's almanac annotations, showing how Evelyn's notes were often transferred and enlarged upon in his diaries.

The talk generated a lively question and answer session which had to be wound up by the need to take the speaker out for a meal. He was accompanied by a several members of the audience.

Anyone who would like to find out more about this innovative research into the annotated almanac as a form of life-writing should read Adam Smyth's excellent article, 'Almanacs, Annotators, and Life-Writing in Early Modern England, *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 38, No. 2. (May 2008), pp. 200-244.

Laura Jacobs

**The Birkbeck Early Modern Society Christmas Lecture 2008**

**Lady Antonia Fraser, 'Is Historical Biography Worth It?'**

**Birkbeck College, University of London**

**12th December 2008**



Antonia Fraser was enthusiastically received by the audience



The bookstall: James Hamilton, Karen Chester and Karen Baston



Antonia Fraser signing copies of her books



The committee (slightly out of focus... perhaps it was the drink)  
from l-r John, Stephen, Sue, Laura, Nigel, Karen B, Karen C, Timothy, Robin



Antonia Fraser's bodyguard for the evening watches out for lunatics



The Christmas Party

In her first ever lecture at Birkbeck, Lady Antonia Fraser's answer to her paper's title was an enthusiastic 'yes!'. The art of historical biography is an important part of the historian's craft and in an entertaining talk Lady Antonia explained how it should be done and what pitfalls to avoid.

When *Mary Queen of Scots* was published in 1969, historical biography was at a low point in terms of academic fashion. Thomas Carlyle's observation that 'a well-written Life is almost as rare as a well-spent one' summed up how the historical biography was perceived at the time. Now, however, historical biographies are popular and they sell well. But with economic crisis looming, the prospects for non-fiction publishing may once again reverse Fortune's Wheel. Whatever the fashion, historical biographies should be popular *and* well-researched.

The historical biography is an essential tool of history. We can use them to explore the ways in which individual characters affected the course of history. Monarchs are especially good subjects. No discussion of religion in England can neglect considering the impact of Henry VIII. And although he is best known for his madness, in George III's times of sanity he helped preserve the English throne. Historical biography can also be used to illustrate broad principles of history. For example, we might assume that radical puritanical members of the Long Parliament were younger than their cavalier counterparts. But we'd be wrong since the puritans were an average of six years older than their rivals. Studies like this help us to find out the truth about individual lives and the importance this can have.

The practice of historical biography is not without problems. One is a question of showing the individual character in the context of his or her own time. Creating the historical context can be difficult. In the case of a huge topic like the Reformation, the historical biographer needs to determine what is relevant in relation to the individual concerned and not try to explain the entire Reformation. Giving enough detail is also important but there needs to be a realisation that some details are irrelevant or can be condensed. In *Mary Queen of Scots*, for example, one chapter is all that is needed to describe the nineteen years of Mary's life as a prisoner.

Another difficulty is recognising that gender issues were different in the past. We might think that defining women by their relationships with men is unacceptable but the women in the lives of Henry VIII and Louis XIV were only important in their times because of these relationships. Anachronistic judgements are part of the process and must be admitted. When *Cromwell* was published in 1973, the modern Troubles had not yet started. Post-war biographers of Cromwell were biased against him since they saw him as a precursor of the twentieth-century age of dictators. Lady Antonia assumed she'd written a bias-free modern work but when she re-read *Cromwell* in 1999 (the anniversary of his birth) she saw that it was a work of the early 1970s. The lesson here is that true objectivity is quite impossible. We need to be aware of our own prejudices when we write.

We need to be careful of giving modern interpretations to historical events and personalities. We cannot understand what was happening better than people who were actually there. For example, we might be tempted to see James I/VI's homosexuality with modern eyes but imposing our view misses out the political strain his favourites caused. We might approve of Charles II's fondness for and loyalty to his mistresses but his contemporaries saw this as 'petticoat government' and not to be encouraged. We might applaud Louis XVI's decision not to have mistresses but his contemporaries saw this as very unkingly behaviour indeed. And Louis XIV's liking for older, wiser mistresses might be a positive thing in modern opinion but at the time this was criticised since the king was expected to have young and beautiful mistresses.

Putting modern judgements on political matters is also problematic. Charles II's attempts to promote religious tolerance were seen as highly suspect in his own time. And when he made a witty response to poetic criticism by the earl of Rochester, the same king's answer was perceived as suspiciously clever. Louis XIV's continual invasions of neighbouring countries may seem horrible to us but in his time he was behaving as a king should. His cousin Charles II endured criticism for not doing the same. We find the revocation of the Edict of Nantes shocking but it was very popular in France when it happened.

Political correctness is not the historical biographer's job. We need to report things as they were. We cannot ignore that astrology was taken seriously or that bear-baiting was seen as entertainment. It is no use imposing our own values on history. *The Gunpowder Plot* opens with a description of a Ben Jonson masque which involved the participants, including the Queen, 'blacking up'. In 1605 this was a normal thing to do and the complaint of an American editor cannot change historical fact. Political correctness is not new in publishing, however. During the Prohibition in the United States, the Bible itself was reprinted as a 'dry' text with the words 'raisin cake' replacing the word 'wine'!

Another potential pitfall is the temptation to fill gaps with imagination. In *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*, biographer Edmund Morris inserted himself as a character in the story. *Don't ever do this!* If you want to write a novel, do so, but in a historical biography, the reader should feel confident that things actually happened there and then. The one exception to this rule is the inclusion of traditional stories about the subject. These stories may bring out traits in characters and it is the duty of the biographer to sort out the traditional from the authentic and to explain why the stories survive. Do they reveal historical truths? Did Cromwell visit the corpse of Charles I and mutter 'cruel necessity'? He might have done. A witness saw a heavily muffled man arrive at 2 a.m. to pay his respects who might have been Cromwell. Did Marie Antoinette really say 'let them eat cake'? No, but there is a long tradition of cold heartedness going back to Marie Therese

who made a similar comment a century earlier. Marie Antoinette actually *gave* bread to the poor but because people wanted to think badly of her the story stuck.

Counterfactual history is a good way to explore the question ‘what if?’ What if the Gunpowder Plot had succeeded? What if Louis XVI had died before the French Revolution and left Marie Antoinette as regent? Counterfactual history must be based on what really did happen in order to work. It can remind us of the perils of writing with hindsight. Henry VIII did not set out to have eight wives; he did not know he was a serial ‘marrier’ when he set out.

Readers want to see things through the eyes of the participants so it is essential to do ‘optical research’. That is, go to places and look at them. Visits to battlefields and priests’ holes can provide insights. A visit to Drogheda revealed the enduring legacy of Cromwell in Ireland as terrified nuns ran from the biographer until convinced that no harm was meant.

Historical biography can provide excitement, happiness, and fun. It is definitely worth it.

## **Q&A with the Birkbeck Early Modern Society**

A lively discussion followed the talk.

Lady Antonia gave some insights into her choice of subjects and revealed that her choice of Mary, Queen of Scots as a subject was as competition with her mother (Elizabeth Longford) and that her follow-up choice of Oliver Cromwell was to get as far away from Mary as possible. *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* was written at the suggestion of her editor in the US. *Love and Louis XIV* was inspired by a desire to return to a character she liked. A planned book on the Battle of the Boyne fell by the wayside when she decided she ‘couldn’t bear William III and James III’. A biography of Queen Alexandra never saw the light of day because the subject was ‘too boring’. Writing about French subjects meant learning French and dealing with hostile French librarians.

Writing about ordinary people is difficult since they tend not to leave sources but writing about extraordinary people also presents problems since their experience of life was completely different from the norm. The biographer has a duty to include the dark side of character – if you’re writing about Cromwell, you can’t gloss over Ireland. Personal liking can tussle with historical judgement but can also provide additional insight.

The talk was followed by the annual Christmas party.

Karen Baston

### **Additional Note:**

Since Lady Antonia Fraser delivered our Christmas lecture her husband, the playwright Harold Pinter, sadly died.

Harold Pinter burst onto the theatrical scene in the late 1950's following the pioneering work of Becket and Osborne but within a space of a few short years he would outstrip his fellow playwrights and unlike most other theatrical artists of the twentieth century his work has never gone out of fashion. In plays such as *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, *No Man's Land*, *The Hothouse*, *Old Times*, *Betrayal*, *The Dumb Waiter* and many more Pinter redefined modern theatre. Pinteresque is the adjective that conjures-up menace, dark comedy and beautifully constructed dialogue. He was also a skilled adapter of other people's work as a screen writer and a director, and a wonderful actor, and I had the privilege of seeing him act in three of his own plays, and on each occasion he dominated the stage with his sheer presence.

It is though as a writer that Pinter will be remembered and his legacy of work will survive for many years. He is universally acknowledged as the greatest British playwright of the twentieth century but some of us would argue further, the greatest since Shakespeare.

Our thoughts and feelings are with Antonia Fraser at this sad time.

John Croxon (Editor)

## **Film Night**

As a Society we are constantly looking at ways of extending our scope and entertaining our membership, one such innovation is a monthly film night, held on a Friday and shown in one of the lecture theatres at Birkbeck.

Film Night has been running for a year now and has proved a popular event for our members. Why not come along, see a great film and meet other members. We show a variety of British and foreign films, all dealing with subjects associated with the Early Modern era. Film Night is free to members and we also provide wine and snacks.

For further information on Film Night contact the secretary, Laura Jacobs:  
[l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk](mailto:l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk)

## The Crucible (1996)



### October 31, 2008, film show: The Crucible

For Birkbeck Early Modern Society Halloween Film Friday we showed ‘The Crucible’ (1996) based on the play of that name by Arthur Miller. The film concerns the Salem Witch Trials, a series of hearings before local magistrates to prosecute over 150 people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts between February 1692 and May 1693.

Miller wrote the screenplay and the film, starring Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder, Paul Scofield, and Joan Allen, and it was directed by Nicholas Hytner.

‘The Crucible’ shows how the investigations into satanic possession expose and exacerbate ordinary tensions between, friends, neighbours, husband and wife, illicit lovers, masters and servants, parents and children. The bonds that hold these relationships together are strained to breaking point by the fear and suspicion engendered by accusations of witchcraft which once made, have an unstoppable momentum of their own.

The judicial machinery is relentless, ultimately destroying the community that invited it in order to resolve its problems. Formerly respected or trusted citizens are interrogated; too many are unable to prove their innocence .The town is devastated by the sheer toll of the consequent hangings. ‘The Crucible’ is a carefully controlled and utterly chilling drama.

Birkbeck Early Modern Society regularly shows films with an early modern theme on a cinema sized screen in the college. All are welcome. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for films that you would like us to screen.

Laura Jacobs

# VISITS



## The Cromwell Museum, Huntingdon

Oliver Cromwell was born in Huntingdon in 1599. As MP for Cambridge he opposed many of the policies of the crown and became an active participant during the Civil War where, without any previous military experience, he proved a superb cavalry officer.

His success on the battlefield, his skill as a politician, and his standing within the New Model Army saw him become one of the main opponents of the royalists. Following the execution of Charles I in January 1649, his influence grew further within the new regime and he became Lord Protector in 1653, the head of a British republic.

The Cromwell Museum opened in 1962 in the old grammar school where Cromwell had been a pupil. After leaving school Cromwell studied briefly at Cambridge before marrying and settling in Huntingdon. He later lived in St Ives and in Ely. The purpose of the museum is to interpret Cromwell's life and legacy through portraits, documents and objects associated with him.

The Cromwell Museum is situated at the edge of the market square, adjacent to the church. The museum is housed in a lovely stone building, and consists of just one room, with walls and cabinets crammed with artefacts. There are portraits of Oliver and members of his family, rings, documents, letters, swords and much more. It was really interesting with a variety of exhibits, but what really caught my eye was Cromwell's hat. It was enormous! I wondered whether it was just worn for ceremonial occasions but when I checked with Barry Coward he assured me that Cromwell wore the hat regularly and not just for special events.

This is only a small museum and therefore it is not going to occupy anyone for hours but it is both fascinating and informative and well worth the short drive up to Huntington. Admission is free. On sale in the museum are a variety of biographies and other books about the Civil War as well as various other artefacts, and I left clutching my newly purchased Oliver Cromwell mug!

I have listed below the address, contact details and opening times for the museum.

John Croxon

Contact:

The Cromwell Museum  
Grammar School Walk  
Huntingdon  
PE29 3LF  
tel. 01480 375830  
e-mail: [CromwellMuseum@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:CromwellMuseum@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

April - October  
Tuesday - Sunday 10.30-12.30 and  
1.30-4.00

November - March  
Tuesday - Friday & Sundays 1.30-4.00  
Saturday 10.30-12.30 and 1.30-4.00

Closed on Mondays all year round

Admission free

# ARTS REPORT



## THEATRE

**Twelfth Night: Wyndham's Theatre, London**



**Derek Jacobi as Malvolio**

Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* in 1601 and ever since it has been viewed as one of his greatest comedies. This particular production is part of a strong season that the Donmar is staging at the newly refurbished Wyndham's Theatre.

Derek Jacobi has gained the plaudits and dominated the press coverage but it is a very strong cast that the director, Michael Grandage, has assembled and all the players pull together to ensure that the production is a huge success. This is a delightful, moving and hilarious *Twelfth Night* as London has witnessed for many years.

Christopher Oram has designed a set shimmering in the Mediterranean sun. Lovesick Orsino, dressed in a white vest, works on his dance steps and Olivia jettisons her mourning black for a designer cream beach outfit. This is a modern dress production and Jacobi wears a butlers outfit before donning his yellow stockings, garters and captains blazer and cap.

The comedy, particularly in the stronger second half, is exquisitely played. Ron Cook's diminutive Toby Belch is hilariously paired with Guy Henry's tall and stupid Andrew Aguecheek, both clad in cream suits. Cook woos Maria (Samantha Spiro) and the three of them devise a plot to humiliate the haughty Malvolio and deflate his self-importance. Spying on Malvolio from behind a windbreak, their heads popping up and down as they try to stifle their laughter.

This is also a poignant production with an undercurrent of melancholy, emphasized by Orsino's unrequited love for Olivia, Olivia's grief for her family, Viola's belief that her brother has drowned and for her growing love for Orsino. Victoria Hamilton as Viola is splendid as a woman hiding her love for Mark Bonnar's Orsino, whilst Indira Varma's Olivia is bewitchingly beautiful and perfect as a woman catapulted from her grief by her love for the youthful Cesario.

Jacobi is hilarious in the letter scene, frowning in concerted effort as he attempts to work out the clues and contorting his face into the maniacal smile that he feels that his mistress desires. Jacobi has produced a marvelous interpretation of the conceited Malvolio; his precisely enunciated smugness, his slow walk, his disdainful and dismissive manner, and he handles Malvolio's final utter humiliation with considerable skill and feeling.

This is a stunning production that is funny, warm and engaging and both charming and entertaining. Playing to packed houses, it has proved that a sensitive and intelligent adaption of Shakespearean drama can lure audiences into the theatre in large numbers, despite a deepening economic crisis. On that note, the Donmar must be applauded for the imaginative ticket pricing, with standing tickets at ten pounds.

John Croxon

## THE LOVER'S MELANCHOLY

**Cockpit/Phoenix Playhouse, The Globe**

On Sunday 7th December 2008 the last of the Read not Dead series of staged play readings was given at the re-construction of the Cockpit/Phoenix playhouse housed in the Shakespeare's Globe building in Bear Gardens. The entire complex is due to be demolished and transformed into a state-of-the-art rehearsal and playing space incorporating meeting and conference facilities much needed by Globe Education. The staged readings will resume in the new space.

On this occasion the group of assembled actors, all performing out of love and interest, applied their expertise to a performance of John Ford's tragicomedy *The Lover's Melancholy*, a play which has received very little attention in modern times. The team at Globe Education are still only part of the way through their endeavour to stage all the neglected plays surviving from the early modern period. In practice this means no Shakespeare apart from arcane early quartos, and none of the other handful of plays by his near contemporaries which enjoy revivals from time to time. The format for these occasions is that a cast is assembled from available professional actors interested in exploring these unfamiliar plays, who receive their scripts a week in advance and meet on Sunday morning to rehearse for a performance at 3 p.m.

The pre-eminence of Shakespeare among Early Modern playwrights has resulted in the favourites in his canon being so frequently performed that actors and directors are sometimes driven to outlandish extremes in their desire to find a fresh approach or an alternative characterization. In direct contrast, plays such as *The Lover's Melancholy* are unencumbered with the weight of performance by former stage luminaries, critical baggage or audience expectations. Accordingly they are free to interpret the text in whatever way feels most appropriate, frequently bringing newly discovered theatrical treasure to light.

This was the case with *The Lover's Melancholy*. Ford focussed on Robert Burton's book *The Anatomy of Melancholy* - a treatise which had become immediately popular when it was first published in 1621, a few years before the play was written and performed - to create his characters, interweaving their passions and preoccupations into an entertaining whole.

In this play, as with many others of the later period, it is interesting to note the Shakespearean traditions which permeated dramatic output, for example: a long lost daughter reunited with her father and her former lover; a lady who scorns a noble suitor only to fall in love with his page, who happens to be a female in disguise; the surly counsellor, derived from Thersites, who exposes and vilifies the follies of self-seeking courtiers.

However, while Ford echoes Shakespearean motifs, he shifts and regroups them into new patterns. Meleander, the venerable nobleman whose daughter has been exiled is mad with grief throughout most of the action. His cure is initiated by a sleeping draught and he reappears, 'his hair and beard trimmed, habit and gown changed', to resume his position, his cure then being completed by the restoration of his honours and the return of his daughter. This, like the other narrative threads is woven with reference to varying

manifestations of melancholia.

The doctor explains:

Melancholy

Is not, as you conceive, indisposition  
Of body, but the mind's disease.

...

which is briefly this,

A mere commotion of the mind o'ercharged  
With fear and sorrow; first begot i'the brain  
The seat of reason, and from thence derived  
As suddenly into the heart, the seat  
Of our affection. (III. II)<sup>i</sup>

The various manifestations are graphically displayed in the Masque of Melancholy of the following scene, introduced by Rhetias, the counsellor who bites with words, '*his face whited, with black shag hair and long nails, and with a piece of raw meat*', exhibiting the mysterious condition of Lycanthropia, which Burton describes as "Wolf-madness, when men run howling about graves and fields in the night, and will not be perswaded but that they are Wolves, or some such beasts".<sup>ii</sup> Demonstrations follow of hydrophobia, dotage, 'hypochondriacal or windy melancholy, and are concluded by a pregnant sea-nymph presenting wanton melancholy, a condition in which the affected dance ceaselessly. Called here the St.Vitus' dance, the condition resembles the Tarantella of Southern Italy, where dancing often cures the affliction caused by spider's venom.<sup>iii</sup> Given the ridiculously inadequate resources of time, properties and costume available to the actors they achieved a remarkably effective presentation.

The masque has omitted one type of melancholy – that suffered by the prince, Palador, the lover's melancholy of the title, which cannot be 'personated'. The doctor assures him: 'Love is the tyrant of the heart; it darkens/ Reason, confounds discretion; deaf to counsel,/ It runs a headlong course to desperate madness.' (III. III) In Ford's tragedies, of course, love does just that, but in this tragicomedy the vicissitudes of love's labyrinthine course are concluded with lovers reunited and wrongs satisfactorily redressed.

The optimistic ending provided a cheerful note on which to depart the theatrical space which has seen so many forgotten plays revived. The project has already unearthed plays which deserve staging, and several have enjoyed professional runs since their staged readings, for example, *Sejanus* by the Royal Shakespeare Company. For the next eighteen months or so it is hoped that occasional readings can be staged, wherever space can be found for them at Shakespeare's Globe. The next event in this series will be a dramatisation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, not a play but one of the most beautiful poems of the period, at the Nancy W Knowles Lecture Theatre on 15th March.

Barbara Wooding

i Quotations taken from *John Ford* ed. by Havelock Ellis (London: Fisher Unwin, nd) in The Mermaid Series.

ii See note 1, p. 55.

iii References to Burton for all these conditions are given briefly in the notes on the relative pages 55-58.

**OPERA**  
**Hansel and Gretel**  
**by Engelbert Humperdinck**  
**Royal Opera House, Covent Garden**  
**18th December 2008**



**Diana Damrau as Gretel and Angelika Kirchschlager as Hansel**

Engelbert Humperdinck's operatic version of the Brothers Grimm fairytale Hansel and Gretel is, somewhat strangely given its content, considered to be a traditional Christmas opera. In fact, it was premiered just before Christmas 1893 in Weimar with Richard Strauss as conductor who hailed the work as a masterpiece. The influence of Wagner, whose musical assistant Humperdinck was, is very much evident throughout the opera. Its librettist was Humperdinck's sister, Adelheid Wette.

The production reviewed here is a new one for the Royal Opera House by the directing duo of Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier. It is very much directed towards creating a magical Christmassy atmosphere, if a somewhat over sugary and sentimental one. Some reviewers have been critical of the staging's sacrifice of the dark subtext of the story in favour of Christmas kitsch. In particular, the scene at the end of Act II, when the children go to sleep in the forest, has been criticised for its pantomime style setting which detracts from the beautiful and uplifting music which forms the heart of the opera. Although this was undeniably the case, I still found the fireside setting and dog-headed angels rather charming and although, like much of the rest of the production a bit overblown, enjoyable. The appearance of the Sandman who, in German legend, makes children go to sleep, is another example of the quirky nature of this production. The Sandman was depicted as an odd dwarfish little man (not unreminiscent of Yoda in Star Wars) in a white suit who, without his reassuring song, could just as easily have been a sinister figure. The Dew Fairy, with her ball gown and cleaning trolley, was really classic Cinderella godmother material.

There was an alternating cast for the main characters, but on the night that I went the German soprano Diana Damrau was playing a very girlish Gretel, whilst Angelika Kirchschlager, the Austrian mezzo, was a tousled haired urchin as Hansel. They were very well cast together, their voices blending beautifully. They also seemed to get genuine enjoyment from their roles, not even relinquishing them when taking their bows together and jointly bringing on the conductor, Colin Davis. If one of the two could be said to be slightly better than the other, then it would have to be Damrau, but really both were excellent in their parts. The reliably good Thomas Allen was their drunkard father, Peter the broom-maker, and Elizabeth Connell the mother who unthinkingly sends the children into the forest to collect berries. The veteran Anja Silja was a convincingly horrible witch as a batty old lady with a red wig and a zimmer frame – although why in her early appearances she was wearing comedy breasts was not completely obvious. However, although her high notes were as powerful as ever, if a little wobbly, it was noticeable that she struggled to make herself heard in other parts.

A sparkling account of the work was conjured from the orchestra by Colin Davis throughout this very enjoyable, and splendidly cast production. Definitely one to be seen at Christmas time though.

Sue Dale

## ART EXHIBITIONS

### Dutch Mannerism: Goltzius and His Contemporaries

National Gallery of Scotland

22nd November 2008 – 8th February 2009



Last autumn a strange new poster appeared throughout Edinburgh. The face of a rather bizarre man in a tasselled cap graced the sides of the town's national museums. With his multiple chins, furrowed brow and a hairy wart growing out of his forehead, he hardly seemed a likely enticer. But, oddly enough, he was.

The strange man forms an even stranger picture. *Bust of a Man with a Tasselled Cap* was drawn by Hendrick Goltzius in 1587. This is a drawing that looks like an engraving – even up close – which depicts something that looks like a sculpture and represents an image of a sculpture. It arrived in the National Galleries of Scotland collection in 2000 and along with Abraham Bloemaert's *The Miracle of the Loaves* (15[93?]) acquired in 2007, forms the backbone of a small exhibition celebrating the art, techniques and practitioners of Dutch Mannerism.

As Christian Tico Seifert explains in the excellent guidebook which accompanies the exhibition (an absolute bargain priced at just £1!), Mannerism was an international style. We tend to think of it as an Italian tradition but it was popular throughout Europe. In the Northern Netherlands, it combined Netherlandish traditions with Italian and German influences. Goltzius was influenced by Italian mannerists like Rosso Fiorentino, the Flemish artist Karel Van Mander, and the Prague-based court artist Bartholomäus Spranger.

Along with Van Mander and Cornelis Cornelisz. Van Haarlem, Goltzius formed the ‘Haarlem Academy’ which had a profound influence on the development of Dutch art. Their work reflects international influences while developing new techniques.

Meanwhile, in Utrecht, Mannerists were developing their own style based on the work of Caravaggio. Abraham Bloemaert’s *The Miracle of the Loaves* combines mannerist forms with an exploration of the contrasts between light and dark. The main action happens in the background in a way reminiscent of Bruegel’s *Fall of Icarus*. *The Miracle of the Loaves* on display is an oil on canvas painting and may have been a study for a larger work or a work in another medium.

This small exhibition of 30 works shows the great variety of influences and techniques of the Dutch Mannerist tradition. In addition to Goltzius and Bloemaert, it includes works by Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, Jacques de Gheyn, Jacob Matham, Jan Saenredam, Willem Swanenburg, and Joachim Wtewael. Artists like these inspired the next generation of Dutch artists like Rembrandt and Vermeer.

The display is tucked within the Scottish Galleries in the basement of the National Gallery complex. Although a bit hard to find (follow the signs to get there eventually), the exhibition was well-visited even on a Monday afternoon. The man with the tassel was clearly doing his job well.

Karen Baston

## **The Intimate Portrait: Drawings, Minitures and Pastels from Ramsay to Lawrence**

**Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (25th Oct 2008 -1st Feb 2009)**

**The British Museum (5 Mar – 31 May 2009)**



There is something truly magical about this gentle exhibition of Georgian and Regency portraits. The faces look more real somehow than they do in the formal portraits of the time. Most of the works displayed were intended to be shared with loved ones or else were done by the artists for as their own mementos of family and friends.

‘Intimate’ portraits were meant for domestic settings or, in the case of miniatures, were portable in nature. The works here are from the collections of the National Galleries of Scotland and The British Museum are described as ‘rarely seen’ and this makes this display even more of a treat. Most of the works are on paper but they are done in a variety of media from pastels to pencil.

The exhibition is organised by themes with self-portraits, portraits of friends and family, and the art of celebrity giving structure to the images. The self-portraits include works by Joshua Reynolds (looking very young and serious), Allan Ramsay, Archibald Skirving, and Thomas Gainsborough (the only surviving portrait drawing). These and many others gaze out with varying degrees of confidence. The portraits of family members are in many cases quite wonderful. Wives smile or look away wistfully, children are caught in mid-laugh, and friends are captured doing their favourite things. The ‘celebrity’ portraits seem to capture the essence of many of the sitters. But some, such as the Chevalier D’Eon as drawn by George Dance in 1793, retain a sense of mystery.

One thing that is striking about so many of the portraits is the feeling of motion they convey. They are fluid and have the feeling of snapshot photographs. Another is the ‘modern’ look of many of the faces. Stripped of affectations and poses, these people look back at us looking like us.

Slightly different are the miniatures. These can convey a sense of sadness in that so many of them are ‘unknown’ people. But clearly they were loved in their time and although their presentation is more polished you can still get a sense of a real person.

I really enjoyed this exhibition and have at the time of writing been to see it twice. I hope to see it again before it leaves Edinburgh and recommend that you see it in London if you get a chance.

Some of my favourites to look out for:

‘Jane Douce’ (1804 or 1806) by John Downman (1750-1824) – a young lady who is the very image of a Jane Austen heroine

‘J. M. W. Turner in the Print Room at the British Museum’ (c. 1820s) by John Thomas Smith (1766-1833) – the artist captured in a moment of contemplation

‘Sir Walter Scott’ (1816) by William Nicholson (1781-1844) – a commemoration of the arrival of a new pet

‘Catherine Hume of Ninewells, Mrs Robert Johnston of Hutton Hall’ (c. 1784-6) by Archibald Skirving (1749-1819) – a sitter whose kind nature is evident

Karen Baston

## **“Diana and Actaeon”**

**The National Gallery**

**London**



Until recently Titian’s “Diana and Actaeon” hung next to his “Diana and Callisto”, both 1556-9, in the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh (N.G.o.S.). I had assumed that these two works belonging to the Duke of Sutherland on loan to the N.G.o.S. had so long been a vital part of the collection in which they hung that, like the royal collections, they were unsalable. This has now been shown not to have been the case. Everyone interested in what the Italians would call the “cultural patrimony” in the United Kingdom must hope that the paintings will be saved for the nation/s at £50 million each. The first effort was directed to hanging onto “Diana and Actaeon”. Its presence in London was in aid of the fundraising campaign. By the time this is published the outcome will probably be known. Sadly for the N.G.o.S. even if the present effort succeeds, it will have to share these great works with the London National Gallery. While “Diana and Actaeon” was in the London Gallery it could be seen with another canvas in the same “set”, “The Death of Actaeon”, dated variously 1568-76, a later date seeming more plausible to me, all having been commissioned from Titian by Philip II of Spain (see last edition of the Bulletin). The London painting is either the original, or according to Johannes Wilde, at worst, a very good version with extensive participation by Titian, another canvass having disappeared in Vienna in the eighteenth century.

We were able to look at the two Diana and Actaeon paintings together for several weeks. Aside from them the whole “set”, if they can be described as such, as the project grew in stages, included “Diana and Callisto”, 1556-9, N.G.O.S.; “Venus and Adonis”, 1553-4, Prado and a version in the London National Gallery, the original first going to Philip in London as King Consort to Mary I; “Danaë”, 1550-3, Prado; “Perseus and Andromeda”, before 1557, Wallace Collection, London; and the “Rape of Europa”, 1559-62, Isabella Stewart Gardiner Collection, Boston. The paintings were dispersed during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain. Contrary to the widespread assumption, created inadvertently by Schiller and Verdi, Phillip II spent most of his time at the old Alcazar in Madrid where naturally the Titian mythological paintings were probably all kept. Most if not all of the mythologies were in one room, the “camarino”. Thanks to plans and representations of other rooms in the Alcazar, famously Velásquez’s “Las Meninas” and a painting by his son-in-law in the Mazo “Queen Mariana”, 1666, London National Gallery, we have a good idea of the layout and mostly austere décor of the interiors. The Titian paintings were delivered gradually over time, the first reaching Philip prior to his return to Spain from his northern possessions and well before he made Madrid the capital or had the Alcazar upgraded. Accordingly the arrangement of the canvasses in the room in which all or most of them were eventually placed must have changed until, possibly, what was regarded as a definitive configuration was decided upon. Given the known dimensions of the paintings and of the room arranging them in a satisfactory manner is a game we could all play. Analogues of poses, composition, colouring, tone and subject matter would all have been factors. As a rule natural light sources and those in the paintings would have been made to coincide so the location of the windows was an important factor.

Exhibitions and re-hangings enable us to make new connections. It is known that as Velásquez shifted from being a full-time artist, to a courtier who did the occasional carefully considered splendid work, he re-hung the Spanish royal collection. Sadly there are no diagrams of his layouts which would be among the most fascinating of all Art Historical documents allowing the connections to speak for themselves without facile verbiage. Titian’s “Diana and Actaeon” in both narrative chronology and execution precedes the “Death of Actaeon”. The death scene is the closer of the two to Titian’s final manner in which muted colour burns through the complicated texture with greater intensity because of the almost monochrome colour scheme in which tone is in some respects more important than colouring as in an antique relief that has lost its original painted surface.

In both the Diana and Actaeon canvasses the protagonist enters from the left so it is read as we would read a text. These poses of the mortal hunter and the divine huntress are sufficiently similar that we would automatically relate the two works even if in a group they were not hung next to each other. Both also wear turned down boots. Moreover these two figures who initiate action are each associated with a loyal hunting dog whose contours combine in an arabesque with those of their master or mistress. The neck and jaw of Actaeon’s hunter follow the curvature of his calf but also, as it were, take a bite out of his thigh, a premonition of what is to happen. The dog’s head is almost solid black so that this area of the painting looks to us like a jig-saw with a missing piece. Having been given the form of a stag, or merely a stag’s head and presumably scented as Titian depicts it, by the vengeful Diana, because he had accidentally seen her and her nymphs bathing naked, Actaeon was torn apart by his own dogs. Diana in the later painting has a dog who follows the line of her rear leg forwards towards the stricken victim enmeshed in the pack. The curved contours of the dog unite the leg and the bow she wields, as we shall shortly see, as a symbolic attribute not as a viable weapon. The bow also merges with the tree trunks of

the background forest as though to identify Diana with the setting as goddess of the hunt.

The bow is held parallel with the picture plane not directed at the victim, much as in so many Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation God, sending down a benediction, rays of light, a dove or all three, and even the advancing angel of the Annunciation seem to be well off a trajectory that will target the Virgin Mary. This mis-targeting happens more often than not. As we shall see there is a parallel with the exact direction of the glances in the earlier of the Diana and Actaeon works which gives the story a variant that may be Titian's own invention or that of his cultured circle. The Diana in the death picture becomes a sort of herald of death paralleling on a symbolic level the action she has initiated without fowling her divine hands with the dirty work. There may be a suggestion that what is happening is a ritual akin to Brunhilde's annunciation of death to Siegmund according to Wagner not just a brutal killing. The foreground central bush is somewhat reminiscent of the lily in a vase in Annunciation iconology. Renaissance paintings, especially late Renaissance paintings, depend for meaning on references to basic archetypes knowingly deployed by the artist. Rosso's "Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro" has been shown to refer an Annunciation both in composition and in its reflection of the writings on an earlier miraculous birth.

One of the most under rated artistic encounters of the Renaissance I suggest is that between Rosso and Titian at a time when Titian's contacts with the Central Italian art world was still quite limited. Rosso passed through Venice on his tortuous journey between sacked Rome and Fontainebleau in the late 1520s. Not only does Diana in the "Death" have the deeply shaded profile of an angel in Rosso's "Dead Christ", 1527, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, also with a beautiful slain man, but it can be argued that the entire structure of the "Diana and Actaeon" reflects the "Moses". At the very least they arrive at identifiably similar results that must reflect similar precedents. Both canvasses have heroes who hurry in from the left (hurry turned to startled suspended motion in the Titian), a gaggle of astonished virginal women to the right of him, a central stepped rounded structure providing water and animals. Diana's enraged lap dog confronts Actaeon (from a safe distance) and his hunter across the stream. The stories are very different and this description is far from comprehensive. We cannot rule out the possibility that Titian may have had a sketch of the "Moses" so that he could adapt the homo-erotic prototype to his own version of a hopeless, unconsummable hetero-sexual encounter. "Diana and Actaeon" can be read as a variation of Gabriel and the Virgin but with a scenario with countless inversions of iconography and even Nature herself to underscore the impending disaster and other implications of the story.

Some of the sources have it that Diana, startled in the presence of her nymphs splashed Actaeon with water instantly transforming him into a stag. The act of splashing in some pictorial representations is a malevolent baptism or aspersion, bringing death not life as in the uses of iconography from the Annunciation in the "Death of Actaeon" discussed above. Versions of the story executed in France show this aspect of the story as in Jean Mignon's print the "Metamorphosis of Actaeon", after Luca Penni, 1545-50; or an anonymous "Diana and Actaeon", tempera on cloth, mid-sixteenth century, Louvre (reproduced in Zerner, "Renaissance Art in France", ills. 139, 289) with the victim having only a stag's head not the whole body. The sprinkling with harmful holy water is not the moment that Titian paints. However Diana's delicate toes at the very margin of the stream could accomplish this in a split second. The raising of a leg to do this, giving Actaeon the most fleeting glimpse up parted thighs, is the sort of implied innuendo Titian would have loved.

The theme of excruciating pain and death for brief pleasure would thus be intensified. A passage in the correspondence with Titian over the series mentions a detail the King wanted, presumably erotic, to be conveyed to the artist by word of mouth. An agitated area of water under the fountain's one active spout close to the huntsman reinforces the idea of transformation by splashed water.

Every limb and many other objects seem to be perfectly placed to instil multiple meanings. On the picture plane, but not in fictive space, Diana's other foot touches the leg of one of her nymphs who is more than a little more interested than, as a virginal nymph, she should be in the unprecedented arrival of a well built and scantily clad young man. This nymph is a derivative of a Sistine ignudo, the one to the upper left of the "Separation of the Sky and the Waters" with head and torso in a mirror image but the direction of the upper legs not reversed and the lower legs bent back not stuck out forward as in Michelangelo's prototype.

There is an associational connection not just a visual one to this pose as Diana implicitly agitates the waters rather than stilling them. There is a sex change too while the figure becomes a witness of a tragic accident not divine creation. With the weight of her legs on her toes this nymph shows signs of not unpleasant agitation. It seems most likely that it is to the other virgin, also obviously interested in the young man, above and behind the one taken from the ignudo that Actaeon looks at, not Diana, and to whom he responds not to the goddess herself. Here again is a wrong targeting as in the "Death" and all the Annunciations. On one level is Diana offended? The divine foot on the picture plane on the lower of these two nymph's leg is like a peremptory warning prod. Again on the picture plane Actaeon's legs and those of the nearest and most recumbent nymph are nearly but not quite arranged so one of the "partners'" legs is between both the other person's legs just as is not quite the case in one of Rosso's prints, "Pluto and Proserpina", mid 1520s (reproduced in Franklin, "Rosso in Italy", ill. 103) where a leg and an arm come into play; in works by Giulio Romano, such as the "Two Lovers", Hermitage, St. Petersburg; and in countless other High and later Renaissance works that unmistakably suggest, without actually showing , intercourse. The nymph thus iconographically compromised grasps the end of a garish pink cloth as though to conceal herself but her action is languid and, given the direction of the light, she could merely have been protecting her delicate complexion from the sun as any well bread sixteenth century woman would. Titian must have observed such actions in the streets loggias and roof terraces of Venice. The enraged glance the nymph directs to her mistress is either an indication of real indignation at Actaeon or a calculated demonstration of being seen to do the right thing by her goddess.

Actaeon has dropped his bow. Around this incident are more connections that can be made on the picture plane. The bow string appears to run between his toes as though an over ingenious Orpheus, who also came to grief through the actions of a group of angry women, is plucking a note. In his case they were disappointed by a lack of response. Alternatively Actaeon could be about to be tripped up painfully. Meanings and causes of action in this painting are instinctively multiple. The only visible bow tip either violates the languorous nymph's lower leg or is about to prick his lower leg as in Tintoretto's Scuola di San Rocco "Calvary", 1565, where, early in the ordeal of the Crucifixion, a lance threatens Christ's thigh by juxtaposition. Actaeon appears to push aside the lurid pink curtain as though tearing away a veil or revealing a vision. He does not actually do this as an analysis of his and the curtain's locations shows, but this first reading is the instinctive first one. On one level he is no doubt astonished and pleased by any young man's fantasy revealed behind

the curtain. Strong suggestions are present that this is a vision, an uncanny event. To the sixteenth century mind all phenomena to some extent fall into this category.

The depicted structure of the setting is riddled with mistakes as though it is one of those pictures in which the viewer is challenged to spot a specified number of mistakes. The loggia, improbably in the forest, has brightly painted vault ribs as might be seen in a well maintained chapel in a major church although this oratory is in an advanced state of decay. On the other hand it has a keystone like an Hieronymus Bosch monster, a few of whom were placed in works attributed to Giorgone, or from his circle, in Titian's youth. An example is "Il Tramonto (Sunset)", 1506-10, National Gallery, London. In its present condition there are three such animals in the river, the one nearest the viewer undoubtedly of an imaginary species. The lower part of the left hand pier is seriously eroded, revealing a bit of wonderfully curvaceous landscape in a simplified version of those by Titian's distinguished predecessor Giovanni Bellini. The spandrel over the right hand front pier is also seriously eroded though the foliage to some extent conceals this. Disturbing from an architectural not a structural point of view the front right pier, presumably rectangular or square, is not wide enough to answer symmetrically, as might be expected in a free standing structure, the "L" shaped one behind it. Titian does not restrict himself to plausible architecture as in the "Pesaro Altarpiece", 1519-26, in the Frari in Venice from his early maturity. In "Diana and Actaeon" the architectural inconsistencies have to be considered with others which taken together undermine belief in the physical reality of what is depicted like a castle in a medieval romance or Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso" which is liable to vanish. Is, for instance, the nymph behind the front right pier who's now faded left hand (to our right), actually shown twice as an earlier version has bled through, going to collapse the structure like female Samson? The virgin behind her with her back to us could also be giving the structure the heave ho as she pushes against the pier veiling her body's front not against our or Actaeon's lascivious gaze but protecting it against the rough texture of the masonry? Is the Temple of the Chase, after a brief rededication to sexual love, about to be whisked away like a vision in Francesco Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili", a work known to have had a great influence on Venetian Art (see for instance Loh, "Titian Remade", pp. 22-3) and with the aid of which part of the mystery of Giorgione's "La Tempesta" may at last have been unravelled.

The structure of objects in "Diana and Ataeon" and even of vision itself is askew. The dropped bow, having passed through the foreground foliage, could re-emerge outside the picture below the frame in our world as a restrained rehearsal for Caravaggio's intrusions of objects into real space, a visual game played on a minor scale by Rosso as with the Virgin's foot or the end of St. John's mantle in the "Deposition", 1521, Pinacoteca, Volterra . Are we implicated by a continuation of the picture into our space in the voyeurism of the scene and the divine prohibitions on what we see? The elaborate stepped fountain is sinking into the little stream. The ruinous state of the grotto and the tipping of the fountain imply a world of neglect and decay even before Actaeon bursts in. More alarmingly the recording of reality or even reality itself is wrong. The objects reflected in the water do not have reflections that reverse the angle the object itself but continue the alignment on the surface of the water. These alignments are generally parallel with the tilt of the fountain steps. It is almost inconceivable that an artist as aware of optical effects and known to be a compulsive reviser of his canvasses over prolonged periods of execution as Titian would commit such an error unless he had good reason. In a more restrained way than Cezanne in his late Bathers paintings Titian challenges the way in which we look at the world, in this instance to create an alarming atmosphere appropriate to the story.

Sexuality even without an overt act can have terrible consequences. Diana's domain could be like the evil castle that ought to be destroyed. What we see is objectively wrong, the physical structures are suspect, while many details, architectural and otherwise, refer to other narratives that give the story line alternative resonances.

In both the Diana and Actaeon paintings the victim to whom something is done, her sanctuary violated, his life brutally taken, is on the right in, or more precisely in front of, a forested side of the canvass. The relationships of character to woodland are different. A cluster of inward leaning tree trunks form a sort of natural tee-pee frame over Diana who's assertive strong pale arm could one feels push them apart in an exercise of divine will, much as the attendant black woman would adjust her every action to the movements of her mistress. The tree trunks and the negress's limbs are rather obvious visual analogues. Political correctness of our sort was not practised in sixteenth century Venice. The victim figure in the two pictures has similar raised arms and upper bodies except that Actaeon is much smaller and is not only overwhelmed and diminished by the forest but smothered and crushed by an enveloping thicket as his dogs bring him down. He is not just a victim of a single aggrieved female but of multiple natural forces including female pride. His body and those of the dogs who destroy him are carefully choreographed with the rear leg, dog and bow of Diana. The cruelty of Nature could be part of a wider divine harmony. In "Diana and Actaeon" the goddess and the nymph furthest back veil their faces as the infant Christ veils his mother's in Titian's early "Pesaro Madonna", Frari , Venice; and Hera her own face in the Parthenon frieze and the Selinus/Selinunte metope in which Zeus pulls Hera's arm to reveal the face behind the veil (not the most widely published metope see: Fullerton, "Greek Art", ill. 95). We are obviously dealing with an archetypal image of female reluctance and male desire. It cannot be ruled out that Titian, in Venice with all its links around the Mediterranean could have had some familiarity with similar ancient motifs if not these particular examples.

The heavy, solid figures in both paintings are concentrated near the picture plane more in the manner of people in ancient reliefs than in Titian's earlier mythological sequence for the Alabaster Room in the Este Castle in Ferrara, one of the paintings from which, the "Bacchus and Ariadne", is in the London National Gallery. (Ariadne's pose as the god is about to overpower her can usefully be compared to that of Actaeon in the much later painting as he stumbles across the goddess.) The "Death of Actaeon" has only two large scale human actors arranged in a setting with water, now more agitated than in the preceding episode, perhaps relating to the tendency of doomed stags to go to water. The implicitly dangerous forest is seen to have an avenue at the far end of which is a human rider, perhaps a human supplementary agent of Actaeon's downfall who will bag the game Diana decreed must be destroyed. The earlier Prado "Venus with Cupid and an Organist", 1545-50, not for Philip, has a much more orderly avenue with a seated and a grazing deer and a fountain with a satyr, symbol of unbridled sexuality. The avenue may already have been bound up in the artist's mind with other themes in the Diana and Actaeon paintings and implies that even this late wild painting is set in a royal or aristocratic park. A clothed, brightly lit background huntress on foot charges up the lime green hill in "Diana and Actaeon". She is similar to two figures in an equivalent setting in Lorenzo Lotto's "Virgin and Child with Saints", ca. 1504-5, N.G.o.S., Edinburgh. In the later, as in the Titian, they are a warning of things to come: two huntsmen take axes to a tree for the Cross as the infant Christ consults a prophetic scroll, the Virgin raises her hand in alarm and St. Francis indicates the wound in his torso.

The main figurative group in this painting is exceptionally compact akin to either a relief or a very compact sculptural group like those, more dense and agitated, in Titian's two versions of the "Martyrdom of St. Lawrence", ca. 1549, Gesuiti, Venice; and 1565-7, El Escorial. An approach to Titian, with the potential to yield interesting results, is to consider him as a virtual sculptor. Every one of the Diana figures, but for the nymph behind the pier, overlaps with one or two others in a very calculated sequence, but there is a wiggly caesura under the obliquely viewed arch in one of the densest figurative areas brought about by hiding the one nymph almost entirely behind the architecture. This caesura is almost but not quite without overlapping as is another gap between the huntsman and the nearest figure and the rest.

Light is used to highlight the foremost parts of the figures or the foremost figures in contrast to the others by means of a version of the dappled light that the Impressionists would fragment more systematically. Figures who break this pattern are the highlighted virgin behind the pier and the negress who absorbs rather than reflects light. This is one of the means used to create ordered relief in the painting but not the only one. This is a painting that could be mapped. Much more interesting than this exercise is working out the way the artist probes the solidity of the figurative mass with highly localized and surprising probings of deep space. There are little bore holes into the middle ground also a characteristic of Rosso, yet again a possibly significant influence, but in this Titian work almost always of an indeterminate extent. Rosso's Florentine contemporary Pontormo also broke up surfaces as in the "Martyrdom of the Theban Legion", ca. 1528-9, Pitti, Florence. Elsewhere he plugged holes or parts of them with red cloth sometimes only to the depth of a lower garment or a deeper tonally intensified part of pink cloth, notably in the so-called "Deposition", later 1520s, Capponi Chapel, Santa Felicita, Florence. He duplicates this procedure almost without colour in the "Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap (Carlo Neroni)", 1530, private collection, in the National Gallery Renaissance Faces exhibition (until January 18).

The little holes in the group in "Diana and Actaeon" include, moving left to right, a triangle between the dog's chest, Actaeon's lower calf and the back of the dark foreground mound, a rare example with a non-figurative component. The nearest nymph's legs fill the triangle between the man's legs except for a dun coloured scrap of middle ground at the top. Between this nymph, Actaeon's leg, tunic and the pink curtain and the nymph's body, excluding the bit cut off by the blue strand is a much larger hole, almost symmetrical, revealing several layers of background in contrast to the almost cartouche-like frame in a narrow spatial band. Another shape over her head, more chaotic, is partly defined by skeins of white which could almost come off the next nymph's cloth, but which are literally optical effects deep in the landscape rendered in a typically bold Venetian way. Between the nymph with her back to us and the one in front of her there may be a small dark non-figurative hole between buttock and thigh. The foremost of these two demi-goddesses with a plug of white cloth wedged between the arm across the breast and the thighs in spite of the brightly lit legs protruding at the knees is the closest Titian could get a solid Brancusi-like figure as in the "Kiss". To the right of her is the wiggly caesura crossed by Diana's foot. There is another small hole between the breast and arms of nymph wiping Diana's foot, an act of Christological significance taken up by Rembrandt in his "Bathsheba". The anatomically remote possibility of a gap between the foot wiping devotee's elbow and lower abdomen is emphatically refuted by a speck of cloth. Titian uses cloth as a kind of sculptural polyfiller where a deep gap was not wanted. Between Diana's legs and the cloth there is another hole and another between her further

forward calf and the velvet on her seat. Still more gaps are between the goddess and the black woman and within the form of this last figure.

It is not clear how far back some of these spatial probings go. This is the sort of exploration of depth that Henry Moore would take to its ultimate conclusions by making holes in figures and dividing the solid components of them into detached entities. How solid or united is a person or group? How united or divisible are they? Titian explored these questions most usually in his late works by means of broken brush strokes spread over an object most crucially in the frighteningly insubstantial body of Christ in the very late “Pieta” for his own tomb where the lack of apparent real substance raises real questions about the nature of the dead Christ. The solidarity and distinctiveness of the union of Diana and her band are brought into doubt by the holes and gaps. The nymph who is on the picture plane is in a shorthand for sexual union with Actaeon is separated from her sisters by a caesura. Are the entourage and the goddess a special, superior divine grouping or just part of a sequence of phenomena which form and reform and metamorphose? Late Titian usually raises such problems in a painterly way but appears to have equally able to do it by sculptural means. Is a person an entity as we think of them or a receptacle for stock behaviours as the sixteenth century was more likely to have them? All exceptional people of any period, including Titian and Philip, however inadequate the conceptual tools at their disposal must have moments of implicitly believing the modern view.

If “Diana and Actaeon” is about impending death “Diana and Callisto”, the other Sutherland painting, at the moment still in Edinburgh, is about the creation of life and the immortality conferred by the god’s goddess’s power to transform those who have pleased or displeased them. Callisto, one of the band of nymphs has been made pregnant by Zeus disguised as a woman, at least up to the crucial moment, in a lesbian seduction. Diana transformed her into a bear and set dogs on her, following a by now drearily familiar script, but Zeus translated her to the heavens. Diana in the painting points to Callisto as though re-enacting God in Michelangelo’s “Creation of Man”, having played no part in this procreation while the poor nymph’s pose is a parody of the God in the Sistine “Separation of the Sky and Water” in which she is restrained by not supported by figures around her. The mortal theme of the later Actaeon painting is inescapable but the overall impression from looking at “Diana and Actaeon” is of life and vitality. The stag’s skull on the pier and the skins dimly visible dangling on the branches of the trees hint at what will happen to the intruder: he will soon be just another pelt. In the painting of his death only his head is that of an animal, stuck on too far back perhaps so as to look slightly deformed. He is a disfigured human, not a mere beast, making his end more poignant. His beady eye and Diana’s nipple, one being exposed as in representations of Amazons (who actually according to legend cut one breast off to improve their dexterity with the bow, but this is too upsetting to show), are on opposite ends of a near horizontal line across most of the width of the canvass. This line crosses one on an opposite slight diagonal which defines a simplified version of the horizon. Diana in her pursuit of Actaeon displays a virtually Amazonian hatred of men.

“Diana and Actaeon” with a cast of extras repeats, with variations, the broad layout of the greatest and one of the smallest Venetian paintings Giorgione’s “La Tempesta”, ca. 1505, Accademia, Venice, the full meaning of which will never be exactly known for all the effort spent teasing it out. Titian may not necessarily have known this small cabinet scene in which a seated naked woman to the right suckles a baby in the presence of a standing,

dressed, seemingly armed man, both of whom are in front of a river and divided from each other by a stream. There is lush vegetation and a storm in the background. His long staff lacks a spear tip but the slashed costume is that worn by landsknechts (Germanic mercenaries). A second nude female at his feet has been painted out in the final version. “Diana and Actaeon” to some extent repeats the basic male/female juxtaposition but with a goddess who will never have a child and a man who has been disarmed by her. The “Brancusi” nymph, also derived from a Sistine ignudo, is far closer to the Giorgione woman than the rather Mannerist Diana with the unnaturally tiny head. It is impossible to say if every one of the suggestions I have made would have been accepted by the artist. Some were so ingrained in the Culture that, even if they were not deliberate they have a fair claim to be legitimate readings. It should be remembered that Titian himself called the paintings for Philip “poesie” or visual poetry. Poetry can never be tied down too precisely though its ambiguous meanings employ exacting precision.

Timothy Alves

## Taking Liberties - a 900-year struggle for rights and freedoms in Britain

### *Exhibition at the British Library*

There is a great deal here to interest us. Although the exhibition spans a much longer period, the Early Modern is well-represented through the Civil War, ‘Glorious Revolution’ and 18th-century radicalism.

The exhibition is organised in themes rather than periods: *Liberty and the Rule of Law*, *Parliament and People*, *the United Kingdom*, *Right to Vote*, *Human Rights*, *Freedom of Speech and Belief*, and the 20th-century *Freedom from Want*. Each section has some point of interest but for Early Modernists, *Parliament and People* is particularly rich: all the major documents are there in the original, such as Charles I’s death warrant, with Cromwell’s signature in third place, the Root and Branch petition with its + marks replacing signatures for those lower down the social scale, and *An Agreement of the People*. Above all, there is William Clarke’s transcript of the Putney Debates, open at page 35: ‘*The poorest he that is in England...*’ (frustrating as it always is to see such volumes in a glass case, preventing you from turning the pages).

There is a replica collection of Parliamentary regimental banners, including the parliamentary soldier pulling the ‘Antichrist’ Pope off his throne and, my personal favourite, that of Edward Wingate of Herefordshire, showing three birds, two in a cage, the other free, singing ‘*Non verna*, Not a slave’. Many of these are available to buy as postcards.

The Great Seal of Parliament is displayed, with the House of Commons in session and the words ‘*In the First Year of Freedom by God’s Blessing restored*’, together with a series of designs for new coins, showing the search for a new republican iconography under the Commonwealth - a tantalising glimpse of the England there might have been, the ‘path not taken.’ Different drafts for the oaths of office point to the problem of constructing a new society and constitution post-revolution.

Pierre Lombart’s ‘Headless Horseman’ series with the head of Cromwell superimposed on that of Charles I and then the head obliterated altogether on the Restoration, shows how economically an image can be adapted to the prevailing political wind.

Although the Civil War is described as the English Civil War, the birth of Britain from its separate kingdoms is well illustrated in the *United Kingdom* section, with a map said to be Henry VIII’s from Hampton Court, showing England and Wales as one nation, the Scottish National Covenant, complete with (mainly indecipherable) signatures, and suggestions for the re-design of the flag after the 1707 Act of Union - we might have ended up with something very different from the Union Flag.

Later developments in the history of ideas are represented in the *Human Rights* section, which brings out the contrast between ideas of liberty based on the Social Contract, such as Locke’s, and the religious basis for the campaign against slavery. The Minute Book of the London Corresponding Society 1792, set up to campaign for parliamentary reform, introduces the section on the *Right to Vote* with its later, better-known material on the Chartist and women’s suffrage.

Accompanying explanations give a clear, and, as far as I could judge, accurate account of very complicated issues, without getting too detailed for the general reader. For instance, the commentary on Charles I's execution (depicted in a contemporary German illustration, complete with blood spurting) is refreshingly free from sentimentality. *Freedom of Speech and Belief* includes Milton's '*Aeropagitica ...a speech for liberty of speech and unlicensed printing 1644.*' By setting 17th century conflicts in a context of competing rights and liberties, the BL have avoided the sort of Roundhead-Cavalier romanticism which so often plagues popular depictions of the period.

I thought the BL have managed to convey a great deal in a small space. Experts will enjoy the chance to see so many key documents in the original; non-historians will learn much that is new. The importance of the Civil War for our subsequent liberties, the way it shaped the debate, is not widely appreciated among the general population. If this exhibition helps to redress the balance, it will be doing a useful and long overdue job.

There is also an interactive element, seeking to link the historic with the modern. Paper wristbands enable you to vote on a series of contemporary issues, such as police powers, detention for 42 days etc., although I found the voting machines required some time to master. It was easy to vote for the wrong option or miss sections out altogether, like one of the unfortunate Florida voters in 2001. Cromwell supporters may enjoy the opportunity to vote for his statue to be set up on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. You can see the latest results at the exhibition or on the website [www.bl.uk/takingliberties](http://www.bl.uk/takingliberties), which also shows documents and artefacts from the exhibition and further information.

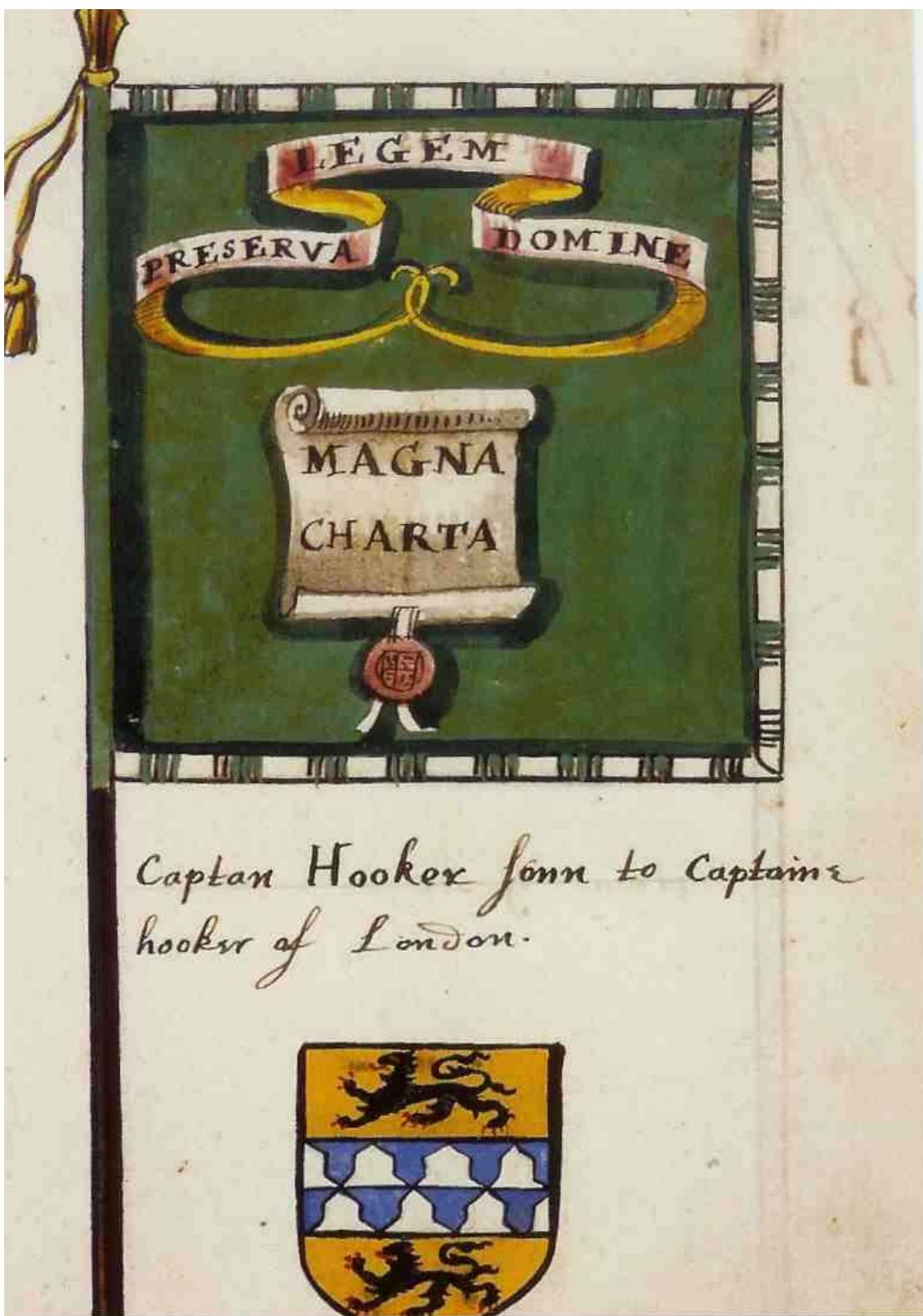
The BL are hosting a number of related events, including '*Is Liberty British:* Prof. Linda Colley in conversation with our own Prof. A C Grayling, on Wednesday 28th January (details on the website).

***The exhibition continues at the British Library until 1 March 2009, admission free.***

Marilyn Polan



Captain Edward Wingate of Herefordshire



## Television

### The Devil's Whore

The most surprising thing about this series is the huge amount of critical acclaim that it has received. A large number of reviewers have lauded praise upon it. If you have missed it then let me tell you the truth... it was awful! Okay, so in the scope of awfulness it was way behind *The Tudors* but it was still pretty dreadful.

*The Devil's Whore* employed the devise of importing a fictional character, Angelica Fanshaw, played by Andrea Riseborough, into the hotbed of political and religious radicalism let loose by the Civil War. This need not be a problem and has been done before on many occasions but unfortunately this time it did not work. The battle scenes were done very well and in each episode there were valiant attempts to present some of the debates that took place. However, these were a mere backdrop to the sex and nudity that the programme was centred on. Now I'm all in favour of a bit of sex and nudity but I prefer it to be mixed in with some culture and put into context, especially when the show is supposed to be about the Civil War. And here we come to the crux of the argument; with something as dramatic and fascinating as the Civil War why do the media feel it is necessary to 'spice it up'? Are we all so stupid that we cannot be expected to watch a serious and realistic drama?

As well as Riseborough stripping off, we watched her character progress from loyal royalist wife to a political radical. The first episode saw the young Fanshaw being abandoned at the shoreline by her mother for a nunnery and throwing herself onto the wet sand screaming "*If there be a God that steals mothers, then strike me down*'. At least it provided an early chuckle. She then started to see the Devil, sometimes up a tree or on top of a building, or in the corner of a room, and I'm still not quite sure why. Another humorous escapade saw her dressed as some sort of highwaywoman. In almost every episode Edward Saxby, played by John Simm, would gallop across the country in order to save her from rape, imprisonment or a hanging. It became really quite tedious.

What I found particularly annoying was the way the series cavalierly (sic) played fast and loose with the truth. I can take some 'interpretation' but I do want them to at least try to truthfully reflect what really happened. The most flagrant instance of altering actual historical events was in the final programme when Cromwell was shown as having accepted the crown, completing disregarding the days of torment that he went through in trying to reconcile his twin goals of settlement (which accepting the crown would have aided) and radicalism. It is to Cromwell's great credit that he declined to be become King Oliver. Yet in the programme he was portrayed as betraying his fellow radicals and apparently being crowned. With shows like this is it any wonder that most teenagers have such a limited grasp of our history?

The writer did at least have an excuse, for Channel 4 made him condense the series into just four episodes. However, this was a wonderful opportunity missed and sadly yet another case of television ruining a great story.

John Croxon

# FORTHCOMING SOCIETY EVENTS

## Events 2007-2008

All events start at 6.30 p.m. and are followed by refreshments and questions unless otherwise stated

- 16th January 2009 Dr. Mike Smith (University of Reading), 'William Byrd's "Why do I vse my paper incke & pen": a song and its context', Clore Building 101.
- 4th February 2009 Dr. Timothy Alves (Birkbeck, University of London), 'Light, Literal and Symbolic in Early Modern Painting', The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London (focusing upon three paintings). As this is a visit to the National Gallery refreshments will not be provided)
- 20th February 2009 - Prof. Susan James (Birkbeck, University of London), 'Spinoza', Clore Building G01.
- 19 March 2009: Professor William Brooks (University of Bath), 'French, German, and Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Madame Palatine, Sister-in-Law of Louis XIV; or, The Case of the Shat-Upon Carrot', Room TBC.
- 13th May 2009: Dr Roger Mettam, 'Absolute Monarchy and Provincial Identity in Louis XIV's France', Room TBC.
- 24th June 2009: Prof. Peter Burke (Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge), 'The Rhetoric of Autobiography in 17th-century Europe', followed by end of year party, both rooms TBC.

For further information on membership and activities contact the secretary, Laura Jacobs: [l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk](mailto:l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk)

Membership is £5 for the year. Non-members may attend events at a cost of £3 each.

# The Birkbeck Early Modern Society

William Byrd's 'Why do I use my paper,  
inke and pen' : a song and its context

Dr. Mike Smith



16th January 2009, 6:30pm, Room B33, Malet St

Free to members £3 non-members £5 membership

# FORTHCOMING EVENTS

This section concerns those events staged by other societies and organizations which we feel might be of interest to our membership.

## Society, Culture and Belief, 1400-1800

The programme for the academic year 2008-9 continues our series on *The Senses*, with the theme:

### Touch

Convenors: Laura Gowing (KCL), Kate Hodgkin (University of East London), Michael Hunter (Birkbeck), Miri Rubin (Queen Mary), Adam Sutcliffe (KCL).

Seminars will take place in the Ecclesiastical History Room at the Institute of Historical Research on the following Thursdays at 5.30 p.m. All are welcome!

**22 January 2009      Dr Alex Cowan (Northumbria University)**

**Touching her reputation: marriage, gossip and social networks in early modern Venice**

**5 February 2009      Dr Willem de Blécourt (Roehampton)**

**Touching witches and the witch's touch**

**19 February 2009      Professor John Walter (University of Essex)**

**Gesture and the politics of touch in early modern England**

**5 March 2009      Stephen Brogan (Birkbeck College, University of London)**

**The sacred touch: scrofula and the restored Stuarts, 1660-88**

**19 March 2009      Dr Lauren Kassell (Pembroke College, Cambridge)**

**The magical and medical powers of touch in early modern England**

**The Historical Association  
Central London Branch**

**17th January 2009, Stephen Brogan, A ‘monster of metamorphosis’: reassessing the Chevalier/Chevaliere d’Eon Affair**

**Turmoil and Tranquillity: The Sea Through the Eye of Dutch and Flemish Masters, 1550-1700**  
**National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London**  
Telephone 08707804552  
Until the 11th January 2009

Featuring seascapes painted during the Dutch Golden Age when the Dutch Republic became one of Europe’s foremost maritime powers.

**Andrea Palladio: His Life and Legacy**  
**Royal Academy of Arts, London**  
Telephone 020 73008000  
**From 31st January until 13th April 2009**

Andrea Palladio was one of Europe’s greatest architects, designing churches, palaces and other buildings in Italy during the fifteenth century and established his theories in ‘*The Four Books of Architecture*’. After his death his influence spread across the rest of Europe including England where Palladian architecture became extremely popular in the eighteenth century.

**Hidden Treasures**  
**Bevis Marks Synagogue, London**  
Telephone 020 76261274  
**Until 15th March 2009**

An exhibition exploring London’s Jewish history containing sacred synagogue textiles, dating back to the seventeenth century.

# BOOK REVIEW

## NON-FICTION BOOKS

I hope that many of you will send in your reviews of newly published books and the occasional old book. The only criteria being that it deals with a subject within the Early Modern period, roughly from the Renaissance (the middle of the fifteenth century) through to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and that the book is still in print.

John Croxon

### *Henry Virtuous Prince* by David Starkey Harper Press

2009 is the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne. To mark the occasion Harper Press have published *Henry Virtuous Prince*, the new, much hyped, work by David Starkey. It covers just the first twenty years of his life, from his birth in 1491 through to 1511 when, with the use of a signed bill for the appointment to a rectory, Henry uses Thomas Wolsey to symbolically end his council's control over patronage.

Starkey sees two different Henry's: one is the aged, fat, grotesque monster that everyone knows. The other is a young, virtuous, intelligent Renaissance prince. It is the younger version that is presented here with the promise of the tyrant for book two.

Firstly, this is an eminently readable book. I read it in less than three days over the Christmas period. It highlights Starkey's strong points: fluency, apt analogies and presentational flair, and it concentrates upon part of Henry's life that is so often ignored by historians. The reason for this is that so little is known about his early years. With the entire book covering these early years this leads to much speculation and conjecture.

To start with there are assertions about the Yorkist and early Tudor period to which I cannot agree. Starkey claims that Henry VII had '*shown many of the key qualities of kingship: bravery, decisiveness and the ability to master men and events*' and that he had '*won his throne in battle, in man-to-man combat with his rival*'. Henry Tudor never fought in any battle. At Bosworth he cowered at the back terrified at the sight of Richard III's fateful charge. God knows what colour his breeches were!

Unbelievably, Starkey repeats the old myth about the red rose of Lancaster and the white rose of York, when surely everyone with even a faint knowledge of the period knows that the red rose was not an emblem of the House of Lancaster and that the Wars of the Roses is a much later term.

There also appears to be too much imaginative interpretation of evidence. For instance, Starkey seeks to present the young Henry as very different from his elder brother Arthur and to do this he asserts how Arthur is sent away for his education whilst Henry stays within his mother's household. Starkey thinks that Henry had a very close and loving relationship with Elizabeth of York and that she was instrumental in his upbringing. However, there is no real evidence for this, Henry had his household and his tutors, and Starkey is reduced to stating that '*Elizabeth of York, in short, may not have been a hands-on mother, but she was close at hand*'.

This leads on to the extraordinary assertion that at this period Henry was a Yorkist and that his father and those at court were seriously worried by this. Henry may have looked with admiration at his maternal grandfather, Edward IV, and the royal household was probably based upon a Yorkist president, but he was always a Tudor raised within a Tudor court. Starkey takes this theme to an even more ludicrous position when he baldly states that Thomas More too possessed Yorkist sympathies!

I struggled to find a big idea in this book, and that need not be a bad thing. There does seem to be a few attempts. The author states that contrary to her assertions at her trial Catherine of Aragon did sleep with Arthur. However, this is not something new and Starkey presents 'new evidence' with the less than conclusive words of a servant in Arthur's household.

Another more interesting idea is that Henry was created duke of York to counter the public relations surrounding Perkin Warbeck. Here Starkey presents a plausible argument and demonstrates how Henry VII attempted to use his young son to bolster his dynastic ambitions unstable by lack of legitimacy and riven by plots, rivals and suspicions.

I cannot see the reason for claiming the young Henry as a virtuous prince. Indeed, there are a number of instances when the actions of the young man seem to presage the actions of the later tyrant. His father's hated ministers, Empson and Dudley, were immediately removed from office but it was certainly Henry's own decision some sixteen months later to execute them. When Phillip of Burgundy was driven ashore and made to agree to the repatriation of the Yorkist Edmund de la Pole, Phillip received the guarantee that Edmund's life was to be spared, but in 1513 he was executed. Both instances show the callous disregard for life reminiscent of the more aged Henry.

With all the hype, I expected a masterpiece, but this is a very conventional book by an establishment historian. However, despite my objections this is a worthwhile book for all those interested in the Tudor period. Starkey writes in an engaging style and he has told a story in a very accessible manner. The second book, dealing with the rest of Henry's life, is due out at the end of 2009.

John Croxon

## FICTION BOOKS

The criteria for fiction books is the same as that for non-fiction book reviews; that it deals with a subject within the Early Modern period, roughly from the Renaissance (the middle of the fifteenth century) through to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and that the book is still in print.

John Croxon

**Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, ed. J. H. Alexander, introd. Kathryn Sutherland (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2000)**

Gothic, melodramatic, and powerful, Walter Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) offers romance, politics, and social commentary set against a dramatic background of the Border country. Our narrator opens with the story of his artist friend Dick Tinto who believed before his early death that art can tell stories without words. To prove it he showed our narrator a sketch which '...presented an ancient hall fitted up and furnished in what we now call the taste of Queen Elizabeth's age. The light, admitted from the upper part of a high casement, fell upon a female figure of exquisite beauty, who, in an attitude of speechless terror, appeared to watch the issue of an animate debate betwixt two other persons. The one was a young man, in the Vandyke dress common to the time of Charles I., who, with an air of indignant pride...seemed to be urging a claim of right, rather than of favour, to a lady, whose age, and some resemblance of their features, pointed her out as the mother of the younger female, and who appeared to listen with a mixture of displeasure and impatience.' (p. 12)

Luckily Tinto also kept notes of the inspiration for the picture since, unless you've read the novel, it's all a bit of a mystery. Tinto had been sketching and painting in the mountains of Lammermoor when he came upon a ruined castle.

This castle was the ancestral seat of the Ravenswood's but by the time of the story it had been bought by Sir William Ashton, a lawyer and the Lord Keeper, who moved in with his family and upset the social order. Of the Ravenswood's, neither father nor son is happy with the situation as they saw themselves as the rightful feudal leaders of the area. When the father dies, the son decides to kill Ashton to avenge the family honour and reclaim the castle.

Ashton has a beautiful daughter called Lucy. Shy, dreamy, and golden, she spends her days listening to local legends and gossip and singing songs. Her father loves her but her mother, a political mover and shaker in London (and reputed witch!) finds Lucy a bit of a disappointment and good for nothing more than a useful marriage.

One day Lucy and her father go out walking and to hear tales told by old Alice, a long-time retainer of the estate. Alice warns Ashton to avoid Ravenswood since he is up to no good. On the way home, father and daughter encounter a wild bull who tries to run them down. They are saved by a mysterious young stranger who kills the bull and falls in love with Lucy. Lucy, meanwhile, is similarly smitten.

Once it becomes clear that the stranger is in fact young Ravenswood, Ashton encourages the romance as a way of solving the feud. He thinks his wife will approve and is shocked when she comes back from London and forbids the match. Lady Ashton wants to link with the neighbouring laird who will bring more property and money unlike the penniless Ravenswood. She does not know that Ravenswood and Lucy are secretly engaged and when she finds out she takes every action to prevent the couple from communicating with each other. Lucy gradually comes to believe that Edgar, who has fled abroad, has forgotten her and miserably implies consent to the alternate match. When Edgar returns, it is as shown in the scene quoted above and neither he nor Lucy has the power to stop events.

Lucy lacks the pluck of a Jane Austen heroine. She is passive and goes through with the wedding. But things go very awry on the wedding night. Horrible cries come from the wedding chamber and when the door is knocked down the groom is found stabbed. Who did it? Lucy? Ravenswood? The Devil? The groom recovers but never reveals what happened. Lucy is mad and dies within a week. Ravenswood falls victim to an old family curse.

The tale is tragic but Scott manages to inject some comic relief in the character of the Ravenswood housekeeper, Caleb Balderstone. Caleb's concern to keep up appearances provides some very funny moments to break up the gloom.

Incredibly Scott based this tale on the true story of Janet Dalymple, daughter of Viscount Stair, who died in 1669 after a similar death to Lucy Ashton. I've been hearing quite a lot about Stair since I moved to Scotland. He wrote *The Institutions of the Law of Scotland* which is one of the key sources of Scots law.

*The Bride of Lammermoor* can be read on many different levels: romance, gothic horror, family saga. Scott's atmospheric prose glitters across the page and proves that words can paint pictures. The story has provided inspiration to artists from Donizetti (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) to E. M. Forster (It is no coincidence that Miss Honeychurch's first name is Lucy. The two Lucies even sing the same song.) The Penguin Classics edition provides extremely useful notes and the introduction offers some revisionist thinking about the composition of the novel.

Karen Baston

## Problem Page

**Aunt Agonistes, Birkbeck's own early modern agony aunt.**

**Dear Aunty Ag.**

**I am fed up and depressed because I have no money.**

**Laura Jacobs**

Dear Laura

You will tell me, that it is good to be rich so that you may be decked in fair and sumptuous garments, finely cut and framed after diverse fashions. You are very sottish and simple if you do not realise that such braveries bring you perpetual solitude and molestation; for having gotten garments of these sorts, you must so often rub, wipe, brush, fold, unfold, alter, amend, air to keep them from spots & moths. You will only express deep vanity as you will cover your body, which is made of nothing but dirt and slime, with purple, silk, gold, and other curiosities.

You would like to see your cellars full of the best and most delicate wines. You forget the discommodities which drink brings. For wine, according to *Plato*, was sent down by the Gods to inflict punishments upon men and to take vengeance on their offenses making them after they be become drunk, kill & murder one another, so it is a blessing, Laura that you can't afford any.

Who would desire riches, for the pastime of hunting, hawking, and other manner of chasing sports? The chase is no recreation at all that a studious or a virtuous spirit should follow: it is an exercise of cruelty, a sport for desperate people, and for mad men.

If we should seek after this wicked money, to take pleasure in many farms, country houses, environed with trim gardens and buildings, beset with clear fountains, thickets, arbours, vineyards, meadows, arable land, and other singularities: I say, such things make us often poor by slothfulness, and undo us by over-lavishness, inducing us to grievous offenses.

I will conclude with the good Philosopher *Possidonius*, that riches are the cause of infinite evils: which contrariwise cannot be so said or alleged, against our holy and well advised poverty, of whom learned *Seneca* speaks honourably saying that the naked by this special mean are out of danger of thieves. Those who are free from money may in besieged places live at ease, not dreading the fear of enemies.

So chin up Laura, your life would be worse if you were rich.

Aunty Agonistes

(Aunt Agonistes consulted Charles Estienne, *The Defence of Contraries*, translated by Antony Munday, 1593. She would like to help you with your problems so please write to her).

## THE WINTER QUIZ

1. Which battle was won by British forces under Sir Arthur Wellesley on the 28th July 1809?
2. Which capital city was formally surrendered to the British on the 18th September 1759?
3. Which famous author died on the 15th December 1683?
4. Which famous poet was born on the 9th December 1608?
5. Which American general and politician was married on the 6th January 1750?
6. At which battle on the 16th January 1809 did British forces under Sir John Moore held off Napoleon's advancing forces?
7. Which actor and theatre manager died in London on the 20th January 1779?
8. Which Scottish poet was born in Alloway on the 25th January 1759?
9. What was the subject of Dr Ralph Shaa sermon at St Paul's Cross on the 22nd June 1483?
10. Which future king was born at Greenwich on the 28th June 1491?
11. Born in 1700, who invented the cotton spinning machine and the weigh-bridge?
12. Who died on the 21st April 1509?
13. Which philosopher and writer was born in Geneva in 1712?
14. Who was created Prince of Wales in November 1489?
15. Who wrote the *New Atlantis* in 1626?
16. Why was Francis Kett burnt for heresy in the ditch of Norwich Castle in 1589?
17. Which sculptor and architect was born in Naples on the 7th December 1598?
18. What did Colonel Thomas Pride 'purge' on the 6th December 1648?
19. What was the name of the man who impersonated Martin Guerre in the French village of Artigat in the sixteenth century?
20. Who was president of the court that tried and condemned Charles I?

Answers on the following page

## **ANSWERS TO THE WINTER QUIZ**

1. Talavera
2. Quebec, Canada
3. Izaak Walton (author of *The Complete Angler*)
4. John Milton
5. George Washington
6. The battle of Corunna (in Spain)
7. David Garrick
8. Robert Burns
9. ‘Bastard slips shall take no deep root’ – a reference to the ineligibility of the children if Edward IV
10. Henry VIII
11. John Wyatt
12. Henry VII
13. Jean-Jacques Rousseau
14. Arthur (eldest son of Henry VII)
15. Francis Bacon
16. For questioning the divinity of Jesus Christ
17. Gian Lorenzo Bernini
18. A purge of the House of Commons of those MP’s who favoured continuing negotiations with Charles I
19. Arnaud du Tilh
20. Judge John Bradshaw

# **THE BIRKBECK EARLY MODERN SOCIETY**

**FOUNDED 2006**

This society was founded in the belief that more study, discussion and interest in the Early Modern period is required. The society aims to promote, encourage and stimulate new research and discussion into a wide range of themes, including art and images, consumption, gender roles, literature, magic, politics, religion, science, music, sexuality and, travel and exploration.

## **PRESIDENT**

Stephen Brogan

## **SECRETARY**

Laura Jacobs

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Sue Dale

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Timothy Alves, Karen Baston, Nigel Carter, Karen Chester, John Croxon, Robin Rowles

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