Art, Eros and the British Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT

Circulated in print reproductions and housed in museum collections, turgid phalluses and sculpted vulvas unearthed at Herculaneum and Pompeii or looted from an expanding colonial frontier challenged an Enlightenment drive to understand ancient societies. This dissertation considers the ways in which Enlightenment thinkers and artists alike grappled with this visceral evidence of the ancients' polymorphous eroticism. Bridging the worlds of antiquarian scholarship, commercial publishing, private collecting, museological culture and the visual arts, this dissertation considers the reception and transformation of ancient Eros in the late British Enlightenment. It argues that Eros, whether disguised as vulgar Priapus, celebrated as a primordial "Prime Mover of the universe" or apprehended simply as sexual desire, became a crucial force in cultural negotiation, embodying complex social relations among the intellectual elite and offering a radical vocabulary for critical intervention in British culture.

Chapter One considers the publication, distribution, and reception of Richard Payne Knight's controversial disquisition on phallic devotion: *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786). It focuses on the evidence privileged by Knight to chart an emerging historical sensibility attentive to canonical sources, material culture and following from J. J. Winckelmann, the power of eroticism. Chapter Two traces the movement of erotic artifacts discussed in the *Discourse* from Dilettanti collections into the British Museum. It explores the associative meanings that Charles Townley ascribed to artifacts in his collection before examining their marginalisation in the public sphere. Chapter Three triangulates between painter/theorist Henry Fuseli, poet/artist/engraver William Blake and poet/natural philosopher Erasmus Darwin to demonstrate that an emphasis on collaboration can enrich our understanding of the conceptual and aesthetic frameworks that gave their joint productions generative force. But far from a "happy copulation," the chapter reveals that collaboration had its drawbacks. The bold virility first realised and later frustrated across their graphic work speaks to the harsh economic climate that brought the threesome into professional alliance. Together, the disparate group of artists, intellectuals, collectors and poets considered in this dissertation emerge as allies insofar as each courted an ancient past teeming with more philosophy, mystery and erotic possibility than their own period could afford.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse examine les manières dont les intellectuels et les artistes du siècle des Lumières ont découvert et considéré les anciennes preuves matérielles de l'érotisme des Grecs et Romains. Tout en reliant les mondes de l'érudition antiquaire, de l'édition commerciale, de la collection privée, de la culture muséologique et des arts visuels, j'étudie la réception des intellectuels et artistes face à la transformation de l'ancienne divinité Éros vers le tournant du XIXe siècle. Je soutiens qu'Éros, qu'il soit déguisé en Priape vulgaire, célébré comme un moteur primordial de l'univers ou appréhendé simplement comme éros—le désir sexuel, est devenu une force radicale dans la culture britannique.

Le premier chapitre examine la publication, la distribution et la réception du livre controversé de Richard Payne Knight: *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786). Je me concentre sur les preuves privilégiées par Knight pour tracer une sensibilité historique nouvelle, attentive aux sources historiques et à la culture matérielle et les idées de J. J. Winckelmann. Le deuxième chapitre explore le mouvement des artefacts érotiques discutés dans *Discourse* de Knight provenant des collections privées du British Museum en Angleterre. J'explore les associations que le collectionneur Charles Townley attribuait aux artefacts de sa collection avant d'examiner la marginalisation et la signification de ceux-ci dans la sphère publique. Cependant, j'explique que leur relégation dans le sous-sol du musée était moins une conséquence de la pruderie victorienne que de la lutte du musée pour établir son identité institutionnelle. Le troisième chapitre considère le travail collaboratif du peintre/théoricien Henry Fuseli, le poète/artiste/graveur William Blake et le poète/philosophe Erasmus Darwin. Mais loin d'être une « copulation heureuse », je révèle que la collaboration avait ses inconvénients. L'audacieuse virilité d'abord réalisée pour être ensuite contrainte dans leur travail graphique témoigne du climat économique difficile qui a amené le trio à former une alliance professionnelle. Ensemble, les groupes d'artistes, d'intellectuels, de collectionneurs et de poètes considérés dans cette thèse émergent comme des alliés. Chacun a imaginé un passé plus philosophique, mystérieux et libre que leur propre époque : un passé gouverné par Éros.

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INTRODUCTION

I. Lover

A lion's head of undercut curls frames an expansive forehead and furrowed brow. Attentive to creases and wrinkles of flesh, Edward Hodges Baily (1788–1867) has rendered painter Henry Fuseli (1741–1825)—then in his penultimate year of life—with measured gravitas. [Fig. 1] But, the bust sculpture's generic choices are also meant to recall the countenances of ancient philosophy.[1] As if to confirm this classicising ambition, the following inscription in Greek characters has been chiseled into the smooth surface of the fictive Fuseli's chest: ΎΠΕΡΙΔΩΝ Ά ΝΥΝ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΦΑΜΕΝ (ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναί φαμεν) (lifting its [the soul's] vision above the things which we now say exist [which we now are]).[2] The words belong to Plato. Drawn from the erotic dialogue of Plato's *Phaedrus*, the longer passage helps to clarify the extract's meaning:

> For a human being must understand a general conception formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being. And therefore it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect […]
>
> Now we reach the point to which the whole discussion of the fourth kind of madness was tending. This fourth kind of madness is the kind which occurs when someone sees beauty here on earth and is reminded of true beauty. His wings begin to grow and he wants to take to the air on his new plumage, but he cannot; like a bird he looks upwards, and because he ignores what is down here, he is accused of behaving like a madman. So the

[1] Caroline Vout, *Classical Art: A Life History from Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 160. See also Malcolm Baker, *Figured in Marble: The Making and Viewing of Eighteenth-Century Sculpture* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 13, 16.

[2] The line is 249c, Plato, *Phaedrus*. Alexander Kader, "Four Marble Busts of Artists by Edward Hodges Baily," in *La scultura II: studi in onore di Andrew S. Ciechanowiecki*, no. 52–55 (1996): 179. While Kader rightly identifies Plato's *Phaedrus* as the origin of the quotation, he translates the phrase to "We speak of things now neglected." The National Portrait Gallery has translated it as: "Look upon that which we now suppose to be."

> point is that this turns out to be the most thoroughly good of all kinds of possession, not only for the man who is possessed, but also for anyone who is touched by it, and the word "lover" refers to a lover of beauty who has been possessed by this kind of madness.[3]

These lines feature in the palinode delivered by Socrates to his companion Phaedrus outside the walls of Athens. In the summer heat and humming song of cicadas, Socrates defines the merits of the lover, whose sexual desire is a boon to all.[4] As he explains, eros ([ἔρως] the ancient Greek word for sexual love or desire) responds to the body of the beloved. It reminds him of an ideal beauty partially glimpsed in the celestial realm during a past life. The lover's "madness" or erotic vision allows him to recollect this divine aspect—and in turn inspire it in others.[5]

In *Phaedrus*, the lover is a philosopher, but Fuseli likely had an artist in mind when he chose a phrase alluding to the superior vision of the aesthete. Baily's visual construction of Fuseli as a powerful mind supports this reading.[6] In the 1820s, any reference to inspired madness would have likewise recalled Romantic ideals of genius.[7] Baily and Fuseli thus borrow from a

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[3] Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Plato in Twelve Volumes,* trans. Harold N. Fowler, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925). The original Greek reads: δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰόντ' αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῷ συναιρούμενον· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων ἅ ποτ' εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῷ καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναί φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὂν ὄντως. διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πτεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια· πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἀεί ἐστιν μνήμῃ κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεῖός ἐστιν. τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἀνὴρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος, τελέους ἀεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλεος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται·

ἔστι δὴ οὖν δεῦρο ὁ πᾶς ἥκων λόγος περὶ τῆς τετάρτης μανίας – ἣν ὅταν τὸ τῇδέ τις ὁρῶν κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμιμνῃσκόμενος, πτερῶταί τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι, ἀδυνατῶν δέ, ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν, αἰτίαν ἔχει ὡς μανικῶς διακείμενος – ὡς ἄρα αὕτη πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάσεων ἀρίστη τε καὶ ἐξ ἀρίστων τῷ τε ἔχοντι καὶ τῷ κοινωνοῦντι αὐτῆς γίγνεται, καὶ ὅτι ταύτης μετέχων τῆς μανίας ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν ἐραστὴς καλεῖται. Plato, *Platonis Opera,* ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), 249c–e.

[4] Drew A. Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 64–90. For more on the positive and negative consequences of erôs see also David Konstan, "Mad Erôs and Eroticized Madness in Tragedy," in *Erôs in Ancient Greece*, ed. Ed Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[5] Frederick Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 21–22.

[6] Fuseli's biographer John Knowles relates that "in the year 1824, Fuseli sat to Mr. Baily for a bust, which was executed in marble … On this bust he had the following line chiselled: —῾ΥΠΕΡΙΔΩΝ Ἃ ΝΥΝ ᾽ΕΙΝΑΙ ΦΑΜΕΝ." This suggests that the line was chosen by Fuseli. John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 1:336.

[7] William L. Pressly, *The Artist as Original Genius Shakespeare's "fine Frenzy" in Late-eighteenth-century British Art* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007).

cultural tradition with deep historical roots to elevate the artist to a special, divinatory status. Seen from either side, the bust presents Fuseli as a lover—someone who knows ideal beauty and therefore sees differently. Or, as Fuseli's close friend and collaborator William Blake (1757–1827) would have it, the artist sees more of reality.[8]

This interpretation coincides well with the context in which the bust was shown. It was one of four sculptures commissioned in the early 1820s by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830), portrait painter and then President of Britain's Royal Academy of Arts. Completed between 1823 and 1828, the other esteemed heads in the series included John Flaxman, Thomas Stothard and Robert Smirke, all modern practitioners of the visual arts. There is little evidence concerning the precise circumstances of the commission, but an anonymous aquatint printed in 1830 shows how Lawrence installed the busts in his home [Fig. 2]. Expanding an already impressive gallery of pictures and plaster casts, the busts stand in formation, poised like sentries. Fuseli and Flaxman are stationed on either side of the fireplace. Directly opposite them, Smirke and Stothard frame a wall of paintings after Leonardo da Vinci. This positioning is worth stressing for in their proud, quadrangular formation, these modern worthies rub shoulders with their illustrious ancient and Renaissance models.[9] They both preside over and form part of the collection.[10] Reverence for the classical world is thus circumscribed in space just as it is expressed through Fuseli's Greek.

[8] In this way, Fuseli endorses an idea of the artist found elsewhere in *Phaedrus*, one positing "a distinction between "mere" imitative artists, who are denigrated to a low level, and inspired artists—i.e., those who experience a form of divine madness—who are placed at the very highest level." Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty*, 78. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974 [1947]), 21.
[9] Kader suggests that Lawrence may have had a "Temple of English art" in mind. Kader, "Four Marble Busts of Artists by Edward Hodges Baily," 181.
[10] Viccy Coltman, "Raeburn's John Hope, 4th Earl of Hopetoun: The 'Knotty' Business of Portrait Painting in London and Edinburgh in the 1810s," in *Henry Raeburn: Context, Reception and Reputation*, eds. Viccy Coltman and Stephen Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 107.

Knowing this, the Platonic quotation reads as inclusive of all "lovers" of beauty, ancient and modern—an erotic, homosocial mélange that Lawrence has gathered under one roof.

In bringing ancients and moderns into intimate conversation, Baily's bust of Fuseli aligns with familiar stories about British neoclassicism. As will be discussed below, the usual historiography emphasises the formal resemblance between the material culture of the ancients and the work of modern, practicing artists. But the bust also communicates something more subtle about modern art and its relationship to antiquity. It calls our attention to the importance of eros. Plato and other ancient thinkers identified eros as a powerful force, one that could be redirected from sexuality toward abstract thought and other cultural work; Eros and philosophy were opposing sides of the same coin.[11] I begin with Fuseli's invocation of Plato not to suggest that the unruly sexuality of the ancients, then coming to light through the material culture recovered from Herculaneum and Pompeii, was somehow sublimated into a platonic ideal of philosophic love. Rather, I begin with Plato because his concept of the lover invites us to imagine new, more complex possibilities for art and eros in the age of Enlightenment. Bridging the worlds of antiquarian scholarship, commercial publishing, private collecting, public arts institutions and the visual arts, this dissertation follows eros in its many guises.[12] As vulgar Priapus, a "Prime Mover of the universe" (the primordial Eros) or simply as sexual desire, I argue that eros became a crucial force in cultural negotiation, embodying complex social relations among the intellectual elite and offering a radical vocabulary for critical intervention

[11] Hyland, for one, argues that the *Phaedrus* nurtures a "complicated connection between beauty, eros, and philosophy." Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty*, 64. See also Douglas Cairns, "The Imagery of Erôs in Plato's *Phaedrus*," in *Erôs in Ancient Greece*, ed. Ed Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 241.
[12] As Andrea Nightengale argues, these two kinds of eros are also present in Plato's *Phaedrus*. The first is Eros, the god who influences human beings and the other is eros or "erotic inspiration," the soul's intrinsic desire for ideal beauty. Andrea Nightengale, *Philosophy and Religion in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 200.

into British culture. This dissertation considers the importance of ancient eros to the scholarship and collecting practices of members of the Society of Dilettanti including Richard Payne Knight (1751–1824), Charles Townley (1737–1805) and Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803) as well as the artistic ventures of Henry Fuseli, Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) and William Blake. These unlikely allies, the project argues, courted an ancient past teeming with more philosophy, mystery and erotic possibility than their own period could afford.

II. Literature Review

This dissertation brings together diverse Enlightenment engagements with ancient eros/Eros. A crucial figure in the story that the following chapters unfold is the Swiss-born painter Henry Fuseli. Fuseli became an important fixture in the British art world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He has, however, only been treated as such in recent art historical scholarship. Shortly after his death in 1825, Fuseli received his first posthumous treatment in his close friend John Knowles's *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (1831). This three-volume set included a biography, a reprint of the lectures on painting, his unpublished *Aphorisms on Art* as well as *History of Art in the Schools of Italy*.[13] Further work on the artist only began in earnest in the twentieth century. Important contributions have been published in both English and German, a division consistent with Fuseli's Swiss German roots and long career in Britain. Important among these early efforts are Gert Schiff's catalogue raisonné, *Johann Heinrich Füssli: Text und Oeuvrekatalog* (1973) and David Weinglass's *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* (1982) and *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry*

[13] John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*. 3 Vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831).

Fuseli (1994).[14] Gisela Bungarten's more recent edition of Fuseli's lectures has worked to unite German and English scholarship on the artist by offering the text in both languages.[15] Similar unifying attempts have been made through exhibitions of Fuseli's work and their associated catalogues. Martin Myrone's 2006 show *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* at the Tate coincided with Franziska Lentzsch's 2005 show *Fuseli: The Wild Swiss* at the Kunsthaus in Zürich.[16] David Solkin's upcoming exhibition, *Fuseli and the Modern Woman: Fashion, Fantasy, Fetishism*,will sim ilarly open at the Courtauld Gallery in October 2022 before travelling to Zürich.[17] These curatorial efforts call attention to Fuseli's shifting cultural allegiances and cosmopolitan career as well as his relevance to both British and Swiss art histories.

The most recent work on Fuseli seeks to contextualise the artist and his work in the tumultuous cultural atmosphere of Britain in the decades leading up to and following the turn of the nineteenth century. Martin Myrone's *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750–1810* positions Fuseli in a culture of crisis. Myrone examines how changing gender expectations and the anxiety that these changes gave rise to shaped artistic production in early modern Britain. Myrone argues that Fuseli, alongside his close working contemporaries, mobilised the sublime as a metonymy for genius even as they struggled to establish a viable market for their heroic art. Andrei Pop has similarly approached Fuseli through the lens of

[14] Schiff, Gert. *Johann Heinrich Füssli: Text und Oeuvrekatalog*. 2 Vols. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1973; Weinglass, D. H. *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994; Henry Fuseli, *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, ed. David H. Weinglass (New York: Kraus International, 1982).
[15] Henry Fuseli, J. *H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005).
[16] Martin Myrone, Christopher Frayling and Mervyn Heard, eds., *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006); Franziska Lentzsch, Christoph Becker, Christian Klemm et al. eds., *Fuseli: The Wild Swiss* (Zürich: Verlag Scgeidegger & Speiss, 2005).
[17] David Solkin, ed., *Fuseli and the Modern Woman: Fashion, Fantasy, Fetishism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022).

cultural crisis. As he argues, new evidence sourced from the ancient Mediterranean and abroad instigated new forms of classicism attentive to cultural plurality. Europeans became painfully cognisant of impassable cultural differences between ancients and moderns, an awareness that Fuseli gives potent expression to.[18]

One emerging focus in Fuseli studies concerns his erotic drawings. In 2006, a collection of these drawings featured in public exhibitions at the Tate in London and the Kunsthaus in Zürich. However, Camilla Smith has called attention to the delicacy with which these institutions handled this erotic material.[19] As she explains, the curators in both venues inadvertently increased the erotic charge of the drawings. Placed off to the side in an isolated "Blue Room" at the Kunsthaus or hidden behind the folds of a gauze curtain at the Tate, the works were shrouded in secrecy. Their partial concealment facilitated what Smith identifies as the "ideal conditions of semi-privacy often associated with the viewing of pornography."[20] But if these spatial interventions worked to affirm their designation as pornography, the Tate catalogue was more ambivalent about their status. Fuseli's *Three Women and a Recumbent Man* (1809) [Fig. 5] and his protégée Theodor Von Holst's *Erotic Scene with a Man and Two Women* (1822–1844) were presented in the following manner: "They may not be as simply ingratiating as pornography, but neither perhaps, can they be wholly removed to an 'elevated' realm of pure contemplation, confounding the modern demarcation of the private, bodily and sexual, and the public and

[18] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 1–18.
[19] Camilla Smith, "Between Fantasy and Angst: Assessing the Subject and Meaning of Henry Fuseli's Late Pornographic Drawings, 1800–25," *Art History 33*, no. 3 (2010): 421.
[20] Smith, "Between Fantasy and Angst," 421. Other museums have opted to feature their erotically charged artifacts in plain sight. The British Museum, for example, presently displays the *Warren Cup* (15BC–AD15), a Roman silver drinking vessel depicting pederastic sex, in a centralised glass case alongside other ancient Roman artifacts. Without the ceremony of discretionary barriers or warnings, visitors are apt to walk right by it without noticing its sexually explicit content.

intellectual."[21] Describing a liminal space between fixed categories, the author prompted a reconsideration of questions that continue to haunt the disciplines of art history and museum studies. How *should* we classify, interpret and present erotic material/visual culture? And what would we see if we embraced the ambiguity that erotic art arouses instead of attempting to resolve it?

Questions concerning erotic art are necessarily embedded in the history of sexuality and censorship.[22] The presence of erotic drawings by Fuseli and von Holst in a public forum like the Tate in 2006 indicates the extent to which attitudes toward sexuality changed over the course of the twentieth century. In 1946, Blake collector Ruthven Todd was unable to publish full reproductions of erotic drawings by these artists in his book *Tracks in the Snow* due to what he called a "dubious legal system."[23] Although in his own possession, Todd could only include small details of the works, which provided rather unhelpful glimpses of the compositions. These publishing limitations indicate the historical inaccessibility of sexually explicit art, which has contributed to its exclusion from both scholarship and public discourse. It is, however, important to remember that erotic art has always been accessible to a select few. The focus of Chapter One, Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786), was not only published by an exclusive gentleman's club, but it functioned as an elitist emblem of social belonging from the late eighteenth century onward. In 1865, for example, the *Discourse* was reprinted in "125

[21] Martin Myrone, Christopher Frayling and Mervyn Heard, eds., *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 173.
[22] Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands, eds., "Bestiality in the Bay of Naples: The Herculaneum Pan and Goat Statue," in *Sex, Knowledge, and Receptions of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86–110; Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peter Wagner, *Erotica and the Enlightenment* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and France* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988); G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Vintage, 1976).
[23] Ruthven Todd, *Tracks in the Snow* (London: The Grey Walls Press Limited, 1946), 82.

copies only" under the auspices of "John Camden Hotten, of Piccadilly."[24] The new edition was designed to attract connoisseurs—abundant in plates, printed on toned paper and offered in a luxurious "Roxburg" binding. What the Keeper of the Department of Antiquities at the British Museum Edward Hawkins once dismissed as an obscure early modern foible, had been rebranded for the modern bibliophile while retaining its semiotic value as a marker of belonging to a small community of highbrow collectors. Its revival in contemporary scholarship, however, signals a growing trend in the humanities to not only broaden the readership/viewership of books and artifacts once hidden from public view, but to take them seriously as both historical evidence and works of art. One striking example is the British Library's digitisation of its private case, a collection of more than 2,500 books with erotic themes and illustrations. This ambitious undertaking to promote greater accessibility to the archive began in 2019 with Gale's Archives of Sexuality and Gender series. As the third installment of its digitisation efforts, Gale worked with The British Library, the Kinsey Institute and the New York Academy of Medicine to digitise a range of erotic material spanning the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. The British Museum has similarly recovered erotic artifacts from its own clandestine storage, the *Secretum*. These moves indicate that curatorial mandates have responded to changes in popular opinion as well as disciplinary turns toward gender and sexuality studies.

Specific to this dissertation is a peculiar nexus between sexuality and neoclassicism that emerged during the Enlightenment period, and which has been well noted by standing scholarship. John Brewer, Jason M. Kelly and Bruce Redford, for example, have considered the

[24] Thomas Wright, *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, and its connection with the Mystic Theology of the Ancients. By Richard Payne Knight, Esq. (A new edition). To which is added An Essay on the Worship of Generative Powers during the Middle Ages of Western Europe* (London: Privately Printed, 1865); Pisanus Fraxi [Henry Spencer Ashbee], *Index librorum prohibitorum: being notes bio- biblio- icono- graphical and critical, on curious and uncommon books* (London: printed privately, 1877), 5–6.

Society of Dilettanti's interest in ancient eroticism and libertinism in tandem with its culture of masculine sociability and antiquarian ambition.[25] Equally, critical interpreters of art history's disciplinary formation have emphasised the importance of sexuality and gender to neoclassical aesthetics and the period's broader ways of writing about art. Both Alex Potts and Whitney Davis have discussed the key role of eroticism to Winckelmann's influential writings, for example.[26] Winckelmann's impassioned response to ancient Greek sculpture, as Davis demonstrates, shaped Enlightenment antiquarians' encounter with erotic antiquity, which became increasingly vivid with new archeological discoveries uncovered at Herculaneum and Pompeii.

Another protagonist of this dissertation at the centre of debates concerning antiquity, sexuality and art is William Blake. His marginal status in the period contrasts markedly with that of Henry Fuseli, who occupied prestigious positions at the Royal Academy. Blake, however, has since become the more attractive figure among scholars. However, as Martin Myrone pointed out in the catalogue to his recent exhibition at the Tate, entitled *William Blake* (September 2019 – February 2020), much of this research is focused on his poetry.[27] Martin Myrone puts the contemporary state of Blake scholarship thus:

> Blake's works have been labored over by literary historians and theorists through generations, and while his printmaking techniques have been scrutinized intensely over the last decades, it remains the case that there is still a lot to be done in the way of understanding Blake's work as visual art.[28]

[25] John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000 [1997]); Jason M. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti: Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2009); Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008).
[26] Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[27] Martin Myrone and Amy Concannon, eds., *William Blake* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[28] Myrone and Concannon, *William Blake*, 20.

Building on seminal studies of Blake's visual art including Anthony Blunt's pioneering *The Art of William Blake* (1959) and David Bindman's *Blake as an Artist* (1977), Myrone offers new insight into Blake's working conditions, his career as a visual artist and his reception during his historical moment as well as our own.[29] As noted by Myrone, one area of Blake's visual output that has received considerable scholarly attention is his printmaking. Early studies include David Bindman's *The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake* (1978), Robert N. Essick's *William Blake: Printmaker* (1980) and Essick's *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations, A Catalogue and Study of the Plates Engraved by Blake after Designs by Other Artists* (1991).[30] Essick's work, in particular, illuminates Blake's artistic agency, elevating his "reproductive prints" as important works in their own right. Morris Eaves's *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake* (1992) and G. E. Bentley's *William Blake in the Desolate Market* (2014) have similarly considered Blake's printmaking, albeit focusing on the economic realities of his multifaceted professional life.[31]

The other branch of Blake scholarship relevant to this dissertation contextualises Blake's visual and poetic oeuvre in a network of exchange, confronting Blake not as singular visionary but an active and critical member of concentric intellectual and artistic circles. Blake emerges from this literature a critic of the period in which he lives, but someone who is nonetheless embedded in its culture. In *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness*, Susan Matthews, for example, confronts Blake's attitudes towards sexuality and gender. She argues that both Blake

[29] Anthony Blunt, *The Art of William Blake* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959); David Bindman, *Blake as an Artist* (Oxford: Phaidon and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977).
[30] David Bindman, *The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); Robert Essick, *William Blake, printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations, A Catalogue and Study of the Plates Engraved by Blake after Designs by Other Artist*s (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
[31] Morris Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake* (Ithica: Cornell University Press 1992); G. E. Bentley, *William Blake in the Desolate Market* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

and Fuseli used sexuality to negotiate the limitations of a bourgeois, feminised society.[32] Jon Mee has likewise traced Blake's involvement in freethinking circles in his *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s*.[33] Sarah Haggerty's recent edited volume, *Blake in Context*, has further expanded this area of inquiry by bringing disparate scholarly voices together. Contributors bring Blake's visual and poetic modes into conversation with those of a diverse range of his contemporaries. Other important work in this direction are studies that consider Blake's working relationship with Fuseli, who is framed as a collaborator, facilitator and rival. Louise Hall has contributed much to our understanding of their working relationship and intimate friendship.[34]

III. Contribution

In bringing Fuseli and Blake into conversation with other writers, thinkers, collectors and artists exploring erotic antiquity, this dissertation contributes not only to our understanding of these artists, but also to scholarship concerned with neoclassicism—the revival of antiquity. Describing a transition from one cultural ethos and set of formal conventions to another, the terms "neoclassicism" and "romanticism" have historically offered a tidy framework for apprehending cultural change in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, art historians writing since the early twentieth century have questioned the boundaries between these classifications as well as their definitions. Resisting the formalist methodologies of Alois Riegl or Heinrich Wölfflin, scholars like Frederick Antal and Robert Rosenblum began to ask new

[32] Susan Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality, and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30–55.
[33] Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
[34] Carol Louise Hall, *Blake and Fuseli: A Study in the Transmission of Ideas* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985); see also John Beer, *Romantic Influences: Contemporary - Victorian - Modern* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1993).

questions of the antique revival that constituted such a pervasive shift in early modern art.[35] These scholars addressed the how and why of neoclassicism. Antal's *Reflections on Classicism and Romanticism*, for example, brought social change into conversation with style while Rosenblum's *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* called attention to the instability of antiquity as a cultural signifier, noting the ways in which "the classical world could be molded to meet demands as varied as Revolutionary propaganda, Romantic melancholy, and archeological erudition."[36] Marking further disillusionment with categorical approaches to early modern art, more recent studies have considered neoclassicism through the lens of crisis and transformation at the advent of modernity, of which the scholarship on Fuseli discussed earlier forms part.[37] This dissertation proceeds from these challenges to prescriptive definition. It argues along the same lines as Viccy Coltman, who conceptualises neoclassicism not as a fixed set of formal conventions, but a mode of thought inculcated first at school through the classical curriculum and later consolidated through travel and private collecting.[38] Seen this way, neoclassicism is akin to a cosmology or a cultural lens that shapes a wide spectrum of cultural practices. I build on Coltman's theory of neoclassicism as a process of translation and transformation to further dismantle divisions that would see engagements with imagination, myth, daring eroticism or the dream state as infringing upon "Romantic" sensibilities and thus at

[35] Frederick Antal, *Reflections on Classicism and Romanticism with other studies in art History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). This collection of essays was published between 1935 and 1941 and then reprinted together in 1966.
[36] Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 10.
[37] Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe 1700-1830: A History of the Visual Arts in an Era of Unprecedented Urban Economic Growth* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth Century Culture of Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[38] Viccy Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). For more on collecting and neoclassicism See also Viccy Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

a threshold between discrete movements. Imagination was central to the disparate neoclassical designs of the writers, collectors and artists discussed throughout this dissertation.

I likewise expand the traditional geographic limits of neoclassicism. I show that artists, antiquarians and other cultural mediators were profoundly aware of ancient cultures distinct from the classical tradition. Artifacts sourced from Egypt and India occupied the same visual and intellectual space as those from the Greco-Roman world. Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, Charles Townley's sculpture collection and the collaborative printmaking of Henry Fuseli and William Blake reveal a global understanding of the ancient world expanding in tandem with European imperialism. British antiquarians, for example, confronted ancient Indian material culture as an untapped source of evidence that could be mobilised to deepen understandings of Greco-Roman antiquity. This dissertation thus works to redefine the existing parameters of neoclassicism, treating the revival of antiquity not as a cohesive entity but a site of contested and active negotiation. The protagonists of the following three chapters are shown to grapple with an unstable or porous antiquity, one that gave rise to equally ambivalent ideas and images.

This dissertation takes a similar approach to Enlightenment scholarship. I show that classicists relied as much on their own embodied techniques and imaginative mythology as they did the authority of canonical sources and empirical evidence. Poised between formal disciplines, open to new forms of evidence and unconventional in their modes of engagement, antiquarians set out to chart new routes to the past. However unwavering in their assurance that they could reveal the "true" meaning of the material culture of the ancients, they were nonetheless vulnerable to the contempt of their contemporaries. How could one listen to an artifact as Pierre Francois Hugues, the Baron D'Hancarville, proposed to do? Here, d'Hancarville suggests that

artifacts might tell their own histories if only scholars could find the means to hear them. As I demonstrate, these techniques were inclusive of a range of embodied practices. But such sensual methodologies met with suspicion and antiquarians were routinely characterised as salacious and unreliable. This reputation proved stubborn in light of the specialisation that occurred in the nineteenth century. Antiquarianism as a cultural, social and intellectual phenomenon thus received little attention until Arnaldo Momigliano's seminal essay of 1950: "Ancient History and the Antiquarian."[39] Momigliano's investigations into early modern inquiry revealed that antiquarianism laid much of the groundwork for the formal, academic disciplines of art history and archeology. More recently, Craig Ashley Hanson, Peter N. Miller and Noah Heringman have shown how early modern antiquarianism mobilised learned polymathy, global networks, innovative knowledge making techniques and imagination to realise their historical ambitions.[40] This dissertation contributes to the debate ongoing around the nature and cultural importance of antiquarianism, emphasising further the role of sensory data and embodied knowledge work to the antiquarian enterprise. Specifically, I theorise the methods and motives of antiquarians associated with the Society of Dilettanti. Richard Payne Knight, for example, highlighted the evidentiary potential of ancient erotic material culture. This approach invited further derision among critics of antiquarianism, who saw in Knight someone motivated by sexual desire. Undermining this criticism, which persists to a degree even now, I venture that a closer look at the erotic antiquarianism practiced by Knight and his colleagues can deepen our understanding of Enlightenment scholarship. The Society of Dilettanti's embrace of erotic material culture

[39] Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, no. 3/4 (1950): 285–315.
[40] Craig Ashley Hanson, *The English Virtuoso: Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Peter N. Miller, *History and Its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture since 1500* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2017); Noah Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

created new frameworks for apprehending and appreciating ancient art, culture, sexuality and philosophy.

Richard Payne Knight, Charles Townley and Sir William Hamilton were also important patrons of the British Museum. In following private collections into the public sphere, this dissertation illuminates a crucial moment in the history of the British Museum which became a clearinghouse for art looted from across the globe as well as an emblem of Britain's growing imperial reach. I explore the ways in which collections, like the neoclassical frameworks that shaped their organisation and management, became contested sites of negotiation. This discussion is inclusive of the trade and transformation of South Asian antiquities which I show to be as important as their classical counterparts. Building on the work of James Delbourgo and others, I illuminate new relationships between colonialism, knowledge production and collecting in the early modern period.[41]

IV. Structure

The dissertation is structured into three chapters. Chapter One investigates the making, distribution and reception of Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786), a book that modelled new methodologies for engaging with ancient erotic material culture. Connecting Knight's research to Winckelmann's embodied experiments, I demonstrate that he engaged in a form of erotic antiquarianism.[42] Drawing on archival evidence, the chapter

[41] James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham, eds., *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007).
[42] Jana Funke and Jen Grove, eds., "Introduction—Desiring Sculptures, Encountering the Past: Sculpture, Sexuality and History," in *Sculpture, Sexuality and History Sculpture, Sexuality and History: Encounters in Literature, Culture and the Arts from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

argues that the *Discourse* served an important symbolic function for the Society of Dilettanti: its formal presentation at meetings was analogous to an initiation ritual into the exclusive circle of men who shared travel experience in Italy and a passion for the antique. Modelling the clandestine knowledge divulged via the Eleusinian Mysteries—the secret initiation rites into the ancient Greek cult of Demeter—Knight set out to disclose the true meaning of Priapus to his readership. His formal, comparative analysis generated surprising results; Knight identified the philosophical ideas behind seemingly vulgar forms, inviting reader/viewers to question not only the authority of classical sources but also their way of thinking. Writing along the same lines as Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Knight traced a compelling correlation between ethics, ethos and eroticism, the findings of which Knight hoped would shape an increasingly "feminising" modernity.

The chapter additionally frames Knight as a crucial agent in extending conversations concerning 'the ancients' to cultures outside of Europe. If colonial expansion facilitated the movement of Indian antiquities from their place of origin to British collections, it likewise instigated new conceptual frameworks for negotiating cultural difference. The chapter explores how Knight juxtaposed erotic sculpture collected in India with archeological artifacts unearthed in the regions surrounding Naples, thereby enfolding ancient Indian art into different varieties of philosophical and art-historical interpretation. However, in bringing Eastern and Western traditions into congenial conversation, Knight transgressed guarded cultural boundaries. Thus, while the *Discourse* was well received among its intended audience, its accidental circulation outside of Dilettanti circles led to zealous criticism in London periodicals. If the volume's erotic imagery and anticlerical rhetoric ruffled feathers among the devout, its tolerance toward Indian art only increased its infamy. In fact, its sphere of influence was wider than scholars have

previously accounted for. The chapter highlights the imperial infrastructure through which antiquarian information and artifacts moved and positions the *Discourse* at the centre of a reciprocal exchange. I argue that armchair antiquarians like Knight offer a critical point of departure for mapping the movement of art and ideas across cultural and geographic boundaries while shifting the emphasis from diffusion to circulation.[43]

Chapter Two follows the ancient erotic artifacts that inspired Knight from their depiction in the *Discourse* to their surviving forms in British collections. Supported by correspondence exchanged between Sir William Hamilton, Charles Townley, Knight and others, this chapter moves from the associative meanings that members of the Society of Dilettanti ascribed to antiquities in their collections to the contested reception of those same artifacts in the British Museum. I begin with Townley who—borrowing from the Baron D'Hancarville and Knight—crafted his own mythic narrative around his collection. His personal museum imitated the same initiation rite enacted in the *Discourse*. However, instead of the reader being lead through a series of examples to discover the true meaning of Priapus, Townley acted as an embodied mediator or hierophant (an ancient Greek priest of the Mysteries). The collector arranged his home to physically simulate an initiate's progress through the Eleusinian Mysteries, a trajectory that only he could explain to select guests. However, when his collection moved to the British Museum in 1805, these meanings were lost. His artifacts were rendered unintelligible to museum staff.

[43] See Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj, and James Delbourgo, eds., *The Brokered World: Go-betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach: History of Science Publications, 2009); Bernard Lightman, Gordon McOuat, and Larry Stewart, eds., *The Circulation of Knowledge Between Britain, India and China: The Early-Modern World to the Twentieth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

This chapter traces a similar instance of miscommunication between Sir William Hamilton and Dr. Daniel Charles Solander, a Keeper at the British Museum. I consider Hamilton's astonishing encounter with Priapus in rural Abruzzo alongside his troubled relationship with the British Museum, maintained through correspondence and intermediaries in London. His difficulties reveal the ways in which the Museum was first conceptualised as a resource for researchers and only later as a public venue for instruction and entertainment. I follow Hamilton's collection of wax phalluses—votives collected in the village of Isernia—from their first appearance in his letters to their rediscovery as fragments in the forgotten collection of the *Secretum* during the nineteenth century.[44] I detail the history of Dilettanti bequests to the British Museum to tell the story of the institution's struggle to negotiate competing interests. Conflict emerged between Trustees on the Board, but also between the Museum and the British public, the latter demanding that the Museum serve a more diverse group of visitors than the gentlemen scholars who frequented its reading rooms. Townley and Hamilton may have hoped to cement their legacy and provide for future antiquarians like themselves, but the framing of their collections needed to be rethought as the Museum transformed in relation to the public sphere. And while it may be tempting to see the marginalisation of erotic antiquities as a product of Victorian sensibilities and the Museum's growing concern regarding vulnerable viewers, I argue that the liminal status of erotic antiquities inside the Museum was most likely a consequence of its fraught internal culture, the emergence of new curatorial practices and changing tastes.

[44] For Hamilton's discovery see Giancarlo Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1996); Whitney Davis "The Universal Phallus: Hamilton, Knight, and the Wax Phalli of Isernia," in *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Whitney Davis, "Wax Tokens of Libido," in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008).

Chapter Three expands the discussion of Enlightenment engagements with erotic antiquity to include artists and entrepreneurs. The chapter centres on an extraordinary collaboration between painter/professor Henry Fuseli, poet/artist/engraver William Blake and poet/natural philosopher Erasmus Darwin. Under the aegis of radical publisher Joseph Johnson, Fuseli and Blake worked together to produce daring images for Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791). The chapter triangulates between Fuseli, Blake and Darwin to argue that an emphasis on collaboration can enrich our understanding of the conceptual frameworks that gave these images their generative force—their ability to evoke complex networks of association in the mind of the viewer.

Moreover, I explore how images made by matrices pressed together on the bed of the printing press were also products of external marketplace pressures. Bringing *The Fertilization of Egypt* (1791) [Fig. 3] into conversation with *Falsa ad Coelum* (c.1790) [Fig. 4] and a series of erotic drawings that Fuseli made between 1800–1810, the chapter connects the figuration of virility first realised and later frustrated in these graphic works to the economic climate that brought Fuseli, Blake and Darwin into professional alliance. We see the same uncomfortable role reversals between poets, painters and engravers then taking place in the publishing industry, mirrored and reimagined in these drawings. Herein, the potent eroticism of the ancients becomes both antidote and antonymy to modern life and the perceived 'emasculating' effects of commercial society. Not only does Fuseli wield allegory to critique British art and its institutions, but his use of ancient erotic material culture ties his 'erotic vision' to that of his contemporaries. His drawings provide crucial insight into the broader circulation and legibility of Priapic themes which he mobilised to assess the evolving relationship between culture and capitalist modernity.

V. Terminology

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Eros as "Love, the god of love, or a representation of him." It defines erotic as "of or pertaining to the passion of love; concerned with or treating of love; amatory." Although they share the same Greek root, these words differ in one important respect. Eros is an ancient god. Erotic, on the other hand, has a more diverse range of applications, conjuring up the profane, sensual pleasures that erotic love affords. In the eighteenth century, the origin, nature and cultural significance of ancient Eros was being studied and reimagined. Richard Payne Knight, for one, featured a primordial Eros in his discussion of "the ancient theology of Greece, preserved in the Orphic Fragments," which describes [a] Deity, the Ερως πρωτογονος [Eros Protogenos or primordial Eros], or first-begotten Love, [who] is said to have been produced, together with the Æther, by Time, or Eternity (Κρονος) and Necessity, (Αναγχη), operating upon inert matter, (Χαος).[45] But according to Knight, there existed not only a primordial, cosmogenic and sublime Eros, or "Divine Love," but also a vulgar Eros, the impish and more familiar "personification of animal desire or concupiscence."[46] This other Eros, known as Amor or Cupid, was the cheeky, boyish cherub who operated behind the scenes of divine/human affairs. In the same way that Plato negotiated between erotic and philosophic love, so too did Enlightenment thinkers and artists grapple with 'ideal' and 'obscene' versions of Eros. To further complicate matters, eros in ancient Greek also denoted desire in a broader sense. Eros, eros and their attendant 'erotic' and 'eroticism' thus emerge from this period slippery terms,

[45] Richard Payne Knight, *An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus, lately existing at Isernia, in the Kingdom of Naples: in two letters; One from Sir William Hamilton, K. B. His Majesty's Minister at the Court of Naples, to Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. President of the Royal Society; And the other from a Person residing at Isernia: to which is added A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, And its Connexion with the mystic Theology of the Ancients* (London: T. Spilsbury, 1786), 29. Hereafter *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* or simply Knight's *Discourse*.
[46] Knight, *Discourse*, 106.

recalling context-specific meanings. Eros could bring to mind religious devotion, bacchanalian frenzy or sexual longing. This mutability makes it necessary to explain how these terms will be used throughout this dissertation: capitalised Eros denotes the ancient god, eros signals sexual desire and erotic accords with the OED definition offered above.

Of course, pornography is another possible term for studies of art and literature with sexual or 'amatory' themes. Derived from the Greek root *pornographoi* or painting of prostitutes, pornography acquired its familiar, modern connotations in the mid nineteenth century.[47] It, too, was allied with the ancient world in its initial formulation. The American edition of Webster's Dictionary, published in 1864, defined pornography as "licentious and obscene paintings employed to decorate the walls of rooms sacred to bacchanalian orgies, examples of which exist in Pompeii." In addition to these historical ties to bacchanalian imagery, early modern pornography's affinity with political and religious radicalism would support its usage in some of the contexts that I consider.[48] Resisting its applicability to early modern productions, however, some scholars have cited the contemporary OED definition of pornography. There, it is listed as "the explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings; printed or visual material containing this."[49] But this framework—with its antipathy toward aesthetic dimension—seems too limiting. I side with those scholars who argue that these categories can and do share many of the same motives and techniques.[50] Nonetheless, I

[47] Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987), 11.
[48] *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800,* ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 10.
[49] For a discussion of this definition and its applicability to early modern culture, see Chantelle Thauvette, "Defining Early Modern Pornography: The Case of Venus and Adonis," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 26–48.
[50] Hans Maes and Jerrold Levinson, eds., *Art and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

choose not to use the term pornography, nor its other, equally promising offspring such as "pornographic sensibilities."[51] Since the central aim of the dissertation is to understand how and why a specifically ancient eroticism gained traction in the British imaginary in the decades leading up to and following the turn of the nineteenth century, Eros, eros, erotic and eroticism serve my argument better. That being said, I do borrow from scholars of pornography insofar as I contend that arousal does not preclude other reader/viewer responses. It is not, as one contentious account posits, an aesthetic flaw.[52] My argument proceeds from the assumption that erotic art can be arousing as well as aesthetically ambitious and intellectually engaging. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

[51] Nicholas R. Jones, Chad Leahy, eds., *Pornographic Sensibilities: Imagining Sex and the Visceral in Premodern and Early Modern Spanish Cultural Production* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 1–16.
[52] Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133.

CHAPTER ONE

Erotic Antiquarianism, Richard Payne Knight and *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*

I. The Body of the Antiquary: Doing, Knowing and the Making of the *Discourse*

In his memoirs, Giacomo Casanova folds a renowned eighteenth-century figure into a surprising tale of pederastic sexuality. Famous for his own erotic adventures, Casanova describes a visit to Rome in 1761 where he meets Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), the German Philhellene whose writings would shape European neoclassicism and the modern discipline of art history.[1] The encounter between these noted personalities is accidental and intimate. No stranger to erotic dalliance himself, Casanova recounts that one day, upon entering Winckelmann's study unannounced, he catches the classicist not immersed in his studies as expected but withdrawing from a male youth.[2] Explaining his actions, Winckelmann offered compelling evidence for the close coupling of the sensory and the sensual in Enlightenment scholarship. According to Casanova, Winckelmann recast the illicit affair as a form of practical research: "In the course of my long studies, I became first the admirer, then the adorer of the ancients, who as you know were almost all b[uggerers] without hiding it…"[3] Finding himself "despicable" for being unable to reconcile the sexual preferences of his heroes, so goes Casanova's tale, the scholar turned

[1] Recent work on Winckelmann includes Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[2] Denis M. Sweet, "The Personal, the Political, and the Aesthetic: Johann Joachim Winckelmann's German Enlightenment Life," *Journal of Homosexuality* 16, no. 1–2 (1988): 149. Sweet argues that there is no reason not to take the anecdote seriously.

[3] Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, *Histoire de ma vie* (F. A. Brockhaus: Weisbaden, 1961), vii:197–8. See also Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 212.

from "cold theory" to experimentation. "I decided to enlighten myself through practice," explains Winckelmann,

> hoping that by analysing the matter my mind would acquire the enlightenment necessary to distinguish the true from the false. Having resolved to do this, it is now four years that I am working on the matter, choosing the prettiest Smerdias [Smerdias was the young lover of the Greek poet Anacreon]; but it is useless. When I set myself to the task, *non arrivo* [I do not succeed]. I see always to my confusion that a woman is preferable in every respect…[4]

Couched within this uncomfortable rationale is the fact that Winckelmann pursues a sexual as well as intellectual enlightenment. But if we follow Winckelmann's thinking, these categories need not be mutually exclusive. For within his unfolding apologia, the classicist makes another radical claim: the ancients "went so far as to allege their taste [for buggery] as testimony to the purity of their morals [*moeurs*]."[5] As scholars have noted, this statement turned period assumptions upside down. Here, as with the classic plots of *film noir*, nothing is what it seems. What might look like the sexual exploitation of a young male prostitute turns out to be an empirical experiment in ancient ethics. According to this strange logic, the scene that Casanova witnesses is not "sex," but "philosophy."[6]

The same tensions between sensory appearance, sensual reality and earnest inquiry resound through the active erudition privileged in antiquarian scholarship of the 1780s that would take up Winckelmann's mantle. Exemplary here is the work on which this chapter centers: Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*. Officially printed for the Society of Dilettanti in 1786 and first circulated in 1787, the quarto volume revels in the same

[4] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, vii:197–8.
[5] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 214.
[6] Louis A. Ruprecht argues that these "sexual explorations are… of a piece with his antiquarian interests, just one more attempt to enter the mental landscape of the ancients." Louis A. Ruprecht Jr., "Winckelmann and Casanova in Rome: A Case Study of Religion and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century Rome," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 38, no. 2 (2010): 304–305.

blend of art and eros, sex and philosophy that underlies Casanova's anecdote. Boldly illustrated, this ambitious volume was designed to impress its limited readership of likeminded antiquarians, allowing its author to flaunt his autodidactic expertise in ancient Greek language and literature. Its guiding methodology—bringing erotic artifacts sourced from across the globe into conversation with cultures both familiar and distant—allowed Knight to disclose the sacred meaning of erotic forms. Rerouting old avenues of inquiry, Knight charted novel pathways to access the past, namely by suspending modern prejudice. "Nothing can be more monstrous and indecent, if considered in its plain and obvious meaning," so Knight would allow of the phallic rites then recently rediscovered in greater Naples. However, the same practice would "be found to be a very natural symbol of a very natural and philosophical system of religion, if considered according to its original use and intention."[7] If such passages stress the dissonance between ancient and modern manners, they also recommend a new, controversial meaning for the phrase "to imitate the ancients." Knight, like Winckelmann, would propose a theoretical framework wherein doing became equal to knowing. Building on recent studies exploring the rapport between sensation and reason, bodies and artifacts in the eighteenth century, this chapter reconsiders the antiquarian's commitment to bodily empiricism against the central thesis of his infamous text: that looks may be deceiving.[8]

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[7] Knight, *Discourse*, 24.

[8] Recent studies that explore embodied knowledge making include, Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: art and experience in the scientific revolution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Zeynep Çelik Alexander, *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern design* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017); Katharina Boehm, "Antiquarian Pygmalions: The Female Body, Ancient Statuary, and the Idea of Imaginary Transport in the Eighteenth Century," *Sculpture, Sexuality and History: Encounters in Literature, Culture and the Arts from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Jana Funke and Jen Grover (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 48–49. See also the special issue of *Word & Image* entitled "Mediating the Materiality of the Past, 1700–1930" in which contributors explore the role of the body in antiquarian scholarship in various periods and contexts. Katharina Boehm, for example, builds on the idea of observations as experiments in early eighteenth-century antiquarian research. She argues that antiquarian images acknowledge the embodied observer as a crucial mediator in the construction of historical knowledge. Katharina Boehm, "Empiricism, antiquarian fieldwork and the

Much has been said about the ways in which Knight's interest in the erotic draws on the ideas of Winckelmann and contemporaneous scholars including the Baron d'Hancarville. But prompted by the intimacy of Winckelmann's erotic research, this chapter asks: what do we see when we focus on the interactions prompted by the *Discourse*? Charting the contested history of the book—its making, distribution and reception—allows us to apprehend the ways in which Knight pioneered and practiced *erotic* antiquarianism, negotiating between the libertine roots of the Society of Dilettanti and its turn toward serious scholarship. Finally, in addition to proving Knight an antiquarian worth his salt, the *Discourse* performed an important ritual function within the Society of Dilettanti. The formal presentation of the volume at Society meetings was akin to an initiation ritual into an elite community. Drawing on artifacts held in the collections of fellow members, Knight grounded his investigations in a material culture already under the purview of British antiquarians, giving intellectual credence to the collecting practices and freethinking ideas that bound the Society together.

It was for these reasons that the book became a potent cultural signifier for opposed social groups in the late eighteenth century. Among recipients, the presentation of the *Discourse* was a rite of passage; its conferral confirmed the status of the beneficiary as either a member of the Society or a close ally. However, when the book met with readers outside of this circle in the 1790s, it became a subversive agent. Critics would denounce Knight as a libertine cast from the French mold. Writing in the wake of the French Revolution, these unsolicited reviewers found its anticlerical drive, daring illustrations and global approach to art history highly dubious. In fact, Knight's global methodology situates the *Discourse* within the imbrications of art and British

(in)visibilization of the past in the early eighteenth century," *Word & Image* 33, no. 3 (2017): 257–266. See also, Ruth Mack, "D'Hancarville's useful history," *Word & Image* 33, no. 3 (2017): 292–302. These more recent studies build on the work of Judith Adler who discusses embodied observation as a form of "experiment" in eighteenth-century travel literature. Judith Adler, "Origin of Sightseeing," *Annals of Tourism Research* 16, no. 1 (1989): 17.

imperial power richly illuminated by recent scholarship—another theme considered in this chapter. Knight engaged with Indian sculpture, using the forthright eroticism found on artifacts arriving in Britain via East India Company (hereafter EIC) ships to explain antiquities recently discovered in the Mediterranean. Knight both embraced and challenged colonial narratives, the latter spurring detractors to cast his even treatment of South Asian culture as deleterious to British ideals. That these same works were explicitly sexual in content further inflamed the ire of those who reviled Knight for his perceived paganism. But his sympathetic views are important insofar as Knight carves out a space for candid discussion; the *Discourse* invited viewers to recognise bigotry, and to approach erotic/exotic art using borrowed historical lenses. That is, Knight called upon his readers to look through the eyes of others. So, it is with Knight's intrepid, penetrating spirit that I approach both the book and its material evidence. This chapter pursues a fault line in the branch of antiquarianism practiced in Knight's circle and highlighted in Casanova's tale: a contradiction between the privilege of the sensing, seeing body and interpretive conclusions that utterly confound common sense. Following this antinomy, in turn, enables us to resituate Knight in larger discursive frameworks where interpretive authority was staked as much between feeling versus knowing as between a vision of art as elite property and as a priceless public asset. In its material form and history, this chapter argues, Knight's *Discourse* is a supreme expression of those vibrating tensions.

II. Initiation: The Making, Distribution and Reception of the *Priapeia*

Knight's *Discourse* (or *Priapeia* as it is called in the Society of Dilettanti minute book) would become a notorious Enlightenment title. The volume was sponsored by the Society of Dilettanti, an elite social club for former grand tourists—a designation given to those who had travelled to Italy to visit the famous classical sites that they had studied at school. Knight did not

receive a formal education but a second tour through Italy in 1780 ensured that he had been steeped in enough antiquity to merit election.[9] He became a full member in 1781. As his first publication, the *Discourse* functioned to prove his antiquarian credentials.[10] But if Knight wrote the book, the actual making of the volume was a collective effort involving a small team of engravers, printers and binders. The *Discourse* was printed and sewn by Thomas Spilsbury of Snowhill (1733–1795), and its initial print run consisted of two hundred and fifty copies.[11] Dr. Daniel Cox was responsible for printing the copper plates which were engraved by William Sharp (1749–1824), Conrad Martin Metz (1749–1827) and James Newton (1748–1804), the last an ambitious professional who contributed to other Dilettanti publications during the 1780s including the second installment of *Antiquities of Athens* (1787).[12]

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[9] Messman has noted that Knight attended neither public school nor university. Frank J. Messman, *Richard Payne Knight: The twilight of virtuosity* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1974)**,** 14.

[10] Although the *Discourse* was his first official incursion into the antiquarian book trade, Knight had earlier planned on publishing his Sicilian journal, *Expedition into Sicily*. However, even after requesting the artist Thomas Hearne to finalise the illustrations in 1782, he abandoned the project. As Viccy Coltman has pointed out, the reason was likely the appearance of three rival volumes on Sicily and its antiquities which were both more lavishly illustrated and erudite than his own. Bruce Redford has suggested that *Expedition into Sicily* was composed for the sole purpose of gaining membership into the Society of Dilettanti. John Brewer has similarly examined the role that publishing critical histories had in constituting a "cultural establishment," and affirming membership within it. The *Discourse*, representing his second attempt to gain recognition in print, might be read in these precise terms. That is, with its abundance of citations, ancient Greek phrases, highly finished engravings and recourse to radical sexuality, it was primed to impress. See Viccy Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11; Redford, *Dilettanti*, 83; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2013 [1997]), 375; Clarke and Penny, *The Arrogant Connoisseur*, 30. Richard Payne Knight, *Expedition into Sicily*, ed. Claudia Stumpf (London: British Museum Publications, 1986), 17.

[11] Bill dated August 10th from Thomas Spilsbury to the Society of Dilettanti for printing "Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus, in 4to, with Notes, 250 Copies, 25 Sheets, at 16/ per sheet." Minutes and Reports of Committees of the Society, MR40d G1, f. 355, Society of Antiquaries Library. Thomas Spilsbury succeeded William Strahan at his Snowhill printing office c.1780.

[12] The second volume of *Antiquities of Athens* contains twelve plates signed by Newton while forty-four of the sixty-three plates printed for the second volume of *Antiquities of Ionia* (1797) are also signed by Newton. Robin Middleton, Gerald Beasley, and Nicholas Savage, *The Mark J. Millard Architectural Collection Volume II British Books, Seventeenth through Nineteenth Centuries* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 298, 302. Only seven plates in the *Discours*e bear Newton's signature. The Society of Dilettanti Minute Book contains a receipt detailing the "Cost of the Cult of Priapus." It records that Conrad Metz was paid for seven engravings, William Sharpe was paid for at least two and that Newton was paid for various. See 4 May 1788, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti 1777–1798, vol. 4., MR 40d-e B4, Society of Antiquaries Library. Knight was satisfied with Newton's work but recognised his artistic limitations. In a letter to Charles Townley, he gave an account of Newton's strengths

The *Discourse* had three main sections. It began with two letters, the first by Sir William Hamilton, dated December 30th, 1781. This infamous dispatch, addressed to Sir Joseph Banks, recounted an astonishing occurrence: the ceremonial presentation of wax models of male genitalia at Catholic shrines in rural Abruzzo. The second letter was written in Italian and belonged to Hamilton's informant, the engineer who had witnessed the ceremony firsthand while building a new road in the region. Knight's contribution followed—*A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, And its Connexion with the mystic Theology of the Ancients*—a work largely unstructured with discursive footnotes, accompanied by eighteen numbered plates and, in a select number of copies, two additional engravings.

I will begin with these elusive, additional engravings as a means to consider the *Discourse*'s audience. The Society of Dilettanti Minute Book first describes an additional plate delivered together with the *Discourse* on March 2nd, 1788. It is noted that the *Priapaie* "with the Ex Voto" and *Ionian Antiquities* was delivered to Mr. Mitford and Mr. Parsons. On the same date, a list was made of those to whom "The additional Plate to the Priapeia was deliverd …" Here, Mr. Mitford and Mr. Parsons reappear alongside the names of notable members of the Society including Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sir Joseph Banks and Charles suggesting that the additional plate and the "Ex Voto" are one in the same.[13] The "Ex Voto" is likely the

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and weaknesses which were compared unfavourably with the work of Scottish artist John Brown (1749–1787). According to Knight, "Newton the Engraver lives in Brookes's Gardens near Tottenham Court Road. He is moderate enough in his charges, & as far as the mere tracing of Lines, very neat & accurate, but he has no knowledge of Effect or delicacy of Execution. Mere didactic Prints, such as I employed him in, he does very well; but I do not think him by any means capable of imitating the delicate touches of W? Browns Pencil." Letter from Richard Payne Knight, 5 November 1786, Downton to Charles Townley, TY/7/2092, f. 2, Townley Archive, British Museum.

[13] Following the initial announcement regarding the additional plate, mention of the Ex Voto is consistent but not comprehensive. On June 1st, 1788, for example, it is noted that Mr. Barry and Mr. Wood received the *Ionian Antiquities* and the *Priapeia*, but there is no mention of the Ex Voto. Likewise, On February 11th, 1790, Mr. Patterson, Mr. Yorke and Mr. North receive both volumes but no additional plate. However, on March, 29th, 1789, it is recorded that "The Priapeia & Ex Voto were delivered to Ld Charlemont on his lordship demanding them." The

unnumbered plate of "An Ancient EX VOTO in Silver the Size of the Original" found in extant copies of the *Discourse* at the Wellcome Library, the British Library and the Society of Antiquaries Library [Fig. 7].[14] This inclusion is consistent with Dilettanti publishing procedures, which privileged artifacts in the collections of members of the Society. The original—a small silver phallus combined with a vulva on the back—belonged to Townley. In addition to the extra plate, the artifact was also reproduced in a watercolour drawing which is now in the collection of the British Museum [Fig. 8]. There, it appears alongside other examples of phallic jewellery wrought in precious metal.[15] As Hamilton suggested, these amulets were worn to protect the wearer against *mal occhii*, or *evil eyes* and for their "supposed invigorating influence."[16] Townley's example, however, was unusual since the combination of male and female genitalia was more commonly rendered emblematically as a closed hand, an example of which could be found on Plate II of the *Discourse* [Fig. 9]. Knight may have had the artifact engraved for the supplement because it not only provided curious, new evidence for his arguments, but it also ensured that the research remained up to date with Dilettanti collections. This practice saw the *Discourse* evolve in tandem with new discoveries and acquisitions.

The second engraving is more intriguing. It depicts an Indian architectural fragment carved in high relief. This artifact, which presents six figures in a configuration of contortionist sexual exploits, also belonged to Townley. As rendered by its unknown illustrator, light glances

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Ex Voto is also noted in a spread sheet detailing the distribution of Dilettanti publications to members of the Society. At least eleven were presented to members on March 2nd, 1788, including to Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Duke of Norfolk, Sir Joseph Banks, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynne and Mr. Peachey. See Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti, MR 40d, f. 521, Society of Antiquaries, London.

[14] A curator's note, found in a copy originally presented to the gem engraver and antiquities dealer Nathaniel Marchant on May 1st, 1796 (now in the Society of Antiquaries Library) supports this claim. It reads: "This copy contains the very rare extra Plate of the ancient Ex Voto in silver."

[15] The engraving was accompanied with the following text: "An Ancient EX VOTO in Silver the Size of the Original. / ΑΡΡΗΝ ΚΑΙ ΘΗΛΥΣ ΔΙΦΥΗΣ ΛΥΣΕΙΟΣ ΙΑΚΧΟΣ. / Orph.Hymn."

[16] Sir William Hamilton, "A Letter from Sir William Hamilton," in *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, ed. Knight (London: T. Spilsbury, 1786), 4–5.

off the splayed torso of the inverted deity at left [Fig. 10]. Her legs wrap around the head of her paramour as she twists her body to fellate him. Where the architectural fragment terminates at the standing figures' waists, the artist has extended the scene via dotted outlines indicating the lithe limbs and massive phalluses lost to the artifact's percipient. Reconstructed thus, the engraving is among the most sexually explicit in the volume. It is seconded only by the tailpiece which depicts a marble statuette of a satyr penetrating a goat from behind to which I will return later in the chapter. Finally, the image is accompanied by a paratext that contains the artifact's measurements, details concerning its findspot, a short bibliography on Indian cave temples and a Latin quotation adapted from Horace's *Epistles*: "Et Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non?" (What is beautiful? What is base? What is useful? What is not?).

There are two possibilities for understanding the context of this plate and its connection to the *Discourse*. Its rarity could indicate that it has no formal affiliation with the book. However, the fact that it features in at least two copies (one in the Houghton library and one in the British Library), suggests that it is not an extra illustration (one bound into a volume by the owner, as opposed to the publisher).[17] Adding further evidentiary weight to this proposition is Knight's discussion of the original sculptural fragment in the text, a second illustration of the artifact (shown in part) on Plate X [Fig. 11], and its being listed together with the "Votive Silver Phallus" plate in Portfolio D of a catalogue containing Townley's documents compiled by his uncle, John Towneley.[18] The latter coupling certainly strengthens the conclusion that both

[17] Only one of two volumes in the collection of the Houghton library contain it (f *EC8.K7472.786a). A more exhaustive comparison of extant copies would likely turn up further volumes inclusive of the plate. A pencil note in the copy of the *Discourse* in the British Library would lead us to believe that the supplemental engravings are extra illustrations. The undated message, which proceeds the additional plate of the Ex Voto and that of the Elephanta fragment, reads: "The following plates have been added to this volume, altho' not forming part of this work, as they relate to the same subject" and is signed "Ab." This is misleading since, as noted earlier, it is probable that the Ex Voto was the "additional plate" mentioned in the Minutes of the Society of Dilettanti and delivered to both members and proposed recipients.

[18] TY/20/1 ff. 1, Townley Archive, British Museum.

engravings were supplements to the original text. More evidence, albeit located slightly further afield, can be found in Thomas Astle's *Observations on Stone Pillars, Crosses, and Crucifixes,* read to the Society of Antiquaries in January 1798 and printed by Thomas Bensley of Bolt Court in 1800.[19] Crucially, Astle relies heavily on Knight. He links together a Priapeid deity, the use of phallic symbols in the religion of Brahma (Hinduism) and the quotation from Horace that appears on the supplemental engraving, thus mirroring the same association of ideas found in the *Discourse*. But one question remains unresolved. If both plates are addenda, why is one plate found in fewer volumes than that of the Ex Voto? One explanation is that the Elephanta plate was circulated only within the Society's inner most circle. We learn from a letter addressed to Sir Joseph Banks in 1785 that Knight at least contemplated releasing different variants of his book:

> I shall be happy in your Assistance in finding some Expressions which may not give Offence to the Godly, though I fear that it will be impossible to make the Work fit for any but very profane Persons on Account of the Prints which are necessary to explain it […] holy Spirit may be changed into divine Spirit […] Trinity may be written Triade. Communion I can find no substitute for, & shall be glad if you can […] I meant my Discourse only for the Society & a few real Dilettanti—if it is to be in the smallest degree public many other parts must be unpublished, particularly the Plate of the Goat & Satyr.[20]

None of the proposed changes were made, and the distribution of the volume remained private. But while a less irreverent version never materialised, it remains a possibility that the plate was distributed covertly, perhaps even only among those closest to Knight.

Initially, the *Discourse*'s distribution was limited to members of the Society of Dilettanti and their friends. Each member could recommend one additional recipient to be approved by collective vote. It was decreed on March 3rd, 1787: "That each member be allowd once & no

[19] Thomas Astle, *Observations on Stone Pillars, Crosses, and Crucifixes* (London: Thomas Bensley, 1800).
[20] Letter from Richard Payne Knight, 18 June 1785, Whitehall to Sir Joseph Banks. Papers of Sir Joseph Banks, 1745–1923 (bulk 1745–1820), National Library of Australia. MS 9, 102b, http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-222969158. See also Jana Funke, Kate Fisher, Jen Grove, and Rebecca Langlands, "Illustrating phallic worship: uses of material objects and the production of sexual knowledge in eighteenth-century antiquarianism and early twentieth-century sexual science," *Word & Image* 33, no. 3 (2017): 327.

more to move the Society recommending by name a Friend to whom he wishes the Society to present a copy."[21] The presentation of the *Discourse* was quasi-ceremonial. It could only be given to members at meetings, and its broader circulation was restricted.[22] It is solemnly noted, for example, "That the Copies be lodg'd in the Custody of the Secretary & one of them deliverd to each member of the Society, & that except these he do not on any Pretence whatever part with any other copy without an order made at a regular meeting."[23] A letter from Sir Joseph Banks to Sir William Hamilton dated July 24th, 1787, confirms that this motion was intended to prevent outsiders from seeking membership in the Society for the sole purpose of procuring the desirable volume.[24]

Additional regulations were contrived to control distribution. On April 1st, 1787, the Society ruled "that if any one who has receivd a copy of the *Priapeia* by the recommendation of a member shall afterwards himself become a member of the Society, the copy he has thus receivd shall be considered as sufficient for him & he shall not receive any other."[25] Double dipping was not allowed. But despite these strict rules, the dissemination of the *Discourse* was

[21] 3 March 1787, MR 40d-e B4, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti, Society of Antiquaries, London.
[22] For the carefully outlined rules around the distribution of the *Priapeia* to non-members, see Society of Dilettanti, Volumes of Correspondence, 1736–1800, vol. 1. f. 527v, Society of Antiquaries, London. The document is headed "Priapeia" followed by "Rules relative to the delivery thereof to persons who are not members of the Soc." It explicitly states that "no business relative thereto shall be done which 12 members at least are present at a regular meeting thereof." The names of those who received the *Priapeia* are likewise recorded in a spread sheet and a document that lists recipient names alphabetically. Volumes of Correspondence, 1736–1800, vol. 1., MR 40d, f. 527v, Society of Antiquaries, London.
[23] 3 March 1787, MR 40d-e B4, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti, Society of Antiquaries, London.
[24] Banks explained that "Some disputes arose in the Soc[iety] about the mode in which it should be publishd and an Idea, in my mind illiberal that by Keeping it up [in price] people for the sake of possessing it, would become members was started by the Duke of Norfolk & had almost prevaild. We contrivd, however, to pass a law for disposing of the Copies, which is that any member who wishes his Friend be possessd of one shall move the Society for that purpose, Specifying the name of his Friend. This motion being seconded shall if 12 members are present at a regular meeting be put to the ballot & if 2/3 of the ballotters are for the motion it shall be Carried. In this manner about 30 have already been disposd of & if you want any for any Friend of yours I shall be happy & move for you." Letter from Sir Joseph Banks, 24 July 1787, Soho Square, London to Sir William Hamilton, Naples, MS 2641, f. 136r–v., British Library. The letter is also published in Neil Chambers, ed. *The Letters of Sir Joseph Banks A Selection, 1768–1820* (London: Imperial College Press, 2000), 96.
[25] 1 April 1787, MR 40d-e B4, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti.

generous and consistent. It was dutifully presented (often alongside Richard Chandler's *Ionian Antiquities*) to all incoming members as well as friends of established members.[26] On June 5th, 1791, for example, Sir William Hamilton made a rare appearance at the Society's headquarters in London. He was on leave in Britain to secure permission from King George III to marry his mistress, Emma Hart. During the meeting Hamilton was given license to expand the readership of the *Priapeia* to the Continent: "It was movd & seconded that 25 copies of the Priapeia be ~~given to~~ Presented to Sr Wm Hamilton with a desire from the Society that he will distribute them among such Foreigners as he may think worthy of them & likely to do honor to the Priapeid system."[27] Another six copies were given to Knight on the same date for the same purpose, likely to be distributed during his upcoming trip to Paris where he was planning to purchase artifacts for his collection.[28] Volumes were also given to such illustrious individuals as Edward Gibbon, John Wilkes and the Prince of Wales and offered to institutions including the British Museum, the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society—so long as the recipients were deemed "inclined to receive the present with gratitude."[29]

If the private circulation of the *Discourse* served to augment its cachet among collectors,

[26] *Ionian Antiquities, Published, with Permission of the Society of Dilettanti, by R. Chandler, M.A. F.S.A., N. Revett, Architect; W. Pars, Painter.* (London, T. Spilsbury and W. Haskell, 1769). The book was published by the Society of Dilettanti and contained engravings of monuments in Ionia, where they had sponsored a two-year expedition in 1764.
[27] 5 June 1791, MR 40d-e B4, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti, Society of Antiquaries, London. Sir William Hamilton and Emma travelled back to Naples that same year by way of France.
[28] Nicholas Penny, "Collecting, Interpreting and Imitating Ancient Art," in *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751–1824: Essays on Richard Payne Knight Together with a Catalogue of Works Exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery*, eds. Michael Clarke and Nicholas Penny, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 69.
[29] 6 May 1787, MR 40d-e B4, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti.

then it is not surprising that the 195-page book eventually fell "into the wrong hands."[30] The first public review of an errant volume appeared in the satirical poem *The Pursuits of Literature* in 1794. Its author, Thomas J. Mathias, described the "representations of the organs of generation" that he found within its pages, a "new species of blasphemy."[31] Other hostile voices soon registered its other transgressions. Among them was the geographical transposition of ideas to understand cultures distinct from the Hellenic tradition that had so bewitched Winckelmann. Printed but not published, concealed but not suppressed, the *Discourse* was "clandestine" in the assessment of Robert Nares and William Beloe, editors of *The British Critic*.[32] Importantly, the work, which they declared dangerous to proper sensibilities, came to their attention by way of Edward Moor's *A Narrative of the Operations of Capt. Little's Detachment, and the Mahratta Army commanded by Purseram Bhow* (1794). Moor paraphrases liberally from the *Discourse*, an occasion *The British Critic* exploits to condemn the logical ingenuity that Knight models to defend sexually explicit art.[33] Philosophy, Nares and Beloe maintained, was no justification for "Hindoo depravity" or defending sexual practices which, in the words of the French philosopher Abbé Raynal, rendered the divine "palpable and sensible" through an "effusion of souls and senses."[34] "Such" the authors exclaimed, "was the language of Philosophy in France!"[35] The review aligns Knight and Raynal, casting them both as enemies of Britain and thereby

[30] Peter Funnel, "The Symbolical Language of Antiquity," in *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751–1824: Essays on Richard Payne Knight Together with a Catalogue of Works Exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery*, eds. Michael Clarke and Nicholas Penny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 61.
[31] Thomas Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature*, *A Satirical Poem in Four Dialogues* (London: T. Becket, 1797 [1794]), 135. For more on Mathias, see Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 126.
[32] *The British Critic, a New Review for July, August, September, October, November, and December* (London: printed for F. and C. Rivington, 1794), 390.
[33] Edward Moor, *A Narrative of the Operations of Capt. Little's Detachment, and the Mahratta Army commanded by Purseram Bhow* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 392.
[34] *The British Critic,* 391.
[35] *The British Critic,* 391.

strengthening derision toward the Indian erotic art illustrated and discussed at length in the *Discourse.* The perceived sexual flagrancy expressed on Hindu temple architecture could be made to seem more threatening to British society if allied to the radical mood, irreligion and libertine sexuality associated with revolutionary France.[36] In view of his anticlerical polemic and candor, Knight was a true libertine in the sense described by Randolph Trumbach. He, like other libertines, believed "in contradistinction to orthodox Christianity, that sexual experience was central to human life and that sexual desire and pleasure were good and natural things."[37] Writing in the early 1790s, an "ultraconservative" moment sensitive to political unrest in France, those periodicals which blasted Knight would attempt to stamp out all radical thinking in Britain.[38] Moreover, the editors ventured to remedy the "libertine masculinity" increasingly held to be a marker of elite identity. Many of the Society of Dilettanti's early members, for example, were involved with other wanton companies including the Calves' Head and Hellfire clubs (the former was credited with starting a riot in 1735 and the latter was suspected of debauchery).[39] The Society of Dilettanti, in the eyes of astute cultural commentators, was but another iteration of these early associations—a closed world in which licentiousness and irreligion ruled. Knight, evidently, was perceived to indulge in both. Not only did his tolerance arouse suspicion, but there was, as G. S. Rousseau has observed, "lurking on almost every page […] some form of

[36] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 128. Redford highlights the political implications of the review. Mobilising the techniques of comparative religion to rethink Christianity, Knight was following from Jean-Fréderic Bernard's influential *Cérémonies et coutumes de tous les peuples du monde* (1723). See Joan-Pau Rubiés, "From Christian Apologetics to Deism Libertine Readings of Hinduism, 1650–1730," in *God in the Enlightenment*, eds. William J. Bulman and Robert G. Ingram (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[37] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England," *The Invention of pornography: obscenity and the origins of modernity, 1500–1800*, ed. Lynn Avery Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 254.
[38] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 126, 128. Knight's *The Landscape* was also accused of Jacobinism. See Messmann, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 83.
[39] Jason M. Kelly, "Riots, Revelries, and Rumor: Libertinism and Masculine Association in Enlightenment London," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 4 (October 2006): 759–795.

scepticism about the institution of Christianity."[40] We will turn to some of the more incendiary arguments presented in the *Discourse* later in the chapter, but what must be stressed here is that the linking together of Christianity and other religions, ancient and exotic, under the rubric of shared sexual symbolism was sufficient to call Knight out for obscenity. Accordingly, his critics concluded that the Eleusinian secrets which the *Discourse* brought to light should remain within the confines of the closed world of the Society. "We sincerely hope for the good of mankind, [that the treatise] will never burst from the awful and Eleusinian darkness, in which it is at present reserved for the sight of the initiated alone."[41] In spite of the controversy that the *Discourse* generated, there is little evidence to suggest that Knight deliberately suppressed the work as some scholars have argued.[42] The Minutes confirm that the Society of Dilettanti continued to present copies to new members throughout the 1790s and into the nineteenth century.[43] In fact, it was "Ordered That from the 2^{d} March 1800, No Person admitted into the Society of Dilettanti shall be entitled to receive any Works of the Society printed previous to the date of his election; excepting the Priapeia."[44] The formal presentation of the *Discourse* remained, as its critics spitefully pointed out, an important initiation ritual for the Society.

III. Theorising Antiquarian Intelligence: Methods

[40] G. S. Rousseau, "The Sorrows of Priapus: anticlericalism, homosocial desire, and Richard Payne Knight," in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, eds. Roy Porter and G.S. Rousseau (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 102.
[41] *The British Critic*, 388.
[42] Scholarship on the *Discourse* has tended to perpetuate the idea that Knight attempted to "buy back all existing copies" of the book in the 1790s. See Rousseau, "The Sorrows of Priapus," 120.
[43] Even as late as March 2nd, 1800, it was decided that "The Priapeia [was] to be presented to the Marquis of Bute on the motion of L. Wentworth seconded by the Secretary." It is unlikely that the Society would continue to present the volume to incoming members and illustrious persons if they were attempting to censor it. 2 March 1800, MR 40d-e B5, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti, Society of Antiquaries, London. It is also unlikely that the Society would have acted without Knight's blessing.
[44] 2 March 1800, MR 40d-e B5, Minute Book of the Society of Dilettanti, Society of Antiquaries, London.

The *Discourse* embodied the intellectual ambitions of the Society of Dilettanti. It offered in discursive form a "new history" that brought the past into conversation with the present in radical ways. Modelling the rigorous scholarship pioneered in earlier Dilettanti publications such as *Ionian Antiquities*, the volume considered a misunderstood facet of ancient world: its symbolical language. Knight traced the genesis of art from primordial sign to figurative sculpture with philosophical rigor and pointed irony—a winning combination in the waggish cultural atmosphere of the Society of Dilettanti, which, as has been suggested by Redford and others, supported both serious research and brazen ribaldry.[45] But incongruities arising from this surprising synthesis have continued to trouble even contemporary readers. Knight, for example, moves easily between ancient sources and material culture to draw an unusual conclusion about a marble sculpture in the collection of Charles Townley. Engraved as a tailpiece for the volume, the artifact features a satyr penetrating a goat from behind [Fig. 12] [Fig. 13] [Fig. 14]. What are we to make of his claim that the work is not intended to amuse or arouse its viewer, but to inspire devotional awe? This section argues that we can better understand the *Discourse*'s complexities if we reconsider its methods. Having situated the *Discourse* in its initial context of production and reception, this section thus focuses on the adventurous artifact-centric scholarship that Knight practiced in the 1780s. We apprehend both the material basis and philosophical drive behind the book most clearly when we resist the impulse to reconcile Knight with the standards of subsequent disciplinary categories and instead trace how he mobilised evidence (empirical, literary and philological), media (print, printed images) and social capital (his increasing authority on ancient art and matters of taste). To do so, we must first understand the scholarly context in which Knight was working.

[45] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 3.

While the differences between historians and antiquarians of the early modern period are less categorical than late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century scholars, writers and cultural critics have made them out to be, a sensorial approach stands out as a definitive feature of the latter.[46] An erudite polymath, Knight was a model virtuoso, someone who took up diverse topics and mobilised an equally disparate range of evidence in his research.[47] He could cite classical authorities and renowned works of art with learned ease. However, it was his interest in the ordinary that rendered him vulnerable to criticism. Debates over the complexion and grounds for reliable historical evidence were ongoing. Canonical texts—Thucydides, Herodotus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Strabo, Pausanias and others—prevailed as the authoritative sources on the ancients during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But in the 1670s, a new class of historian began to emerge. Those who expressed a mistrust of standard historical accounts, or "historical Pyrrhonists," as Arnaldo Momigliano has called them, identified gaps and falsehoods in historical records. These historians began to seek new possibilities, leaving their libraries in search of state documents, which included charters, inscriptions on public monuments and coins.[48] 1697 marked an important year in the unfolding early modern debate between literary and empirical evidence. It witnessed the publication of both Francesco Bianchini's *L'istoria universale provata con monumenti e figurata con simboli degli antichi* and John Evelyn's

[46] The difference between antiquarian and historical methods inquiry has been the subject of scholarly debate since the question was first posed by Arnoldo Momigliano in 1950. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, no. 3/4 (1950): 285–315. Momigliano's pioneering works on antiquarian scholarship are considered at length in Lucy Peltz, Martin Myrone, eds. *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700–1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). More recent studies of antiquarianism include Peter N. Miller, *History and Its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture since 1500* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2017) and Alain Schnapp, ed. *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2017).

[47] Craig Ashley Hanson, *The English Virtuoso: Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009). Craig Ashley Hanson has shown how early modern antiquarianism was characterised by learned polymathy. For more on antiquarianism see also Noah Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[48] Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," 296–297.

Numismata: A Discourse of Medals. Citing archeological remains as "proof of what happened," Bianchini saw past the classical corpus.[49] Interested less in specific historical figures than the achievements of humankind across the ages, he outlined his historical method: questions concerning agriculture, law and religion were addressed using artifacts and extant monuments. Each of his chapters featured an engraving, likely executed by Gian Antonio Zuliani.[50] Compositionally complex, these images were inclusive of the kinds of evidence Bianchini assembled in the text: coins, sculptures, monuments and fragments thereof. The second chapter, for example, concerned with the "Age of Gold," featured a composite engraving of a sarcophagus, a relief sculpture and a statue base [Fig. 15]. While substantially altered in terms of scale and context to create a striking impression, such depictions allowed the reader to benefit from the immediacy of visual evidence. As Bianchini explained, images communicated more efficiently than words, being "'bound up with the natural impressions that the imagination receives from sentiment,' [i.e., from the senses.]"[51] Bianchini's innovative mode of presentation proceeded from the supposition that fragments offered glimpses of the whole, but that "assemblages" presented the reader/viewer with the "essence of the historical period illustrated."[52] Evelyn would similarly reconcile pictorial and lettered modes of communication to

[49] Quoted in Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," 299.
[50] Susan M. Dixon, "Piranesi and Francesco Bianchini: Capricci in the service of pre-scientific archaeology," *Art History* 22, no. 2 (1999): 194.
[51] Translated by Susan M. Dixon, "Piranesi and Francesco Bianchini," 194.
[52] Dixon, "Piranesi and Francesco Bianchini," 194.

persuasive effect.[53] His *Numismata* applied a similar logic to individuals. Painted, engraved or cast portraits could be read using physiognomic theory and grouped together according to the sitters' accomplishments. When seen alongside other men "of extraordinary Merit" and similar mind, the viewer would not only be able to discern the interests and exploits of each in a new light, but perhaps also gather a sense of the scholarly spirit of the era and its otherwise invisible intellectual networks.[54] But if Bianchini and Evelyn offered only a supplement to established methods, antiquarians of the following century would take this approach more seriously. In the early eighteenth century, the superior evidentiary merits of coins, medals and other seemingly humble impressions became a topic of debate. "It is much safer to quote a medal than an author," so Joseph Addison would claim in his *Dialogues Upon the Usefulness of Ancient Medals* (published posthumously in 1726), "for in this case you do not appeal to Suetonius or to Lampridius, but to the emperor himself or to the whole body of the Roman Senate."[55] Knight affirms the continued currency of such thinking in the *Discourse*. He privileges medals as "the public acts of the States, [which] therefore contain the sense of nations, and not the caprices of individuals."[56] Importantly, this method did not undermine the authority of classical authors, but

[53] John Evelyn, *Numismata: A Discourse of Medals, Antient and Modern* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1697). For discussions of the visual and discursive strategies of the *Numismata*; Sean Silver "John Evelyn and numismata: material history and Autobiography," *Word & Image*, no. 31, 3 (2015): 331–342. For a similar discussion of the innovative use of images in Bianchini's work see Dixon, "Piranesi and Francesco Bianchini," 184–213, Susan M. Dixon, "Francesco Bianchini's Images and his Legacy in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in *Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, ed. Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 87, and Christopher M. S. Johns, "Papa Albani and Francesco Bianchini: Intellectual and Visual Culture in Early-Eighteenth-Century Rome," in *Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, ed. Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 41–46. Bianchini's role in the history of antiquarian scholarship is likewise discussed in Alain Schnapp's "The Earth is a History Book: Arranging Objects as Text, Making History Readable," in *The Discovery of the Past* (New York: Harry N. Abrams inc., 1996), 182–234. Schnapp's chapter charts the development of antiquarian method, specifically the role of numismatics and comparative iconography in late seventeenth-century scholarship.

[54] Matthew C. Hunter, "Cascade, Copper, Collection Constellations of Images in 1670s Experimental Philosophy," in *Wicked Intelligence: Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 139–140.

[55] Joseph Addison, *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq. in four volumes* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1721) 1:442.

[56] Knight, *Discourse*, 80.

rather emphasised a need for corroborative proof. The problem with history was not its reliance on texts perse, but their isolation. Historical accuracy required combining reading with looking (and handling)—embracing both the "discursive, conceptual, and propositional knowledge" of texts and the "experiential familiarity" of artifacts.[57] Consider Knight's evaluation of the Orphic Poems:

> The collection of these Poems now extant, being probably compiled and verified by several hands, with some forged, and others interpolated and altered, must be read with great caution ; more especially the fragments preserved by the Fathers of the Church and Ammonian Platonics ; for these writers made no scruples of forging any monuments of antiquity which suited their purposes."[58]

Since clerics had their own, corrupt agendas, measures needed to be put in place to ensure the veracity of their records. "There is no surer rule for judging," Knight proposes, "than to compare the epithets and allegories with the symbols and monograms on the Greek medals, and to make their agreement the test of authenticity."[59] In addition to delivering material support and interpretive nuance for old claims, antiquities were increasingly appreciated for their ability to reveal new information. Medals could be collected and compared to uncover formerly unknowable peculiarities of the ancient world. The *Discourse* thus models an approach that trades in both coins and canonical texts to produce historical truth.

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[57] Peter N. Miller and François Louis have argued that this method, a "constant hermeneutical movement from text to object and object back to text," was in keeping with a long tradition of humanist scholarship. Peter N. Miller and François Louis, "Introduction," in *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China 1500-1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 3. On the growing importance of visual evidence in Enlightenment scholarship see Sam Smiles, *Eye Witness: Artists and Visual Documentation in Britain 1770–1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate: 2000), 1–13. See also Stephanie Moser and Sam Smiles, *Envisioning the Past: Archaeology and the Image* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 4. Moser and Smiles identify Pietro Santi Bartoli's *Gli Antichi Sepolcri; overo, Mausolei Romani et Etruschi* (1697), Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité Expliquée et Representéé en Figures* (15 vols., 1719–24), Julien David le Roy's *Les Ruines des Plus Beau Monuments de la Grèce* (1757) and James Stuart's and Nicholas Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762) as important precedents for late-eighteenth antiquarian texts.

[58] Knight, *Discourse*, 31.

[59] Knight, *Discourse*, 32.

But coins and medals were not the only reliable evidence. Scholars in and outside of academic settings began to perceive the value of data drawn from architecture and visual art.[60] Devotional sculpture, funerary ceramics and architectural ornament afforded glimpses into the broader world in which historical events unfolded, disclosing tenets of ancient philosophy and religion. A lengthy note found among Hamilton's papers and written prior to 1776 spells out the evidentiary merits of his celebrated collection of ancient Greek vases. The passage, a draft of an advertisement for a forthcoming sale "of near 200 lots & mostly of figured Vases" promotes the "rare and Valuable Collection, of Grecian commonly called Etruscan Vases" as sacred artifacts.[61] The writer, perhaps Hamilton himself, goes on to explain that the scenes painted thereon:

> represent the different ceremonies that were performed at the Feast of Bacchus – Sacrifices – ablutions – Horse & Chariot Races[,] Gymnastic Exercises[,] Subjects from Homer & Scenes of Ancient Tragedies & Comedies supposed to have been recited by Travelling Poets – in short whatever we meet with in the most ancient Grecian Authors on the Subject of Bacchus & Eleusis & their Mysteries & of the Olympic Games is to be traced distinctly in these singularly well preserved monuments of Antiquity.[62]

The vases, at least two thousand years old, offered visual proof of the secrets divulged in authorial accounts of the Eleusinian mysteries and Bacchanals. Crucially, Hamilton goes on to explain that they not only affirm what is already known but provide new insight into those clandestine religious rites described in accredited records: "The importance of the collection & its Utility for the Advancement of the fine Arts & the Elucidation of the most obscure passages of the most ancient Greek Author's will be ~~sufficiently~~ clearly ascertained."[63] Comparing vase

[60] Sweet suggests that Cambridge University, specifically Benet Hall, cultivated a strong antiquarian tradition. Rosemary Sweet, "Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 184. David C. Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660–1730*, 2nd ed. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951).
[61] Anon., Undated Note, Hamilton and Greville Papers, Volume I, Add MS 42069, f. 199, British Library.
[62] Add MS 42069, f. 199v.
[63] Add MS 42069, f. 199v.

paintings with little understood passages found in the classical corpus, Hamilton asserted the utility of antiquarian methods for all students of the past.

Philology was also advanced as an expedient method for antiquarian inquiry. The turn toward antiquities was in some ways an unhappy consequence of the ancients versus moderns debate: the dramatic unmasking of once celebrated canonical texts as forgeries in the infamous *Battle of the Books*.[64] The quarrel, which takes it name from Jonathan Swift's satire published in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), concerned modern methods of scholarship. These were lauded by some as promising new tools for producing knowledge about the past but dismissed by others who argued that ancient Greek scholars were the absolute authority on all historical matters. As Joseph M. Levine has argued, this contest marked a "divide in the world of historical learning into two hostile camps."[65] Supporting the 'moderns' was the young linguist William Wotton (1666–1727), who advanced philology as potentially rewarding subfield. The philologist, he reasoned, could restore the correct meanings of ancient texts and disclose those which had been lost to history.[66] He proved his case by prompting his friend Richard Bentley to expose the letters of the ancient Sicilian despot Phalaris as fraudulent using the new techniques of philology and textual criticism. Phalaris had, as recently as 1690, been heralded by Sir William Temple as a model for ancient learning and rhetoric. In the bitter conflict that unfolded between Bentley, Wotton and their rivals at Christ Church college, Oxford, Bentley showcased his superior

[64] Joseph M. Levine, "'Et Tu Brute?' History and Forgery in 18th-Century England," in *Fakes and Frauds: Varieties of Deception in Print & Manuscript*, ed. Robin Meyers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1989).
[65] Joseph M. Levine, "Jonathan Swift and the Idea of History," in *Re-enacting the Past: Essays on the Evolution of Modern English Historiography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 2:79.
[66] Levine, "'Et Tu Brute?'," 72.

erudition and the benefits of his novel methodology, mobilising philological nuance, ancient coins, and his studied understanding of ancient culture and historical events.[67]

Following from figures like Wotton and Bentley, philology offered new ways to engage with cultural history, or "the whole life of the past."[68] While Knight was not the first to follow their lead, his commitment was, in many ways, equal to it.[69] He scrutinised both inscriptions and Greek letters in an effort to produce a more intimate understanding of the ancient world. Knight would later mount a formal defense of philology in the prefatory address of his *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet*, written throughout the 1780s and published in 1791. As Knight would have it, philology was an essential prolegomenon to any scholarly operation. "Whatever may be the taste and discernment of a reader, or the genius and ability of a writer," Knight insisted, "neither the one nor the other can appear while the text remains deformed by the corruptions of blundering transcribers, and obscured by the glosses of ignorant grammarians."[70] Philology's crucial service to the antiquarian is also a common theme in Knight's correspondence with Charles Townley (1737–1805), collector and fellow member of the Society of Dilettanti. Townley had hired Pierre François Hugues, a charismatic and erudite rogue (who first charmed Sir William Hamilton before finding patronage among those members of the

[67] Levine, "Jonathan Swift and the Idea of History," II:82.
[68] Levine, "Jonathan Swift and the Idea of History," II:80.
[69] Benjamin Kennicott, for example, was a Hebrew scholar that James Turner discusses as a paradigm for the "seismic shifts within philology" that occurred during the late eighteenth century. He argues that Kennicott and his contemporaries were not only attuned to the unique techniques of their field to produce new truths about the past, but that they began to consider language alongside subjects such as customs and manners. Knight's interest in the relationship between language and national character resonates with Kennicott's discussion of the potential of comparative linguistics to alter ways of understanding the ancients. This resonance confirms Turner's argument that these ideas were commonplace. See James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 91–99.
[70] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet* (London: printed by J. Nichols for P. Elmsly, 1791), 2. See Section VII wherein Knight gives an example of how these errors occur, specifically in instances where editors find it easier "to alter [an original text] than explain [it]." Knight, *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet*, 133.

Society of Dilettanti in London), to write a book on the symbolic origins of art, which became *Recherches sur l'Origine, l'esprit et les Progrès des Arts de la Grèce* (1785). While generally well received within Townley's circle, Knight found parts of the *Recherches* wanting. In a letter dated November 5th, 1786, he assured Townley that "The Parts in which I differ with the Baron [d'Hancarville's adopted title] are, I am afraid, more important than you at present seem to think them."[71] He sets out to prove exactly where the immovable Baron had gone wrong, using his command of philology.

> His general Idea, indeed, of the One Spirit universally diffused & expanded by various Symbolical Figures, I entirely approve, as the great outline of the ancient Religion. But when he derived these Symbols from verbal Etymologies, & ambiguities, which he supposes to have existed in a Primitive Tongue, he seems to me to relapse into all the Nonsense … By a continuation in the same radical Error he has confounded Pan with the eternal Father or great fountain of all Emanations, altho' the Latin Name Sylvanus, had he attended to its true Etymology in the Æolian Greek, must have informed him of the difference. We have often debated these Points with him, but to no purpose altho' the general Plan of his own System coincided with the facts & arguments alledged against him. These inconsistencies together with the Blunder he has made in the Greek Language have ruin'd the Credit of his book.[72]

It was d'Hancarville's imperfect knowledge of ancient languages, their complexities and their historical development that produced his most "radical errors." Failure to apprehend the importance of language and its historical construction thus hampered any profound understanding of visual art.[73]

It is important to remember that while antiquarian methods were being embraced in certain collegiate settings, Knight was operating outside of professional academic frameworks.

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[71] Letter from Richard Payne Knight, 5 November 1786, Downton, to Charles Townley, London, TY/7/2092, f. 2, British Museum, London.
[72] TY/7/2092, f. 3.
[73] For a broader discussion of Knight's writing on Homer and the Greek language, see Nicholas Penny, "Richard Payne Knight: A Brief Life," in *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751–1824: Essays on Richard Payne Knight Together with a Catalogue of Works Exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery*, eds. Michael Clark and Nicholas Penny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 8–10.

As such, he was eager to prove that philologists and antiquarians were unjustly classed below literary critics and historians.[74] He puts it this way:

> Those among them who assume the office of pointing out the beauties, and detecting the faults, of literary composition, are placed with the orator and historian, in the highest ranks, whilst those who undertake the more laborious task of washing away the rust and canker of time, and bringing back those forms and colours, which are the objects of criticism, to their original purity and brightness, are degraded with the index-maker and antiquary among the pioneers of literature, whose business it is to clear the way for those who are capable of more splendid and honourable enterprizes. Nevertheless, if we examine the effects produced by those two classes of critics, we shall find that the first have been of no use whatever, and that the last have rendered the most important services to mankind. [75]

The analogy is that of art restoration; the works of the ancients are returned to their original brightness and clarity through the unglamorous but hard work of those unfairly designated amateurs among professionals. Knight would later push this idea even further. In *Carmina Homerica* (1820), he suggested that the academically trained mind could, in fact, be too critical to appreciate ancient poetry. "Students of Homer," he writes,

> must be constantly reminded that the old bards did not use the language of professors, did not sing to scholars and grammarians or to any such subtle critics; their hearers were men who indulged their feelings freely and openly and undisguisedly, who had not overlaid their *natural emotions* with philosophy and the learning of the schools, or blunted their force by the refinement of civilization.[76]

As Frank Messmann explains, Knight was writing with the work of Friedrich August Wolf in mind. While both scholars were classicists and proponents of philology, Knight considered Wolf to be the product of a rigid philosophy rooted in the university. Knight may have been profoundly influenced by Wolf's work, but it was in opposition to academics that he fashioned his own scholarly identity.[77] Thus, in addition to the unique insights afforded by philology,

[74] Messmann, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 130.
[75] Knight, *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet*, 2.
[76] Knight, *Carmina Homerica*, xxiii. Quoted in Messmann, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 129.
[77] Messmann, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 130.

Knight was able to exercise his "*natural emotions*" to hear Homer with the ears of the ancients. It is also worth stating that philological acumen differentiated English antiquarians from the French *philosophes*. Voltaire, for one, exploited historical data to make radical advances in the understanding of ancient customs and manners, the fine arts, religion and even economics. But, as Edward Gibbon would charge, the *philosophes* were ambivalent toward "the learning and language of Greece and Rome."[78] If ancient language remained a neglected arena of human experience in European scholarship, Knight—bolstered by British elites' privilege of classical languages—set out to correct this. The "minute labour" of the philologist, seemingly "contemptible in its operation" was in fact, "important in its effect."[79]

Complementary to philological methodologies were empirical practices that brought quotidian artifacts into focus. Material culture offered substantive evidence toward sanctioning or overturning the authority of classical authors. It also encouraged new ways of engaging with and thinking about the past. Similar to interpreting language, interpreting antiquities required special competencies. Knight, for one, would theorise an antiquarian intelligence, which he aligned with taste. He explained that "refined judges" who had "accustomed their minds to seek for merits of a higher kind" could easily differentiate between artifice and originality.[80] It was obvious to those who had cultivated their powers of discrimination. He puts it thus:

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[78] Edward Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esquire: With Memoirs of His Life and Writings*, ed. John Holroyd Earl of Sheffield (Dublin: P. Wogan, 1796), 86. Indeed, the situation in France was hostile towards philology. "The guardian of those studies, the Academy of Inscriptions, was degraded to the lowest rank among the three royal societies of Paris"; Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon*, 102. Knight similarly observed that "The office, indeed, of analysing letters has been thought the lowest of all literary occupations." Knight, *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet*, 2.

[79] Rebecca Gould offers a concise history of philology and its relationship to philosophy, history and archeology. Rebecca Gould, "Philology's Contingent Genealogies," *Philology: An International Journal on the Evolution of Languages, Cultures and Texts* 1, no. 1 (2015): 53–66. In this text, as in the *Discourse*, Knight revisits the relationship between form and meaning, what he calls "form" and "substance." Investigating the mechanics of speech, Knight would attempt to prove that language and culture were correlated. Knight, *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet*, 2–3.

[80] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne, 1805), 104.

> The copy may be equally exact in imitation, equally correct and dignified in expression…whence none but the most acute and experienced judges of the art can distinguish the one from the other: but the copy will never have masterly intelligence in the execution – that union between the conceptions of the mind and the operations of the hand, which constitute the superior merit of the original in the estimation of the real judge of art: for to all others it is imperceptible; and unlooked for.[81]

This skillset, one of "improved perception" was a product of "acquired knowledge."[82] The close examination and comparison of antiquities within the context of private collections allowed the gentleman scholar to develop a unique *sense* for the antique.

Exactly how this connoisseurship was practiced behind closed doors is perhaps less familiar to academics than it might be to collectors. We can, however, learn much from contemporary connoisseurial techniques. Questions concerning age, authenticity, authorship, quality and condition are determined through a thorough sensorial assessment even in light of modern technologies. Among them, sight remains the most robust sensorial mediator. Artifacts are first examined in a meticulous fashion, often under the power of magnification. Using a loupe, the bubbles in earthenware glazes, the abrasions on the bottom of early modern glassware and the whimsical entomological bigornes on French silver can all communicate age and origin. Working with antique earthenware or glass is likewise a raucous business since flaws and material composition can be discovered through performing sounds tests. The knocking of a knuckle on a vessel will produce a quasi-musical note or a lacklustre thud depending on its condition, while the ringing of a glass can determine its vintage, lead content and quality. Ceramics are likewise subjected to oral probing in the same fashion as pearls. Unseen restorations will produce a waxy sensation on the tooth which is differentiated from the coarser surface of true porcelain. Handling discloses other material properties. Counterfeits can be

[81] Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry*, 106.
[82] Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry*, 130.

heavier or lighter than their authentic counterparts, while metals are particularly suited to tactile investigation; pure silver warms to the touch, but silver plate remains cool even when held for an extended period. Older antiquities might disclose their epoch through aroma. Forgeries do not retain the mustiness of long buried artifacts and offer no prolonged affront to the olfactory glands. Knight would have us believe that his expertise was intuitive, but such connoisseurial techniques of corporeal knowing were likely central to the apparatus through which he and his contemporaries grappled with material culture and art.

IV. Putting to Practice: Arguments

Returning to the inaugural moment of Knight's scholarly incursion into ancient erotic art, this section examines the scandalous assertions staged in the *Discourse*. An expansive and fast paced discussion of the ancient Greek god Pan exemplifies the assured, buxom analysis found throughout the book. Knight applies his own "powers of attraction" to create persuasive cultural juxtapositions. He tells us that the Chorus in Sophocles's *Ajax* calls Pan by the title of ἀλίπλαγκτος or "sea-roaming," and that this was

> probably because he was worshipped on the Shore of the sea; water being reckoned the best and most prolific of the subordinate elements, upon which the spirit of God, according to MOSES, or the plastic Nature, according to the Platonics, operating, produced life and motion on earth. Hence the Ocean is said by HOMER to be the source of all things; and hence the use of water in baptism, which was to regenerate, and, in a manner, new create the person baptised; for the soul, supposed by many of the primitive Christians to be naturally mortal, was then supposed to become immortal. Upon the same principles, the figure of PAN, engraved in Plate V. Fig. I is represented pouring water upon the element upon which it acted.[83]

Moving between classical authors Pindar and Diodorus, the Bible and a carved figure of Pan pouring water onto his visible erection [Fig. 16], Knight links each idea to the next using the

[83] For ἀλίπλαγκτος see Sophocles, *Ajax*, ed. A. C. Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 29, line 695.

word “hence.” If we follow the sequence further, he goes on to connect Pan to ritual dances, Jupiter Ammon of the Africans and the use of horns as an emblem of power in the iconography of Alexander the Great. This passage typifies the dizzying associations leveraged by Knight. So, too, does it offer subversive readings of Christian themes and institutions, a point that critic Thomas J. Mathias easily recognised and coldly denounced. Knight supposes that Saint John the Baptist’s ritual use of water served a similar emblematic function as Pan ‘baptising’ his “organ of generation.” Implicit is the theory that Christians borrowed the ritual use of water and its association with renewal from their pagan predecessors. This argument supports the broader thematic of the book, which traces the evolution and corruption of signs from their primal origins to their modern (Catholic) manifestations. The *Discourse* would therefore ruffle a few feathers among the godly, as Knight himself would admit.

It is also helpful to consider the *Discourse* alongside other period engagements with historical evidence to appreciate what exactly Knight attempts to do. David Hume, for example, has been identified as an historian with little interest in antiquarian methods. This is important insofar as when Hume considers the relationship between architectural renovation and the identity of a church, he focuses on the sociological function of the building as a place of worship. He is patently disinterested in the meanings associated with its material form. According to Hume, if a ruined brick church is rebuilt in a modern style using stone, its purpose (as a gathering place for worship) does not change. Its identity therefore remains constant. He puts it thus: “Here neither the form nor materials are the same, nor is there any thing common to the two objects, but their relation to the inhabitants of the parish; and yet this alone is sufficient to make us denominate them the same.”[84] This is, of course, a modern variant of an ancient thought

[84] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Electric Book, 2019 [1739–40]), 290.

experiment, but one that offers a point of contrast to an argument concerning church architecture found in the *Discourse*. Noting "the Spires and Pinnacles with which our churches are still decorated," Knight proposes ancient sources.[85] These features, he argues, were discreetly adapted "from the ancient Solar Obelisks" not only as decorative motifs, but as bearers of meaning.[86] In support of this proposition, he recalls an ancient medal "belonging to the Museum of the late Dr. Hunter." Following on from the propositions we have seen him making, Knight musters numismatic evidence to recover the *original* significance of architectural ornament.[87] Plate IX renders this medal in etched schematization with a linear bridge connecting the medal's faces [Fig. 17]. The print creates that which could never be seen directly: two sides of the same coin shown simultaneously. As if empowered by this mediation, Knight argues laterally between the crowned head of Apollo on the obverse and a column terminating in a cross framed with laurel on the reverse. The relationship between the sides is clear enough: obelisks are Apollonian symbols and "sacred to the Sun, whose rays they represented both by their form and name." But these movements yield a surprising inference since the obelisk found on the coin is crowned with a cross, an amalgam that Knight claims functions as "the least explicit representation of the Male Organs of Generation."[88] Appealing to the formal evidence of the medal's pillar as represented in his print, Knight goes on to argue that the Christian cross derives from the same column-as-phallus pictured in relation to the worship of Apollo, the sun god. Indeed, it has

> exactly the appearance of one of those crosses, which were erected in church-yards and cross roads for the adoration of devout persons, when devotion was more prevalent than at present. Many of these were undoubtedly erected before the establishment of Christianity, and converted, together with their worshippers, to the true Faith.[89]

[85] Knight, *Discourse*, 116–117.
[86] Knight, *Discourse*, 116.
[87] Knight, *Discourse*, 115–116.
[88] Knight, *Discourse*, 116.
[89] Knight, *Discourse*, 116.

Then, Knight appeals to exactly the species of linguistic licence that he had critiqued in the scholarship of the Baron d'Hancarville. He concludes a fantastical feat of comparative analysis with a quote from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whose poetry of numinous luminosity Knight attributes to the Ammonian Platonics (followers of the philosophy of Ammonius Saccas, a Hellenistic Platonist): "Anciently they [crosses] represented the generative power of Light, the essence of God; *for God is Light, and never but in unapproached Light dwelt from Eternity*."[90] In connecting Milton, Greek philosophy and the material remains of a once pervasive creed, Knight proves the pagan origin of Christian ideas and artistic forms. Both church architecture and Miltonic verse are shown to have roots in the primordial worship of generative power embodied in both the sun and the phallus—all of which is disclosed by a method of evidence-building that privileges formal relationships.

V. In Pursuit of Pleasure: The Antiquary in the Popular Imagination

Perusing assertions that claimed the phallic roots of Christian iconography, opponents of the antiquarian enterprise found much to criticise. Notwithstanding the efforts of 'philosophic antiquarians' like Knight and d'Hancarville, the dilettante—like the virtuoso of the previous century—met with harsh criticism during the 1790s and early 1800s. In the repressive social and political atmosphere following the French Revolution, satirists caricatured antiquarians as libertines: those who flouted Christian doctrine in pursuit of profane pleasure.[91] With the distended readership of the *Discourse*, Knight found himself in a position to contest the accusation that his mental life was one of "lust and darkness."[92] Arguing along the same lines as

[90] Knight, *Discourse,* 16.
[91] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 129–142.
[92] Mathias*, The Pursuits of Literature,* 67–69

Winckelmann, the young scholar maintained that he was concerned only with "religious philosophy." In fact, he insisted that his plates had been copied from books published under the direction of Christian and monarchical authorities.[93] Such a move diminished the radical tone of the *Discourse*, reframing it as didactic, impartial and within the limits of modern morality. This was necessary in a cultural climate where even the noble academic ambition to better understand the ancient world and its complexities encouraged spirited derision. Novel accounts of ancient sexuality persisting into the present were nothing if not divisive. Critics also confronted the reliance on sensorial input integral to these historical reconstructions. How could one listen to an artifact as the Baron d'Hancarville had proposed to do? It is not us [scholars], but the monuments themselves that must be heard," so wrote d'Hancarville in a resolute passage, "… it is our job to listen to *them* [my emphasis], to record their discourse, to bring them closer and finally to show them in the order in which they should be seen to make intelligible to all, the spirit in which they were made and the intentions of those who made them."[94] The question which occupied sceptics of this anthropomorphising rationale was whether the appeal to a multi-sensory knowledge of the past was but an alibi for licentiousness. Satirists leapt upon these ambiguities. James Gillray (1756–1815), for one, was eager to capitalise on the passionate collecting practices of the British elite. In a coloured etching entitled *A Cognocenti contemplating ye Beauties of ye Antique* (1801), Gillray pictures Sir William Hamilton in a museum of his own design [Fig. 18]. The

[93] Knight offered the following public rebuttal to these criticisms in the preface to *The Progress of Civil Society* (1796). The 'Priapvs,' as the Vatican bronze is called in Michaelis Angeli de La Chausse's *Museum Romanum* (1690) was a sculpture that Knight championed in his defence of the *Discourse*. He noted that it had been "publicly exhibited [at the Vatican palace] for near a century, without corrupting anyone's morals or religion." If pope Benedict XIV saw nothing wrong with it, Knight implies, then surely his detractors were being overzealous. Richard Payne Knight, *The Progress of Civil Society: A Didactic Poem* (London: W. Bulmer, 1796), xxi. See Messmann, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 52–53.

[94] [my translation] Baron D'Hancarville, *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et le progrès des arts de la Grèce sur leur connexion avec les arts et la religion de plus anciens peuples connus : sur les monumens antiques de l'Inde, de la Perse, du reste de l'Asie, de l'Europe et de l'Égypte* (London: B. Appleyard, 1785), xvii.

stooped collector peers at a clutter of items that could only coalesce systematically for the man who compiled them. Yet, the eclectic assemblage invites us to attempt the quixotic exercise: Gillray's curatorial choices ridicule Hamilton's position at the bottom of a love triangle comprising his wife Emma and her lover Sir Horatio Nelson, pictured as Cleopatra and Mark Antony in pendant portraits above him.[95] Emma appears again as the object of his affection in the form of a ruined bust inscribed with the title *Lais*, the name of an infamous Greek courtesan. Her missing nose, synonymous with advancing syphilis, subtly inserts moral condemnation of her extramarital activities with Nelson.[96] Hamilton's own emblems are equally derogatory. The portrait of the emperor Claudius and the stag's horns confirm his role as the cuckolded husband, while the monstrous figure of Midas, complete with ass ears, proclaims Hamilton a fool for having fallen for young Emma's greed-driven ruse.[97]

While Gillray calls our attention to illicit amorous affairs, there is also a way in which he implicates Hamilton's dubious book designer, the alleged Baron d'Hancarville. Cleopatra, king Midas, the emperor Claudius and the zoomorphic fertility god Apis, are among the identifiable sculptures with clear cultural associations. They are juxtaposed to suggest a d'Hancarvillian theory of universal *mythos*—the idea that all myths and their expression in art shared common origins. The ironic effect arises when the viewer becomes aware that the grouping of artifacts actually undermines Dilettanti scholarship. Instead of a careful comparison that discloses secret truths, the disorder communicates the lustful materialism of the connoisseur, who, dressed in hunter's garb, fails to obtain the esoteric knowledge he seeks. Instead, he projects his own vision

[95] Ersy Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth-century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 55.
[96] Contogouris, *Emma* Hamilton, 55; David Solkin, "The Fetish over the Fireplace: Disease as genius loci in Marriage A-la-Mode," *The British Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (2000): 28–29.
[97] Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 101.

of the world onto the past. Taking Gillray's preliminary drawing [Fig. 19] for the engraving into consideration, we see that Hamilton has one book tucked into his left pocket, another held in his hand—perhaps the *Recherche*s and/or the *Discourse*. Gillray introduces the possibility that d'Hancarville's theories (as well as Knight's) will appear nonsensical under sustained critical attention. The volumes become emblems of intellectual conditioning. Read this way, Hamilton's gaze searches for proof of what one later reviewer would call d'Hancarville's "unsound, unmethodical [and] mythological fantasies."[98] The theories propounded by d'Hancarville, which united disparate artifacts into a cohesive collection, threaten to unravel under Gillray's scrutiny, leaving behind a room governed only by a desire to possess.

Hamilton's gaze, directed through his glasses, is also a caricatural trope. He looks but does not see.[99] While this sightlessness includes the adulterous activities of his wife, it cleverly reverses d'Hancarville's spatial metaphor. Gillray takes aim at the idea, articulated in the *Recherches*, that the antiquarian's occupation is to "bring them [the objects] closer." Instead of bringing things into focus, we see that Hamilton peers through the wrong side of his glasses, making them appear further away. This reversal was consistent with criticisms levelled against connoisseurs like Hamilton. Their partiality for small, seemingly irrelevant details was thought to prevent them from engaging with more important qualities like content.[100] The jest functions equally well if we consider that Hamilton, having accidentally inverted his own spectacles, promoted the use of historical lenses to avoid the very errors which he warned abounded in scholarship across disciplines, from volcanology to ancient history.

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[98] Adolf Theodor F. Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, trans. C. A. M. Fennell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), 122.
[99] Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton*, 55.
[100] Harry Mount, "The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass: Constructions of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 171–173.

Finally, Gillray makes light of the sexual proclivities of prominent Dilettanti, exposing the danger of intimate encounters with artifacts. In a drawing for an unrealised print, *The Charm of Virtu*, [Fig. 20] Gillray explores antiquarianism's autoerotic opportunities. Knight is shown in the privacy of his study, magnifying a miniature Priapic herm. Holding the statuette in his right hand, his thumb becomes the figure's erection. But this corporeal conflation is not the only transgression registered. The drawing is also attentive to the unstable boundaries between sex and scholarship.[101] As Redford has astutely observed, while Knight contemplates the sculpture as an *objet d'art*, his prominent groin is an indication that he physically responds to it.[102] The desire to know is likened to sexual desire. Moreover, like antiquarian inquiry, it can only be gratified through looking and handling. In fact, Gillray is drawing on an established tradition of ridiculing the salacious connoisseur. His image restates a critique made in 1750 by Pier Leone Ghezzi (1674–1755) in whose pen and ink drawing a compressed male figure likewise confronts a Priapic herm [Fig. 21]. Ghezzi's disproportioned devotee tucks his left hand into his waistcoat in a gesture of politeness, but his right hand is lost among the folds of his clothing, a bit too close to his genitals.[103] Both Gillray and Ghezzi emphasise the fact that encounters with classical art could and did encourage an *aisthētikē* reaction grounded in corporeal sensation and erotic stimulation.[104] Gillray thus pictures the erotic antiquarianism practised by the Society of

[101] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 131.
[102] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 131.
[103] For a discussion of Ghezzi's work see Shearer West, "The Darly Macaroni Prints and the Politics of 'Private Man,'" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25, no. 2 (2001): 170–182.
[104] The ancient Greek word *aisthētikē* designated knowledge produced through sense perception as differentiated from knowledge produced through the intellect and featured in Enlightenment discussions of aesthetics. The enlightenment philosopher Alexander Baumgarten proposed that "a sensuous cognition" could act as "an analogue to reason" and theorised a reciprocal cognitive system in which the "lower faculties" associated with sensation might work together with their loftier cerebral counterparts to produce an authentic form of knowledge not otherwise complete. Zeynep Çelik Alexander, *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern design* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 12. Alexander draws from Alexander G. Baumgarten's theories of *cognitio sensitiva* and *analogon rationis* as described in *Aesthetica* (1750) and *Metaphysik* (1739). For an analysis of Alexander Baumgarten's writings on aesthetics see Simon Grote, "Alexander Baumgarten's Intervention," in *The Emergence of Modern Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 102–146.

Dilettanti in the final decades of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, its members pursued the academic delights of the scholar, laboriously collecting and collating data, and on the other, the erotic pleasure afforded by close encounters with material culture.

VI. "A very fertile subject": Ethics, *Ethos* and Eroticism

Knight's *Discourse* models this combination of serious scholarship and bold sexuality. Disclosing the covert cosmologies of the ancients, the *Discourse* furnished its exclusive readership with a detailed account of the "true meaning" of Priapus. This "obscene Divinity of the ancients," Knight would go on to prove, was originally the supreme Deity of a religion at once pure, reasonable and sublime. Only this religion had been corrupted by the poetical mythology that succeeded it. Crucial to Knight's argument was his emphasis on ethos, the collective cultural spirit of a community group. Knight suggested that moderns were too culturally distant from the classical past to reconcile vulgar form and theological philosophy. However, since this cultural divide was a matter of nurture, not nature, one needed only to overcome cultural bias to understand ancient erotic emblems—to appreciate the metaphysical ideas they represented. If readers could "divest their minds of artificial opinions and prejudices," so explained Knight, the "lucid cultural logic" of ancient phallic worship became visible. Mustering his profound knowledge of ancient language, literature and material culture, Knight would model *how* one should look. This approach resonates with a broader Enlightenment ambition to see through the eyes of the ancients. Edward Gibbon's *An Essay on the Study of Literature* (1761) similarly articulates the enticing possibility of transforming one's perspective through learning. Gibbon lamented that moderns, born under another sky and in another age, could not hope to appreciate ancient art or literature without "[a]n acquaintance with antiquity… [and] a certain turn of mind, which is generally the result of it; a sentiment not only making

things known, but familiarizing them to our ideas, and inducing us to regard them with the eyes of the ancients."[105] But how did this relate to what would come to be called Art History? Once again, we must turn to Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764). The *History of the Art of Antiquity* [as it was translated into English] introduced a macrocosmic approach to the interpretation of art. Winckelmann theorised a relationship between art and the external forces that shaped it: climate, constitution and government, habits of thinking, respect for the artist and liberal attitudes toward sexuality being among the most important. Knight can be seen as moving in Winckelmann's footsteps. The question as to *why* sexual forms were adopted as emblems is a central concern of the *Discourse*, which, following Winckelmann, would chart a robust causal relationship between ethics, ethos and eroticism.

For Knight, artistic achievement depended on cultural context. In particular, Winckelmann's proposition that the perfect climate for art was "both politically free and freely sensual," as Alex Potts has summarised it, resonated with the young scholar.[106] So, too, did he share Winckelmann's admiration for the age of classical Greece, a superlative historical moment in the progress of civilisation when men were polished but still natural.[107] Working within the same framework of rise and decline, Knight traced a correlation between inner life and plastic expression.[108] In his 1794 poem *The Landscape*, he advanced a small brass jug [Fig. 22], "of that plain and cheap kind, which could only have been meant for the common use of the common

[105] Edward Gibbon, *An Essay on the Study of Literature* (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1764), 25–26.
[106] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 182.
[107] Knight argues the following in *The Landscape*: "The state of society in Greece was such that it afforded the artist the advantages of savage, joined to those of civilized life." Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape, A Didactic Poem. In Three Books* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer, 1794), 4.
[108] Andrew Ballantyne, A*rchitecture, Landscape and Liberty: Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43–4.

people," to demonstrate that all material culture—high and low—was a product of ethos.[109] In ancient Greece, imagination and reason coalesced to produce a "uniform principle of grace and elegance which prevailed in all the works of Greece and her colonies."[110] The jug fell under this rubric because, as Knight continues in verse, grace and elegance were true of "lib'ral or mechanic art," and "every work of labour or of thought."[111] While he naturally refrains from extending his argument to erotic images, being that his poem was intended for a broader audience than the Society of Dilettanti, it can nonetheless help us to understand his earlier *Discourse*. Knight saw ancient societies as existing in a natural state, one which saw no impurity in the "gratification of natural appetites." It was this "primitive" mentality, unmarred by modern prejudices against the body, that saw the phallus become a logical attribute for divine creativity. Contriving "to express abstract ideas by objects of sight," so Knight put it, the ancient makers of phallic artifacts had

> naturally selected those objects whose characteristic properties seemed to have the greatest analogy with the divine attributes which they wished to represent. In an age, therefore, when no prejudices of artificial decency existed, what more just and natural image could they find, by which to express their idea of the beneficent power of the great Creator, than that organ which endowed them with the power of creation?[112]

As in the law-bound phenomena of science, the ancient Greeks moved from concept to material symbol inexorably. Via "natural" analogy, the phallus was chosen as an appropriate and rational emblem for a "complicated System of Philosophical Religion."[113] It was false decorum that

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[109] Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape: A Didactic Poem*, 38.
[110] Knight, *The Landscape*, 38.
[111] Knight, *The Landscape*, 39.
[112] Knight, *Discourse*, 28.
[113] Knight explains this in detail. "Hieroglyphical Writing," he writes, "which has been supposed peculiar to the Ægyptians was equally practiced by the Greeks, whose Works of Art are a Sort of written Characters representing Ideas instead of Sounds. As many Ideas, even of the most complete, were necessarily to be represented in order to preserve by allegorical forms, a complicated System of philosophical Religion. I think you will find that the different Subjects represent different parts of it. These are undoubtedly Repetitions, as the same Mode of Symbolical Writing was not employed in every Country or City. Eleusis, Somathrace & Hierapolis had probably all different

clouded vision and prevented moderns from understanding.[114] Through Winckelmann and others, readers were accustomed to negotiating between the licit and illicit pleasures that art could offer, but the overwhelming material evidence of ancient phallic worship remained antithetical to modern sensibilities. Thus, the first aim of the *Discourse* was to mitigate cultural bias against erotic imagery.[115] The investigator's bias could only be overcome by recognising that art and culture obeyed laws as inviolable as those of the physical universe envisioned by Isaac Newton. "*In morals, as well as physics,*" Knight intones, "*there is no effect without an adequate cause*."[116] Bound by fixed causes, art had to be apprehended through an historical lens, one which accounted for the cultural relativity of obscenity. Knight makes this point with a sensational example of interspecific sex at Mendes in ancient Egypt, where "a living Goat was kept as the image of generative power."[117] There, women "had the honour of being publickly enjoyed by him," an act that signalled communication with the divine.[118] "However shocking to modern manners and opinions," Knight he assures his reader that the ancient Egyptians "had no such horror of it… it was one of the sacraments of that ancient Church, and was, without doubt, beheld with that pious awe and reverence with which devout persons always contemplate the mysteries of their faith, whatever they happen to be."[119] Evidently, Knight is being cheeky. As

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Modes of conveying their doctrines, otherwise a Person who had been initiated in one would have been so in all which we know was not the case – luckily for your Patience I am got to the End of my Paper otherwise I know not when I should end my Letter upon this very fertile subject." Letter from Richard Payne Knight, dated December 1787 in Downton, to Charles Townley; British Museum, TY7/2101.

[114] Knight was not alone in arguing that the ancients had not chosen unreasonable, but rather 'philosophical' emblems. The Italian antiquarian Andrea de Jiro, for example, argued for similarities between ancient and modern gestures that "even the apparently disreputable aspects of the very interesting customs of our country… are, in reality, full of philosophy, and could be said to be Roman, Greek, Natural." Andrea de Jorio, *Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity*, trans. Adam Kendon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 6. Francis Haskell discusses these aspects of de Jorio's project in greater detail. See Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 155–158.

[115] Smiles, *Eye Witness*, 1–13.

[116] Knight, *Discourse,* 25. This is effectively Knight's articulation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

[117] Knight, *Discourse*, 55.

[118] Knight, *Discourse*, 55.

[119] Knight, *Discourse*, 55.

Bruce Redford has shown of the longer passage which describes the "ritual bestiality practiced in Egypt," Knight is deliberate in his word choices, which bear "the hallmarks of libertine parody in the manner of Wilkes's *Essay* [*on Woman*]."[120] Knight relishes his own chance to mock orthodox religion using an established libertine vernacular.[121] In fact, Wilkes's lewd poem and the *Discourse* share further common ground: the Greek epithet ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ or "*The Saviour of the World*" graces both the frontispiece to Wilkes's poem and the headpiece to Sir William Hamilton's letter as published in the *Discourse* [Fig. 9]. In the former, it appears below an erect penis measuring a mighty ten inches. In the latter, it features on the base of a bronze statuette in the Vatican collection. One is tempted to read the avian chimera as a Wilkean pun on the dual signification of the word "cock," for it comprises a male torso crowned with the head of a rooster whose beak has been replaced with male genitalia. Knight affirms solemnly (and, we can imagine, facetiously) that ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ was "a title always venerable, under whatever image it be represented."[122] Emblem of the generative power of Eros (who is also Osiris, Mithras and Bacchus), so Knight explains, the composite statuette depicted not only his divine attribute but also the "mode and purpose of its operation," that is, "the incarnation of the Deity, and the communication of his creative spirit to man."[123] Based on this reading, the sculpture signified the same divine 'communion' as the ceremony at Mendes.[124] The epithet was evidently meaningful in libertine circles since it also opens a letter to Charles Townley written by Sir Joseph Banks: "My Dear Sir / Soter Cosmas or ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ."[125] Its currency suggests something akin to

[120] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 121–122.
[121] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 121–122. For more on the libertine culture of the early Society of Dilettanti see Kelly, "Riots, Revelries, and Rumor," 759–795.
[122] Knight, *Discourse*, 54.
[123] Knight, *Discourse*, 54.
[124] Knight, *Discourse*, 55.
[125] Banks wrote to Townley with the following declaration "My Dear Sir / Soter Cosmas or ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ which I write in Greek characters to prove as an Irishman would do that I cannot write Greek." Letter from Sir Joseph Banks, dated Dec. 13th, Soho Square, to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum TY 7/1838.

a shibboleth. But more than proving their authors' membership in a libertine community, these examples are important insofar as they restate one of the central arguments in the book: that what *appears* obscene to modern audiences was not so in the ancient world. Here, we must take Knight seriously.

Knight did not confine this reasoning to the culture he admired most but extended it to those as distant as ancient India and Japan. In fact, the image most likely to offend an unsuspecting viewer (someone outside of the Society of Dilettanti who had procured an illicit volume) depicted an architectural fragment from a medieval Hindu temple. Returning to his master trope of misleading appearances, Knight underlined how such an artifact demanded cognitive flexibility. The reciprocal act of oral sex was not an obscene gesture, as one might jump to conclude, but an emblem of invigoration and "the active and passive powers of procreation."[126] Resisting the impulse to evaluate the sculptural group through modern sensibilities, Knight's reader was invited to consult a "moral and metaphysical" text—the *Bhagavad Gītā* (c. 1st or 2nd century CE). This sacred Hindu scripture containing Upanishadic and Yogic philosophy had been translated into English in 1785, just as Knight was preparing to publish the *Discourse*. It was considered to be a crucial innovation in Indological studies. Assisted by pundit Kasinatha Bhattacharya, the avid Orientalist Charles Wilkins worked directly from classical Sanskrit, making it the first translation of its kind.[127] Esteemed among the Brahmans with whom he worked, Wilkins followed their advice in choosing the *Bhagavad Gītā* (a smaller part of the Mahabharata), which he thought "contain[ed] all the grand mysteries of

[126] Knight, *Discourse*, 81.
[127] Richard H. Davis, "Wilkins, Kasinatha, Hastings, and the First English 'Bhagavad Gītā,'" *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 19, no. 1/2 (2015): 39–57.

their religion."[128] Knight, therefore, had an exceptional primary source from which to draw out the religious significance of the sexual acts found on Hindu temple sculpture. When read in conjunction with the arguments presented in the *Discourse*, the viewer was to see this eroticism differently—as an expression of an ancient ethos which embraced natural sexual desire.

Art historian Andrei Pop has argued that this approach to antiquities promoted a form of cultural relativism.[129] Knight explained that although the true emblematical significance of the phallus might be surprising, "it will appear just and reasonable to those who consider manners and customs as relative to the natural causes which produced them, rather than to artificial opinions and prejudices of any particular age or country."[130] This encouraged the reader/viewer to resist bias formed through modern experience alone. The paratext that accompanied the additional engraving—a quotation adapted from Horace's *Epistles* in the original Latin—supports the idea that Knight intended the image as a prompt for a cognitive exercise. Printed below, the text reads: "Et Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non?" (What is beautiful? What is base? What is useful? What is not?). Knight chooses the passage in which Horace encourages his friend Lollius Maximus, a young man with political aspirations, to read Homer instead of the Stoic philosophers for a moral paradigm. In Horace, the phrasing is less

[128] Richard A. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 79. Charles Wilkins, *The Bhăgvăt-gēētā, or dialogues of Krĕĕshnă and Ărjŏŏn; in eighteen lectures; with notes* (London: C. Nourse, 1785), 23.
[129] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 19–69.
[130] Knight, *Discourse*, 28. Knight leverages his argument on the principles of connoisseurship outlined in Jonathan Richardson's essay *The Science of a Connoisseur* (1719). According to Richardson, to be a connoisseur was to be as "free from all kinds of prejudice as possible." Jonathan Richardson, "The Science of a Connoisseur," *The Works of Jonathan Richardson* (Strawberry Hill, 1792), 199. Ann Bermingham, "Elegant Females and gentleman connoisseurs. The commerce in culture and self-image in eighteenth-century England*," Consumption of Culture*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (New York: Routledge, 1995), 504. These principles are discussed by Ann Bermingham who argues that the connoisseur was differentiated from the self-interested virtuoso because he was thought to employ an impartial gaze. Bermingham calls our attention to the ways in which vision and cognition were connected through her discussion of Richardson and his use of the term "connoissence" which distinguishes between seeing and knowing.

equivocal. “While you declaim at Rome, Lollius Maximus, I’ve been at Praeneste rereading the author who wrote about the Trojan War, who tells us what is fine, what is base, what is useful or not, more clearly and better than Chrysippus and Crantor do.”[131] Knight, however, reframes the original text as a question, a revision that changes the meaning of the image above it.[132] Homer no longer tells us what is fine or what is base, but rather Knight’s readers are called upon to think for themselves.[133] Using their own faculties and discretion, readers are also compelled to see reason embodied in erotic images—that is, as natural emblems chosen as analogies for the abstract ideas they express. Ensuring that the reader reflects before passing judgment, Knight reinforces Horace’s emphasis on the act of reading itself. As one scholar has noted, the *Epistles* prove that “it is not just what he reads, but how he reads, that matters.”[134] Lollius Maximus is encouraged to test different approaches to find a suitable method for extracting moral lessons from Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Knight borrows from Horace to teach the reader about the process of interpretation—the methods used to locate truth. Positioned above a question, the energetic sexual antics pictured in the engraving are nonetheless intended to provoke a moment of contemplation, one that parallels the “pensive withdrawal” from public life that Horace pursues in his retirement. In the *Discourse,* as in the *Epistles,* art initiates philosophy.

But what does it mean when the work of art in question is *so* explicitly sexual? Although the additional plate had a modest print run, I argue that it functioned as a clever stratagem to

[131] Quoted in Catherine Keane, “Lessons in Reading: Horace on Homer at “Epistles” 1.2.1-31,” *The Classical World* 104, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 429.
[132] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 198.
[133] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 198. Pop argues that not only are reader/viewers forced to confront the prejudicial basis of their own thinking, but the plate offered an alternative model for moral and aesthetic virtue. Sarah Monks similarly argues that the juxtaposition of image and text suggests Knight’s ability (and perhaps desire) to transcend his own culture’s “moral limits.” Sarah Monks, “Making Love: Thomas Banks’ Camadeva and the Discourses of British India c. 1790,” *Visual Culture in Britain* 11, no. 2 (July 2010): 209.
[134] Keane, “Lessons in Reading,” 427.

convince readers of their own predispositions vis-à-vis their visual experience. This invitation is also manifested in the moral ambiguity of the language that Knight uses. Pop has noted that it models "a changed attitude toward images and practices: one is not meant to *do* or *don't* without thinking, but to consider, and in turn to experiment with ways of being in the world, spiritual and social."[135] This observation points us to what Knight borrows as much from Horace as from natural philosophy: that "*there is no effect without an adequate cause*" and that learning necessitates reflection and experimentation. Insofar as one is expected to be thoughtfully engaged, the ethical insights found in erotic art needed to be *activated* through new kinds of engagements with the world.

We might look for the origin of this idea in *Expedition into Sicily*, a book that Knight began writing while touring the island in the late 1770s. The travelogue borrows from Winckelmann to underline the importance of ethos for cultural development. Although the publication did not materialise in his lifetime, *Expedition into Sicily* allowed Knight to establish an opposition between ancient serenity and modern suffering.[136] Knight explained the "backward" state of Sicilian culture using regional histories, a method developed from an expanding awareness that taste itself was local.[137] Here, too, the text confirmed that art flourishes or languishes depending on external social and political circumstances.[138] The impoverished state of Sicilian taste was the result of corruptions in language, economic pressure from Spain and

[135] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 196.
[136] Bruce Redford highlights this comparative aspect in the text. See Redford, *Dilettanti*, 83–96.
[137] Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton, "Introduction," *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture: Johann Joachim Winckelmann* (La Salle: Open Court, 1987), xvii. For a discussion of Knight's theory of taste see Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*, 159.
[138] Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*, 44.

Christian priestcraft.[139] Knight puts the ecclesiastical imperative to maintain the ignorance of the populace in no uncertain terms:

> Their [the Ecclesiastiks] influence is so great, that all inquiry or improvement of every kind it checked. Men… are naturally very jealous of every thing, that can tend to dissipate the cloud of darkness, which protects them. Weak as human reason is, it would be sufficient in its lowest state to penetrate the thin veil of Priestcraft, if People only dared to think; but the greatest Part of Mankind believe because they have never had the Courage to ask their own understandings, whether they believe or not.[140]

The lament "if People only dared to think" resonates keenly with Immanuel Kant's famous call to reason.[141] Knight follows the Enlightenment philosopher's argument closely. Kant claimed that people should find the courage to "ask their own understanding," and borrowed the maxim *Sapere aude* [Dare to Know] from Horace. That *Sapere aude* first appeared in the *Epistles* later quoted by Knight is worth stressing.[142] Mediated through Kant, it signals the second ethical insight borrowed from the ancient Roman poet that we find in the antiquarian's early oeuvre. The double citation invokes the power of both Enlightenment and ancient philosophy.[143] Turning to the ancient, the narrative context for this moral describes the ignorance of a farmer who waits at the edge of a river, desiring to cross. The farmer is foolish because he waits in vain for the water to stop flowing. Thus proceeds Horace's dictum: *Dimidium facti, qui coepit, habet; sapere aude, incipe.* (He who has begun is half done; dare to know; begin!). Horace propounds action as a virtue. But what kind of action does Horace have in mind? The moral of the story is that the farmer, ignorant and inert, puts off the moment for living well. With these connections in mind,

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[139] In Knight's Sicilian Journal, freedom is argued to be a prerequisite for political, economic and cultural greatness. See Alessandra Ponte, "Architecture and Phallocentrism in Richard Payne Knight's Theory," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 276.
[140] Richard Payne Knight, *Expedition into Sicily*, ed. Claudia Stumpf (London: British Museum Publications, 1986), 61.
[141] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment," in *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century*, trans. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58.
[142] For how Kant modifies the meaning of sapere aude see John T. Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 102.
[143] Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh*, 100.

we might reconsider the kind of action Knight hopes to inspire with the *Discourse*. If the erotic Indian fragment and the excerpt of Horatian wisdom over which it presides call upon the reader/viewer to rethink the relationship between ethos and eroticism as I have argued, it likewise calls attention to the original ethical problem found in ancient Greek philosophy: what constitutes the good life?

Knight's own manner of living provides unique insight into this problem. As Andrew Ballantyne has shown, Knight "immersed himself ever more completely in pagan culture and aestheticised his whole manner of living, trying to reclaim the grace and freedom of a savage society without losing touch with the benefits of civilisation."[144] This radical, perhaps even Winckelmannian approach to philhellenism was noted by his contemporaries. In 1839, Sir William Hamilton's nephew Charles Greville described Knight as an Epicurean philosopher.[145] This designation is appropriate if one considers his religious scepticism and commitment to empiricism. Knight adhered to an Epicurean understanding of matter, motion and the atom, one which undermined Christian doctrine.[146] If atoms randomly dispersed and recombined after death as Epicurius theorised, there could be no immortal life in heaven or hell. It was a cosmology that could not but evoke that other popular extract of Horatian counsel: *Carpe diem*! More importantly for our purposes, however, was that taking full advantage of one's life as Epicurean philosophy dictated, required a specific methodology: knowledge of the world had to be acquired through corporeal experience. Our "sensory apparatus" acted as a barometer for good and evil; that which made us feel good should be pursued and that which caused pain, avoided. Of course, some pleasures turned out to be ruses, and excess was equally problematic since fulfilling desires

[144] Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*, 43.
[145] For more on Knight's adherence to Epicurean morals see Andrew Ballantyne, "Specimens of Antient Sculpture: Imperialism and the Decline of Art," *Art History* 25, no. 4 (2002): 552.
[146] Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*, 65–67.

which led to future troubles were not conducive to happiness overall—the essential goal of an Epicurean life. Andrew Ballantyne has argued that Knight modelled Epicureanism as "a symptom of his philhellenism," advocating for the moderate gratification of desire.[147] This was consistent with the Epicurean ideal of the good life. One should not indulge in pure hedonism.[148] Epicureanism promoted pleasure, but its ethics required actions to proceed from reason and its practice relied on sense perception to differentiate between natural desires and artificial wants.[149] Predictably, Epicurean philosophy became relevant to discussions of human sexuality. Knight, we will recall, argued that "there is naturally no impurity or licentiousness in the moderate and regular gratification of any natural appetite; the turpitude consisting wholly in the excess of perversion."[150] The emphasis Knight places on the natural calls the reader's attention to the difference between innate desire and artificial propriety. This empiricist discourse had been reconfigured during the Enlightenment with thinkers like Diderot and the Marquis de Sade, both of whom connected cognition to experiential sense perception.[151] The philosophes subscribed to the notion that "ideas were true only if they derive[d] from real sensation," that is, were mediated through corporeal experience.[152] Scholars have pointed to the ethical ramifications of this turn toward corporeal knowing which embraced experimentation through the body but likewise necessitated that individuals "think and act in obedience to their natures."[153] What was within the bounds of human nature and how these bounds were knowable was a question that occupied many Enlightenment minds. Knight reasoned that sexuality was shameful only because of

[147] Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*, 23–27.
[148] Raphael Woolf, "Epicurus and the Epicureans on Ethics," *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*, ed. Christopher Bobonich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 165.
[149] Woolf, "Epicurus and the Epicureans on Ethics," 169.
[150] Knight, *Discourse*, 28.
[151] Caroline Warman, *Sade: from materialism to pornography* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), 21.
[152] Warman, *Sade: from materialism to pornography*, 21.
[153] Alan Corkhill, "Kant, Sade and the Libertine Enlightenment," in *Libertine Enlightenment*, ed. Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 63.

"acquired habit, not from nature."[154] While distant from the position of the Marquis de Sade, whose libertine rhetoric made the indulgence of sexual desire an ethical imperative, Knight elsewhere hints that repressed societies will not live up to the cultural achievements of the ancient Greeks. In Winckelmannian fashion, his narrative begins with ancient art but ultimately confronts modernity. Whether Knight believed "phallacism capable of liberating modern oppressed man from the sombre gloom of an incrementally industrial milieu," as G.S. Rousseau poetically framed his ambition remains to be resolved. However, the idea that his contemporaries needed to embrace the true, virile nature of the classical past for the betterment of the future is implicit in his writing.[155]

Devotions paid to Priapus may have been a corruption of an ancient philosophical system, but sexuality had always been a natural, lived experience. It is for this reason that the *Discourse* may be called libertine. It is libertine in a conventional sense—affiliated with anticlerical freethinking—but also libertine in its desire to institute what the authors of *Libertine Enlightenment* have described as "the vernacular, dissident freedoms of everyday life."[156] The *Discourse* formed part of a broader culture of "defiance and ethical experimentalism," one which used material culture sourced from across the globe to question (and reverse) modern, puritan attitudes toward sex.[157] In the political atmosphere following the French Revolution, it seemed improbable that a return to the "natural and philosophical" good life of the ancients was

[154] Knight, *Discourse*, 28.
[155] Rousseau, "The Sorrows of Priapus," 120. Ballantyne, "Specimens of Antient Sculpture," 552–553. Ballantyne argues that Knight subscribed to Winckelmann's concept of cultural totality and believed that liberty would improve cultural and social life. G. S. Rousseau, "The Sorrows of Priapus," *Perilous Enlightenment pre- and post-modern discourses: sexual, historical* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 82.
[156] Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell, "Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century," in *Libertine Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.
[157] Cryle and O'Connell, "Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century," 4.

attainable, but the author had at least provided his exclusive readership with the means to understand it.

VII. Erotic Indian Art and The Economy of Knowledge

The libertine blasphemy alleged by critics like Mathias: that was one thing. But the incorporation of "eastern" eroticism into the fabric of modern life via the conduit of Mediterranean antiquities as charged by Nares and Beloe in the pages of *British Critic*: that was something else entirely. Indisputably, the most controversial aspect of the *Discourse* was its engagement with and reproduction of the "curious Oriental fragment" depicting figures in the act of reciprocal oral sex discussed above. "Lately brought from the sacred Caverns of ELEPHANTA, near BOMBAY," as Knight describes this eleventh-century, sandstone sculptural group, it arrived in Britain on the Cumberland man-of-war in 1784 via captain William Allen Esq. [Fig. 6].[158] Consigned to auction, Charles Townley purchased the sculpture in 1785.[159] It was a rare find in a London saleroom, being heavy and therefore more difficult to transport than

[158] Knight, *Discourse*, 80. The engraving of the Elephanta fragment in the *Discourse* is accompanied by the following caption: "This fragment … was brought to England in the Year 1784 by William Allen Esqr. Captain of his Majesty's Ship the Cumberland." Max Bryant suggests that the object was brought by sea and purchased "by Townley's friend Thomas Astle and put on display at the Society of Antiquaries before joining the Townley collection at Park Street." Max Bryant, *The Museum by the Park: 14 Queen Anne's Gate from Charles Townley to Axel Johnson* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2017), 73. Hermione de Almeida and Geroge Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance: British romantic art and the prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 52. De Almeida and Gilpin offer this account: "In 1784 Captain Alexander Allan, a military artist and cartographer, and commander of the man-of-war Cumberland, who had helped provide naval support to Hector Munro and General Matthews in the second Mysore war against Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, brought back on his ship several sculptural pieces from Elephanta as well as an entire Hindu temple from the Rohilla district in northeast India. Charles Townley, a wealthy antiquarian and art patron who collected Greek and Roman sculpture and erotic pieces, purchased several of the Elephanta pieces as well as the Rohilla temple from Allan for his personal museum." However, it was likely not Alexander Allan, but William Allen, captain and commanding officer of the Cumberland from 1784. I thank Andrei Pop for pointing me toward Allen's naval records.

[159] Max Bryant notes that some of Townley's Indian works were on display in his drawing room by 1794. This Elephanta fragment, however, was likely only accessible to guests by personal invitation. Bryant, *The Museum by the Park*, 73. We know that the sculpture was in Townley's collection by June 18th, 1785, from a note in a letter from Knight to Banks. "The Specimen of Elephanta is now in Townley's Collection." See Letter from Richard Payne Knight, 18 June 1785, Whitehall to Sir Joseph Banks. Papers of Sir Joseph Banks, 1745–1923 (bulk 1745–1820), National Library of Australia. MS 9, 102b, http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-222969158.

works in other media.[160] Townley would install it in his residence on Park Street, where a select few visitors were invited to admire it alongside his vast collection of classical sculpture. The sandstone fragment is carved in high relief and contains two offsets, indicating that it once formed the corner of intersecting walls. Although its surface is damaged and parts of the sculpted scene are now lost, important details remain visible including the elaborate jewellery decorating all six members of the entourage. Three male figures are discernable: their beards, headwraps, auspicious threads and *rudrākṣa* (seed rosaries) indicate their special status as ācāryas, devotees of Śiva and teachers of Vedic lore with specialised philosophical knowledge. The first figural group contains an ācārya performing cunnilingus on an inverted female figure whose impressive contortions seem to surpass the limits of human flexibility. Although the lower extremities of her sexual partner are missing, her facial expression suggests an act of fellatio. The second group contains a female figure standing between two ācāryas with one hand wrapped around the waist of her companion (at right) to grasp an immense phallus embedded between her spherical breasts. The face of the remaining female figure, located on the left side of the fragment is unintelligible, but her accessories remain intact [Fig. 23].

Whether South Asian artifacts reached British soil through opportunistic colonial agents like Allen or were circulated only in print, antiquarians had to contend with a rapidly expanding corpus of material evidence. This section highlights the crucial roles of Knight, the Baron d'Hancarville and other comparative mythographers in extending conversations concerning the ancients to cultures outside of Europe. We will see how Knight—modelling the "Orientalist" scholars from whom he borrowed—saw ancient India as a resource to be mined for producing

[160] Anne-Julie Etter, "Collecting Statues in India and Transferring Them to Britain, or the Intertwined Lives of Indian Objects and Colonial Administrators (Late Eighteenth Century to Early Nineteenth Century)," in *Eastern Resonances in Early Modern England Receptions and Transformations from the Renaissance to the Romantic Period, edited by Claire Gallian and Ladan Niayesh* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan: 2019), 186.

knowledge about the ancient past.[161] Building on key insights of the historiography of the British empire, I read the *Discourse* as an intellectual conquest that coincided with the material ambitions of British colonialism in the late eighteenth century.[162] It discloses how expansionist policies operated, from sourcing at the imperial periphery to metropolitan scholarship and back again.

Interpreting the Elephanta fragment trafficked via Allen, the *Discourse* recast the sculptural group as an episode in the progression of art from East to West, from ancient emblem to modern figuration. But further reinscribing the original artifact, Knight's engraver enacted a material conversion from stone to print. As noted earlier, the artifact featured in the *Discourse* twice. The first engraving to appear in the book illustrated only a part of the larger composition [Fig. 11]. Plate X contained a detail of the sculpted pair at left, presented alongside a Parian medal and other coins from ancient Greece. Seen in dialogue with classical material culture, the plate suggests that erotic emblems were themselves promiscuous, and could be found in such disparate places as archaic Greece, ancient India and modern Abruzzo. The illustrative juxtaposition likewise supported a comparative logic that the text expanded and mobilised theoretically.[163]

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[161] Thomas R. Trautmann, "Does India Have History? Does History Have India?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 1 (2012): 174–205.

[162] Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham, eds., *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007). Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy, eds., *Empires of Vision: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). P. J. Marshall, "Taming the Exotic: The British in India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 46–65. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Empire and Objecthood," in *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Sarah Monks, "Making Love: Thomas Banks' Camadeva and the Discourses of British India c. 1790," *Visual Culture in Britain* 11, no. 2 (2010): 195-218. Holly Shaffer, "'Take All of Them': Eclecticism and the Arts of the Pune Court in India, 1760–1800," *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 2 (2018): 61–93.

[163] The comparative impulse instigated by 'exotic' material culture was widespread. See Marshall, "Taming the Exotic," 46–65. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1977]), 47–48.

The findspot of the temple fragment was assumed to be the sixth-century rock-cut cave temple on Elephanta island (Gharapuri) near Mumbai.[164] The temple was well known in the eighteenth century for its elaborate sculptural program depicting scenes from the life of Śiva to whom it was dedicated.[165] It was of particular interest to European artists who were drawn to its sublime magnitude and radical otherness. The artist and writer for the British East India Company James Forbes visited the temple in 1774 alongside the Scottish portraitist James Wales. Forbes admits to being as humbled as surprised in his discovery of such an immense cavern constructed at a time when medieval Europeans were still living "in ignorance and barbarism."[166] The caves themselves were an innovation when constructed. Open on three sides, the site combined carving techniques used in freestanding sculpture with those of rock-cut architecture to create an imposing and unearthly interior atmosphere.[167] It remains uncertain whether Townley's artifact came from the cave temple on the island or from one of the numerous rock-cut temples in the region of Mahārāstra.[168] Knight, however, found no reason to doubt Allen's archaeological fieldwork. He proceeds with his analysis of the context in which the

[164] Walter Spink dates the temple to the mid-sixth century, a date still widely accepted. Walter M. Spink, *Ajanta to Ellora* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1967).
[165] Descriptions of the cave temple on the island of Elephanta were first recorded by European travellers in the sixteenth century and new ones continued to appear throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, 31–48.
[166] De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 48.
[167] Carmel Berkson, "The Historical Context and Evolution of Style at Elephanta," in *Elephanta: The Cave of Shiva* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 6.
[168] De Almeida and Gilpin provide the most compelling argument for maintaining the cave-temple findspot. Their discussion proceeds from first-hand accounts of eighteenth-century visitors to the temple who observed a plethora of erotic imagery. The authors stress that "All of the accounts of Elephanta available popularly in the 1780s made specific reference to the erotic and sexual symbolism of its sculptures." De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 49–52. Another potential link between the fragment and the cave temple is offered by Susan L. Huntington who notes that a niche in the Śiva cave temple depicts Lakulīśa, a figure associated with the Pāśupata Śaivites, one of the sects that Thomas E. Donaldson discusses in relation to erotic imagery on Orissan temples. Susan L. Huntington "Hindu Rock-Cut Architecture of the Deccan" in *The Art of Ancient India, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985), 279. See also Charles D. Collins, "Elephanta and the Ritual of the Lakulīśa-Pāśupatas," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no. 4 (1982): 605–617 for a discussion of the sculptural program at Elephanta and its relationship to Lakulīśa-Pāśupata texts.

fragment was purportedly found. “Now neglected,” he claims, the caves that sourced the erotic group resemble

> others of the same kind [which] are still used as places of worship by the Hindoos, who can give no account of the antiquity of them, which must necessarily be very remote, for the Hindoos are a very ancient people; and yet the sculptures represent a race of men very unlike them, or any of the present inhabitants of INDIA.[169]

Evoking his earlier appraisal of Sicilians, Knight stresses a discord between modern Indians and the glorious ancient heritage surrounding them. That familiar trope of Orientalist scholarship is deployed here to undermine indigenous claims to the ownership of the site. Despite the “immense labour and difficulty” required to construct these ancient places of worship, “hewn in the solid rock,” Hindu cave temples were commonly described as monuments without histories.[170] Arguing that modern Hindus were neither the racial nor the cultural heirs to the temple, the *Discourse* warranted a British intervention: an obligation to collect and restore the material culture and lost knowledge of ancient India.[171] Antiquarians typically based such assertions less on detailed research than on the testimony of those charged with disciplining the Indian population: military commanders, surgeons and other agents of the East India Company. Knight, for example, draws on the accounts of William Pyke and William Hunter, the former an EIC military cartographer who first drew and measured the temple in 1712 and the latter a surgeon in the EIC, avid Orientalist and Secretary to the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Pyke’s

[169] Knight, *Discourse*, 80–81.
[170] Knight, *Discourse*, 80. Trautmann, “Does India Have History?” 189. Trautmann considers the origins of the idea, perpetuated in British Orientalist scholarship, that India “had no historical consciousness.” See also Rama Mantena, “The Question of History in Precolonial India,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007): 396–408.
[171] This preservationist impulse became a directive in the late nineteenth century. In his essay “Census, Map, Museum,” Benedict Anderson quotes Lord Curzon, viceroy of India between 1899 and 1905, to highlight the colonial ideology that informed British archeology in India. Instead of allowing monuments to “crumble into ruin,” Lord Curzon maintained, “It is… equally our duty [that of British colonial officials] to dig and discover, to classify, reproduce and describe, to copy and decipher, and to cherish and conserve.” See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016 [1991]), 179–181.

findings were first presented to the Society of Antiquaries in 1780 by Alexander Dalrymple, and in 1785, his notes and drawings were published in the Society of Antiquaries' journal *Archaeologia* alongside Hunter's observations.[172] However, as one scholar points out, these early English reports were characterised less by deliberate study than by "incidental observation."[173] The EIC employees who visited the temple had neither the time nor the resources to dedicate themselves to archeological investigations. Thus, Knight supplemented his English sources with the more complex and detailed accounts of continental European travellers. He borrows principally from *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine depuis 1774 jusqu'en 1781* (1782) by the naturalist and colonial administrator Pierre Sonnerat and *Voyage en Arabie & en D'autres Pays Circonvoisins*) (1776–1780) (originally published in German as *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern* (1774) by the Danish explorer Carsten Neibuhr. These accounts were especially compelling for Knight since they express a keen interest in Indian religion. Lamenting the insularity of Brahmans, Neibuhr pressed Indian merchants for insight into Hinduism. He learned that "only the enlightened among them worship as the Creator and Preserver of all things, one omnipotent, omnipresent and invisible Being, but that the Brahmins invented subordinate deities, to which they gave certain forms and functions, because the lesser people were not inclined toward abstract ideas."[174] This fit well with the broader

[172] See Alexander Dalrymple, "Account of a curious Pagoda near Bombay, drawn up by Captain Pyke, who was afterwards Governor of St. Helena. It is dated from on board the Stringier East-Indiaman in Bombay Harbour 1712, and is illustrated with drawings. This extract was made from the Captain's journal in possession of the 'honourable the East-India Company, By Alexander Dalrymple, Esq. F. R. and A. S. and communicated to the Society, Feb. 10, 1780," *Archaeologia*, 7 (1785): 323–332. And, from the same volume: William Hunter, "An Account of some artificial Caverns in the Neighborhood of Bombay," *Archeologia, Or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity Archaeologia*, 7 (1785): 286–302.

[173] C J Wright, "An Eastern Perspective: The Society of Antiquaries and Indian Antiquities in the 1780s," *The Antiquaries Journal*, 91 (2011): 207.

[174] [my translation] « que les plus eclairés d'entre eux, n'adorent, comme le Créateur et Conservateur de toutes Choses, qu'un Être tout-puissant, présent par tour et invisible, mais que les Bramâns ont inventé des Divinités subalternes auxquelles ils donnent certaines formes et certaines Occupations, seulement à cause du petit peuple qui n'est pas susceptible de ces Idées abstractes. » Carsten Neibuhr, *Voyage en Arabie & en d'autres pays circonvoisins, par C. Niebuhr* (Amsterdam: S. J. Baalde, 1780), 2:17.

polemic offered in the *Discourse*. Neibuhr's findings allowed Knight to follow instances of duplicitous priests and double doctrine into India. As Knight explains, the "original principles of [Hindu] Theology" have, like those of ancient Greece and Egypt, been "buried […] under a mass of poetical Mythology."[175] Knight touts his antiquarian knowhow as the tool needed to unearth them. Of course, the major disadvantage of his armchair antiquarianism was that he could only work with the information available to him, mediated through ancient authorities, EIC officials and travellers like Neibuhr and Sonnerat.

Colonial administrators with scholarly ambitions were better positioned to engage in the kind of research that Knight and d'Hancarville were pursuing in Britain. In fact, comparative mythology involving Eastern traditions flourished in late eighteenth-century India. The arrival of polymath and jurist Sir William Jones in Calcutta in 1783 and his founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 marked the beginning of sustained British scholarship on India and its past.[176] Jones's essay "On the gods of Greece, Italy, and India," compiled in 1784, read to the Asiatic Society in 1785 and published in *Asiatick Researches* in 1788 identified affinities between Indian and classical deities. While it is unlikely that Jones's essay had a direct influence on the *Discourse*, the thematic correspondences are striking.[177] Jones, for example, observed similarities between the concept of the mundane egg as found in Ionian philosophy and that described in the Hindu *Purānas*. Consider the following:

> The first operations of these [Brahma's] three Powers are variously described […] by a number of allegories, and from them we may deduce the Ionian Philosophy of primeval water, the doctrine of the Mundane Egg, and the veneration paid to the Nymphaea, or

[175] Knight, *Discourse*, 81.
[176] For a concise history of European antiquarianism in India see Upinder Singh, "From Antiquarianism to Archeology" in *The Discovery of Ancient India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 1–22. For more on Jones's research activities see Michael J. Franklin, *Orientalist Jones: Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist, 1746–1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[177] Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57.

> Lotos, which was anciently revered in Egypt, as it is at present in Hindustan, Tibet, and Nepal.[178]

We see the same creation motifs—primeval waters, mundane egg, Nymphaea flower—discussed by Knight. Moreover, both Knight and Jones rendered Indian gods and their associated allegories more familiar and noble through comparative juxtaposition with their assumed ancient Greek counterparts.[179] Other investigations into the sexual symbolism of world religions soon followed. In 1795, the French intellectual Charles Dupuis would publish his research in a seven-volume set entitled *Origine de tous les cultes ou la religion universelle*.[180] The increasing availability of serious Indological scholarship made the kind of remote study that Knight pursued more viable. However, in the 1780s, when Knight sat down to pen his *Discourse*, obtaining reliable information could be problematic. His English sources on cave temples, for example, proved faithful on some accounts but outlandish in others.

We see these errors most clearly in the writing of EIC surgeon William Hunter. Recent scholarship dates the origin of Indian rock architecture to the third century B.C., a moment when the requisite technical skills for excavation were shared between the Mauryan Empire and Persia.[181] However, British speculators to the site in the late eighteenth century found little evidence to illuminate the age or patron of the temple. Coupled with their prejudice against the local population, perceived to be both ignorant and indolent, the construction of such extraordinary architecture prompted wild conjecture. Hunter, for example, proposed that the

[178] William Jones, "On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India, written in 1784, and since revised by the President," in *Representing India, Indian Culture and Imperial Control in Eighteenth-Century British Orientalist Discourse*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 243.
[179] Phiroze Vasunia, "Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 190.
[180] Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, 73–104.
[181] Carmel Berkson, "The Historical Context and Evolution of Style at Elephanta," 4.

stone had undergone a material transformation at a molecular level. Hesitant to admit the "incredible labour that must have been employed in cutting these caves in a hard and solid rock," he ventured that the stone was soft during construction and only hardened with prolonged exposure to air.[182] Whether interpreting the complicated iconographies of sculptures found at the site or determining the technologies that facilitated their astonishing formation, such commentaries share an assurance that educated British men were best positioned to restore what Knight would call the 'true meaning' of Indian cave temples. In fact, with the appearance of important Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gītā in translation, the retrieval of these 'lost' histories became a scholarly as well as a colonial imperative.[183]

Budding Indologists shared other motives and methods with colonial administrators. With the newly institutionalized practices of Orientalism came a drive for metrical exactitude. This was consistent with nascent archeological practice. Empirical study had been integral to the expeditions sponsored by the Society of Dilettanti earlier in the eighteenth century. To "procure the exactest Plans and Measures possible" of ancient buildings: that was the brief claimed in the 1770s by representatives of Dilettanti-backed expeditions to Greece, Turkey and other parts of Asia Minor.[184] The Society's members were also to "be exact" in marking the distances and directions in which they travelled as well as encouraged to frequently observe their "watches and pocket compasses."[185] Such strict standards of data collection were surely informed by the cross-pollination of ideas between the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries and the Society of Dilettanti. But, as noted, the growing penchant for calculating dimensions gathered political

[182] Hunter, "An Account of some artificial Caverns in the Neighborhood of Bombay," 302.
[183] Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi "India and the Identity of Europe: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 713–734.
[184] Richard Chandler, *Travels in Asia Minor: or, an Account of a Tour made at the Expense of the Society of Dilettanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1775), viii.
[185] Chandler, *Travels in Asia Minor*, ix.

charge as the EIC became further entrenched in India. Measurement and especially mapping was were crucial techniques of power. Just as precise drawings were valued by the antiquarian who set out to order the past systematically one monument at a time, accurate geographical representations would guide the tactics of EIC servants and military commanders.[186] That apparatus of imperial governance appears clearly in Knight's *Discourse* as it dutifully follows procedural expectations laid out in the earlier Dilettanti folios.[187] When analysing the Elephanta figural group, Knight turns to measurements and visual details of the cavern from which it was extracted, citing the findings of Pyke and Hunter as published in *Archaeologia*.[188] "That from which the fragment in question was brought," Knight claims, "is 130 feet long by 110 feet wide, adorned with columns and sculptures finished in a style very different from that of the Indian Artists."[189] In addition to following procedural expectations, these numerical measurements

[186] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 44–45. Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2. Kapil Raj argues that the need for surveying became pressing following new territorial acquisitions after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 67.

[187] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 87. Redford argues that Knight also does this in "Expedition into Sicily." This scientific turn also included engagements with material culture, as exemplified by Plate XVII in the *Discourse* which depicts a "Statue of a Bull in the Pagoda of Tanjore [Thanjavur]" [Fig. 24]. Sitting on a rectangular platform, the animal is perched with its front and back legs folded gracefully underneath it. The engraver uses minimal shading, diminishing surface variation and sculptural detail. Only the bull itself and its bands of decorative bells cast shadows. Drawn using singular lines similar to those that construct the platform, the animal appears schematic, an impression antithetical to a sculptural mode. Moreover, floating in a decontextualised space, the viewer has no sense of its massive scale. Knight rectifies this by printing an "Explanation" directly on the plate to provide measurements for each part of the monolithic granite bull. This textual supplement notes that the "Length from the Hind Leg to the Chest" is 16 ft. 4 in. while the "Circumference round the Neck & Chest" is 26 ft. 1 in." Knight borrows his data from the account of Captain Patterson, whose own depiction had been made "on the spot," a common phrasing that accompanied visual records.

[188] Knight's measurements are borrowed from William Hunter, "An Account of some artificial Caverns in the Neighborhood of Bombay," 288–289. Curiously, Knight cites volume VIII of *Archeologia*, not volume *VII,* in which Hunter's account was published. Volume VIII contains a detailed account of the Elephanta caves as described by Scottish poet Hector MacNeill, but no measurements are listed on the cited page (289). This account was not read until 1786, nor published until 1787. See Hector MacNeill, "An Account of the Caves of Cannara, Ambola, and Elephanta, in the East Indies; in a Letter from Hector Macneil, Esq. then at Bombay, to a Friend in England, dated 1783. Communicated by the Rev. Mr. Gregory, F.A.S.," *Archeologia* VIII (1787): 251–289.

[189] Knight, *Discourse*, 80.

performed European difference from native Indians who were dismissively described as being in both technological and cultural stasis.[190]

Finally, Knight was able to muster his own expertise to compliment the information he sourced from others. Rendered knowable by the agents of British expansionism, Indian material artifacts reciprocally become legible through the privileged analytic of Mediterranean culture. Consider here how Knight explains the mythical meaning of the Indian god Krishna:

> KRESHNA, or the Deity become incarnate in the shape of man, in order to instruct all mankind, is introduced, revealing to his disciples the fundamental principles of true faith, religion, and wisdom; which are the exact counterpart of the system of Emanations, so beautifully described in the lines of VIRGIL before cited. We here find, though in a more mystic garb, the same one principle of life universally emanated and expanded…"[191]

The poetry of Virgil is posited as the proper interpretive framework for apprehending Indian divinities. Comparing Eastern and Western emanations, Knight asserts his classical learning as the conduit through which Indian art can be rationalised. In circumstances where artifacts and monuments were seen as 'neglected' or misunderstood, this rhetoric justified the material motives of the colonial project. Instructive here is William Blake's oft-cited dictum: "Empire follows Art, and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose."[192] The material extraction of the temple fragment from India to London made such intellectual requisitioning possible and allowed for other forms of colonisation.

The restitution of Indian artifacts through the prism of Western culture was not only a textual practice (See Figs. 6; 10; 11). By comparing the *Discourse*'s plates, we can observe the

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[190] Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, 32. Edney argues that scientific studies were synonymous with British methods of knowledge production. Kapil Raj has complicated this analysis to argue that novel forms of knowledge making developed from the interaction between Western and native traditions. Raj, *Relocating Modern* Science, 60–63.
[191] Knight, *Discourse*, 82.
[192] William Blake, "Annotations to the Works of Joshua Reynolds," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 636. For more on this statement see Mitchell, "Empire and Objecthood," 145. Natasha Eaton has similarly argued that "collecting could and did motivate empire." Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis Across Empire: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765–1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 29.

extent to which the engraver used his medium to enhance the liveliness of the fragmented Elephanta figures. Reimagining both missing sections and lost surface detail, the reconstruction increases both the visual impact and erotic force of the artifact. Not only shown with a "conjectural restoration," the entire relief is showcased as an ideal version of itself.[193] The missing limbs are reinstated with an "absolute linear purity" that looks forward to the third volume of *Antiquities of Athens* or John Flaxman's reductive visions of Homer's epics.[194] In this composite image, the learned devotees of Śiva are completed through the visual language of neoclassicism.[195] It is thus not 'between the lines' but through line itself that the intellectual conquest of India is made visible. Where European geographers translated the varied landscape of the subcontinent into the linear grid of the map used to overcome the obstacle of distance, Knight's engraver uses tonal, linear webs to transform the rugged fragment into the smoothed surfaces of Burkeian beauty. Complementing Knight's textual armature of philology and

[193] This was characteristic of Dilettanti publications. Thora Brylowe has called attention to the fact that Hamilton's *AEGR* presented his collection of Etruscan vases in an ideal state. Thora Brylowe, "Two Kinds of Collections: Sir William Hamilton's Vases, Real and Represented," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32, no. 1 (2008): 32. See also Viccy Coltman, "Sir William Hamilton's Vase Publications (1766–1776): A Case Study in the Reproduction and Dissemination of Antiquity," *Journal of Design History* 14, no. 1 (2001): 1–16; and Viccy Coltman, "The operations of sculpture: (Re)writing restoration," in *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain Since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 84–116.

[194] The plates first appeared in Rome in 1793. *The Iliad of Homer, engraved by Thomas Piroli from the Compositions of John Flaxman Sculptor, Rome, together with Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeshylus, designed by Iohn* [sic] *Flaxman, engraved by Thomas Piroli* (London: J. Matthews, 1795). Ersy Contogouris notes Flaxman's "absolute linear purity." Ersy Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth-Century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 71. See also Eckart Marchand, "John Flaxman's Drawings After Italian Antique, Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture," in *John Flaxman and William Young Ottley in Italy*, vol. 72 of *The Walpole Society*, eds. Hugh Brigstocke, Eckart Marchand, and A. E. Wright (Wakefield, UK: Charlesworth Group, 2010), 35. The enduring influence of outline drawing is exemplified in William Miller's 1804 publication of outline engravings based on paintings found on Sir William Hamilton's vases. William Miller, *Outlines from the Figures and Compositions Upon the Greek, Roman, and Etruscan Vases of the late Sir William Hamilton: with engraved Borders. Drawn and Engraved by the Late Mr. Kirk* (London: William Miller, 1804).

[195] This combination of the familiar and the exotic was a common feature of British responses to Indian art in this period. Holly Schaffer discusses how shifting political alliances and power structures in India created a culture of artistic eclecticism. She argues that the culture of collecting at the Pune court was fundamentally cosmopolitan, open to both Indian and British artists who mobilised a diverse range of techniques and styles. Shaffer, "'Take All of Them,'" 63.

references to Mediterranean culture, the suave stylings of metropolitan reproductive print makers transform the temple fragment from blasphemous idol of a monstrous Other into a orrect precise "unit of knowledge."[196] Together word and image sanctioned theoretically the material movement of Indian antiquities from sacred spaces to private collections. In some ways the *Discourse* assumed the very qualities that Knight ascribed to erotic emblems. It was both an active and passive agent, one that expanded the scope of neoclassicism to assimilate ancient South Asian art, but which also replicated assumptions about India, its people and its historical imprint from the comfort of a London study.

VIII. Twilight of the Idols

Enlightenment discoveries revealed the classical world to be rich in sexual imagery: swollen phalluses and sculpted vulvas discovered at Herculaneum, Pompeii and across the British empire materialised in collections and circulated in print. The arrival of these artifacts rescripted stories told about the ancient past, but this influx of erotic material culture did little to "reinvigorate" modern art. Neither did the appearance of even more robust models in the form of the Parthenon sculptures. Removed from the Acropolis by Lord Elgin between 1801 and 1812, the metopes, friezes and pediment fragments did, however, upset the classical canon. They sparked a debate concerning the nature, merit and use value of ancient Greek art in modern London.

A willful and ambitious painter, Benjamin Robert Haydon was among the loudest in praising their virtues and revolutionary potential. Affirming the foundation of neoclassical wisdom, Haydon saw the future in the past. Important here is the way in which he articulated his

[196] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 67.

admiration in unashamedly spiritual terms. In one mythical telling of an encounter with the Parthenon's fragmented remains, Haydon ushered his mentor Henry Fuseli up the Strand to see Phidias's work for the first time. Navigating between unwieldly carts and a stubborn flock of sheep while swearing like "a little fury," Haydon recounts that he would never forget Fuseli's "uncompromising enthusiasm" when they finally arrived at Park Lane. Upon seeing the marbles, Haydon's Fuseli declared in no uncertain terms (and presumably in a heavy Swiss German accent): "De Greeks were gods! De Greeks were gods!"[197] But only a few days later, Fuseli tempered his initial excitement. According to Haydon, he tried to "*unsay*" his glowing review. While embellished, what Haydon's tale signals is a climate of uncertainty vis-à-vis the classical past at the turn of the nineteenth century. If Haydon was a firm believer in remaking modern art in the image of Fuseli's godlike ancients, some artists working in London were led to wonder if they had been pursuing false idols. As Whitney Davis has put it, the British art world came to the realisation "that Winckelmann had asked modern culture to revive (or sometimes artificially to reinvent) what had already survived in modern life in more natural forms."[198] That is, artists began to question Winckelmann's mimetic directive. What if the artist chose not to imitate the ancients but to pursue his *own* desire, a move that would allow for an authentic expression of modern ethos? Concerns likewise arose over galleries then brimming with decades of assiduous collecting. Were the ancient masterworks to be blindly venerated or had Winckelmann's ideas been nothing but "frigid reveries and Platonic dreams on beauty," as Fuseli mused in the introduction to his *Lectures on Art*?[199] In his position as Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy, a mature Fuseli accused Winckelmann of leading students amiss, teaching them "to

[197] Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Lectures on Painting and Design* (London: Longman Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), 193.
[198] Davis, *Queer Beauty*, 71.
[199] John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 2:14.

substitute the means for the end, and by a hopeless chace after what they call beauty, to lose what alone can make beauty interesting, expression and mind."[200] Winckelmann was an esteemed classicist, but his "laboured and inflated rhapsodies on the most celebrated monuments of art" had deceived an entire generation of practitioners. Originality, innovation, imagination—these were the qualities increasingly advanced as the cure for modern art.

Importantly, this crisis in artistic practice transpired against the backdrop of the drama unfolding around the purchase the Parthenon sculptures for the nation. Fuseli eventually sided with Richard Payne Knight, whose own involvement in the discussion incited controversy. The conflict began in 1806, when Knight tactlessly declared that the sculptures were "overrated," not Greek but Roman and executed by workmen "hardly higher than journeymen."[201] This he uttered at a social dinner held less than two weeks following Lord Elgin's release from detention in France. Knight, it seems, had not even seen the sculptures in person and had based his opinion on outdated scholarship written in the seventeenth century. His judgement would eventually be challenged, but as Haydon records, it cooled the initial enthusiasm of both artists and officials. In 1816, a full decade following his initial and unquestionably insensitive comments at Lord Elgin's expense, Knight would weigh in on the sculptures' quality and purchase price before a special committee appointed by the British government. Although the sculptures were considered by many of his contemporaries to be "the finest models and the most exquisite monuments of antiquity," Knight remained doubtful in his assessment.[202] His comments are intriguing, and a closer look at the language and evidence that he uses to evaluate them allows us to appreciate

[200] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 2:14.
[201] Haydon, *Lectures on Painting and Design*, 216. Quoted in Messman, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 123.
[202] *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Earl of Elgin's Collection of Sculptured Marbles; &c* (London, J. Murray, 1816), 8.

both his personal motives and the broader cultural stakes of the acquisition.[203] Knight mobilises techniques discussed in this chapter: recourse to historical accounts and embodied knowledge making. Incongruent with the image of Knight thus far presented, however, is his apparent inability to command his evidence with confidence, a usual hallmark of his writing.

The parliamentary Select Committee had four goals: to determine whether Elgin had lawfully removed the marbles from Athens, to inquire into the circumstances under which the authority had been granted, to ascertain the artistic merit and cultural value of the sculptures and to decide on a purchase price. Regarding the latter pair of criteria, they called upon various authorities in the art world. Painters and sculptors were invited to give their opinions during the first day of the proceedings and were enthusiastic about the acquisition. Knight was called to speak on the following day.[204] Sandwiched between the official Dilettanti portrait painter Sir Thomas Lawrence and the architect William Wilkins, Knight gave a languid testimony. His comments betray a stubborn adherence to established standards of taste, and the Committee seemed prepared to expose Knight for his outmoded views.

"ARE you acquainted with the Elgin collection?" so commenced the Committee's line of questioning for each of the witnesses. Knight begins well enough, stating that he had looked them over and would class the finest works of the collection in the second rank, below the Laocoon and the Apollo Belvedere. When next questioned about their antiquity, Knight cites Plutarch for the temple's attribution to Callicrates and Ictinus, noting that some of the finest works may be Hadrianic, an idea he bases on stylistic grounds. This is all in keeping with Knight's usual methods. But he begins to find himself in a precarious position when asked later

[203] Frank J. Messman, "Richard Payne Knight and the Elgin Marbles Controversy," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 72.
[204] For an excellent reading of the unfolding debate, which Redford compares to a cross examination, see Redford, *Dilettanti*, 173–182.

upon what authority he believed a great part of the marbles to belong to the time of Hadrian. Knight replies with the following:

> From no other authority than Spon and Wheler having thought one of the heads to be of that Emporor [sic], and later travellers having found no symbols of any deity upon it; also from draped trunks, which seem to be of that complicated and stringy kind of work which was then in fashion; that is mere matter of opinion; there is no authority as to the time when particular articles were made.[205]

Here he refers to the accounts of Jacob Spon and George Wheler, who had visited the Parthenon in 1675 and published their findings in 1678–1680 and 1682, respectively.[206] Therein they offered an extensive description of the temple's pediments. Such firsthand evidence should have served Knight well except that in 1816, this literature was outdated. Worse still, Knight did not even seem to know it that well. When pressed further on the matter of the Spon and Wheler identifications, Knight falters. "Upon which of the figures is it that you understand Spon and Wheler to have recognized the head of Hadrian?" so inquires the committee. Strangely, Knight is unable to give a credible answer. "I can give no opinion on this point having misunderstood Lord Aberdeen, from whose conversation I had formed an opinion."[207] Further undermining his familiarity with crucial evidence, Knight admits that he had not studied the drawings of the pediment contemporaneous with Spon and Wheler's account for some time. And perhaps the strangest oversight of all is that Knight purports to be unaware that James Stuart had confirmed a number of inaccuracies within the Spon and Wheler descriptions. According to the committee, Stuart proved that they had mistaken "the subjects of the Eastern for the Western pediment," which Knight did not recollect. Several decades had passed since the publication of *The Antiquities of Athens*, but Knight should have known Stuart's arguments. He had, after all, been

[205] *Report from the Select Committee*, 97.
[206] Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism, 1700–1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 2.
[207] *Report from the Select Committee*, 97.

on the Committee that published the second volume (concerning the Parthenon) in 1787. Knight also calls into question his own authoritative position as a classicist when asked to comment on the surface finish of the River god (West pediment A) [Fig. 25] as compared to the standard examples of excellence. He comments that it is "finished by polishing [with] … no traces of the chisel upon it."[208] This he concedes is the reason for classing it as second rate, for on the celebrated masterpieces "the remains of the chisel are always visible."[209] The committee, eager to call Knight out for inconsistency, then wonder aloud whether chisel marks are visible on the Venus de Medici or the Apollo Belvedere, to which the answer had to be no. This curious double standard in conjunction with Knight's earlier lapses in memory are striking and require an explantion.

Scholars have suggested several reasons for Knight's poor performance and modest appraisal of the Parthenon sculptures, including his animosity toward Elgin, his preference for freestanding sculpture over architectural ornament and his erroneous understanding of classical Greek art.[210] All of these conditions likely contributed to his verdict. It may also be worth stressing that his indifference was likely a product of his own antiquarian intuition. Based on a deficit in feeling, Knight argued that many of the Parthenon sculptures were neither authentic nor the product of true artistic genius.[211] The marbles had not *moved* him. In his near contemporaneous publication, *Specimens of Antient Sculpture, Aegytian, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman* (1809), Knight described the ability to recognise artistic genius as a sixth sense, one unique to connoisseurs like himself. This he set out theoretically using examples. Inferior to

[208] *Report from the Select Committee*, 100.
[209] *Report from the Select Committee*, 100.
[210] Ballantyne, *Imperialism and the Decline of Art*, 553. Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*, 45–58.
[211] For Knight on the difference between artists and artisans see Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61.

other ancient artistic traditions because of their flawed language (so Knight had argued in the *Discourse*), Phoenician culture became a set-piece for the power of connoisseurship itself. If it was true that "the Phoenicians were rather *artizans* than *artists*," this was

> a distinction more easily felt than explained: for, though every person conversant in works of art, whether in sculpture, painting, or drawing, instantly feels the difference between the work of a master and that of a mechanic, it is extremely difficult to make it intelligible to any one, who does not feel it…[212]

Knight describes the response as visceral. This reliance on feeling is consistent with the eighteenth-century discourse on taste and embodied knowledge making explored throughout this chapter. Through longstanding empirical practice, the antiquarian learns what to look for until it becomes second nature. Thus, when confronted with works radically different from those he knew to be Greek, it is no wonder that they left him feeling cold. Of course, another chilling reality would set in if Knight apprehended the Parthenon sculptures for what they really were. His own collection and that of Charles Townley would lose much of their value if found to be inferior to Elgin's spolia. Knight's prudent outline of the inimitable ability of "the real judge" to distinguish between the work of the artist and the artisan is thus responsive to threats posed to antiquarian authority and its material assets.[213]

One usual story as to why this occurred at this particular moment points to a kind of cultural deregulation. In the decades leading up to and following Greece's independence from Ottoman rule in 1821, the Society of Dilettanti's "virtual monopoly of English classical

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[212] Richard Payne Knight, *Specimens of Antient Sculpture: Ægyptian, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman* (London: Printed by T. Bensley for T. Payne and J. White, 1809), ix.

[213] Messman has observed that Knight's criticism "may have been animated by jealousy over the fact that in publicly judging the marbles the artists had trespassed on what had formerly been the domain of the dilettanti." Messman, "Richard Payne Knight and the Elgin Marbles Controversy," 72. See also Redford, *Dilettanti*, 178; Jacob Rothenberg, "Apostles and Opponents of the Elgin Marbles," in *"Descensus Ad Terram": The Acquisition and Reception of the Elgin Marbles* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).

exploration" ended.[214] The early nineteenth century witnessed a rise in tourism to Greece. This was a consequence of the Napoleonic wars redirecting travel compounded by a growing appreciation for ancient Greek culture that grew in tandem with the nation's independence movement. And with greater access came new ideas. The Parthenon sculptures were foremost among the ancient Greek masterpieces that reached Britain, and they undermined the prestige of prominent British collections. Only then did it become clear that the "illustrious Greek originals" belonging to Townley and others were either Roman copies of classical originals or otherwise Hellenistic. The force of this new information Knight could only feebly resist.[215]

The proposed public ownership of the Elgin marbles also menaced the private control of antiquity long commanded by Knight's circles.[216] Knight puts the "provisional Fragments of the Frieze" into direct comparison with Townley's collection in a letter to Lord Aberdeen. The letter probably dates from the early nineteenth century when Knight first encountered the marbles since he describes having been to see "Lord Elgin's things with Mr. Hamilton." Knight assures his correspondent that he would be "of the same Opinion," and need only to "compare them with some Specimens of the real Works of the great Artists of that Age in the Townleian Collection."[217] The letter tellingly recalls similar phrases in the *Discourse* which disclose the "real meaning" or "true meaning" of ancient rituals and artifacts.[218] On the line was the very *essence* of classicism which had, until Elgin's intervention, been unquestionably embodied in

[214] Joseph Mordaunt Crook, *The Greek Revival: Neo-Classical Attitudes in British Architecture 1760–1870* (London: John Murray, 1972), 41; Ayumi Mizukoshi, *Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 93.
[215] Penny, "Collecting, Interpreting and Imitating Ancient Art," 77. In 1791, for example, he conceded that the Hercules Farnese and the Apollo Belvedere torso were likely copies after ancient works. See Knight*, An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet*, 20.
[216] Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 229–231.
[217] Letter from Richard Payne Knight, undated, Soho Square to Lord Aberdeen, in Priory, Stanmore; British Library, MS 43229, ff. 237.
[218] Knight, *Discourse*, 65, 107.

artifacts belonging to Townley and Knight. In the highly political and public quarrel that raged around the Elgin marbles, the idea of 'the antique' was becoming dissociated with its material imprint in aristocratic repositories.

This discomfort is palpable in *Specimens of Antient Sculpture.* A stunning work of Dilettanti scholarship featuring high quality engravings, the Parthenon sculptures are conspicuously overshadowed.[219] Of the more than sixty sculptures discussed, two thirds were possessions of Knight and Townley with the bulk of the remaining works hailing from the collection of Thomas Hope, a fellow member of the Society of Antiquaries.[220] Such nepotism was not flagged as problematic among Knight's antiquarian contemporaries. James Dallaway, for example, toed the line. He commended the author for his focus on his own "singularly excellent collection of small bronze statues … [which was] unrivalled both in rarity of individual subjects and perfect workmanship."[221] Knight's dramatic disavowal of the Parthenon sculptures is thus best explained vis-à-vis the diminishing importance of Dilettanti collections. It occurred as the intellectual authority of the Dilettanti establishment waned.[222]

Finally, it is important to remember that Knight's antipathy was somewhat sensationalised. Criticism came indirectly from those artists and aesthetes who recognised a paradigm shift in Phidias, but it flowed vehemently from Benjamon Robert Haydon. His vendetta against Knight contributed much to the perseverance of the antiquarian's mythic status as the blockhead who dismissed the Parthenon sculptures. In fact, Knight ranked the metopes among the finest works art. Rather, it was his want of enthusiasm and low estimation of their

[219] Ballantyne, "Imperialism and the Decline of Art," 557.
[220] Messman, *Twilight of Virtuosity*, 134.
[221] James Dallaway, Of Statuary and Sculpture among the Ancients (London: 1816), 356; Quoted in Messman, *Twilight of Virtuosity*, 135.
[222] Ayumi Mizukoshi, *Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure*, 94.

economic value that enraged Haydon, who certainly did his best to realise his own vindictive predication that as knowledge of the ancient past increased so would the fame of the Elgin marbles, and with their ascent Knight would "s[i]nk into oblivion, Priapus & all…"[223]

While both sides of the Elgin marbles debate agreed on the absolute merit of ancient Greek art, it was perhaps the *modus operandi* of art history pioneered under the Society of Dilettanti that became most problematic in the cultural atmosphere of the early nineteenth century—an idea uncannily framed in the final lines of the *Discourse.* According to Knight, when Saint Peter prohibited Christians from "worshipping after the manner of the Greeks," it was not a "prohibition of worshipping the same God, but merely of the corrupt mode in which he was then worshipped."[224] It is not surprising that critics found in the *Discourse* ample fodder for a public resistance to Dilettanti antics. While the Society might have shared the same Greek gods as upstart professionals like Haydon, who challenged connoisseurs for the supreme verdict on the Elgin marbles, their erotic encounters with the antique—their *corrupt mode of worship*—was increasingly advanced as evidence that antiquarian learning was based on nothing but lewd fantasies. By contrast, I have argued that the *Discourse* is an indicative sample of the heady mixture of philological technics, associative formalism and eroticised mythmaking from which (and against which) disciplinary art history would form itself. And while the Elgin marbles did not incite a renaissance in European art as Haydon predicted, their transfer to the British Museum where they remain on permanent display did overturn longstanding hierarchies in the British art world. Moreover, their sustained primacy within the Museum acts as a highly visible contrast to the treatment of Dilettanti collections, which have been dispersed throughout the

[223] Willard Bissell Pope, ed. *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960–63), 2:146. Messman, "Richard Payne Knight and the Elgin Marbles Controversy," 74.
[224] Knight, *Discourse*, 195.

institution. The Townleian marbles are shown less as examples of classical art than as evidence of a peculiar Enlightenment worldview. How the British Museum arrived at this curatorial solution is the problematic pursued in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Housing Priapus: Dilettanti Collections and the British Museum

I. Johann Zoffany's *Charles Townley and Friends*

The crowded library barely contains four companions and their lively sculptural counterparts [Fig. 26]. The collector sits at lower right: Charles Townley (1737–1805), Catholic millionaire and patron of classical scholarship. Turning to him inquisitively from across the room is Pierre François Hugues, alias Baron d'Hancarville (1719–1805), an itinerant rogue and expert antiquarian. His presence signals his position as an informal scholar-in-residence at Townley's London abode. There, he would write *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et le progrès des arts de la Grèce* (1785), which proposed a theoretical framework for proving the emblematic origins of art—for which Townley's collection provided evidence.[1] Two more guests stand a few paces from the collector himself. These modish men are Charles Greville (1749–1809) and Thomas Astle (1735–1803). Greville, shown caressing Townley's treasured marble bust of the Greek water nymph Clytie, was a mineralogist and an active member of both the Royal Society and the Society of Dilettanti. He was also the nephew of d'Hancarville's former patron, Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803), for whom the 'Baron' produced a highly influential catalogue of Grecian

[1] Francis Haskell reveals that the Baron d'Hancarville was born Pierre François Hugues into a poor merchant family. His title was apparently self-styled and one of the many false names that he used during his lifetime. Francis Haskell, "The Baron d'Hancarville: An Adventurer and Art Historian in Eighteenth-Century Europe," in *Oxford, China and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Edward Chaney and Neil Ritchie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 177–191. D'Hancarville's *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et le progrès des arts de la Grèce sur leur connexion avec les arts et la religion de plus anciens peuples connus : sur les monumens antiques de l'Inde, de la Perse, du reste de l'Asie, de l'Europe et de l'Égypte* (London: B. Appleyard, 1785) will hereafter be referred to as *Recherches*. While d'Hancarville was in residence at Townley's Park Street home, he was responsible for cataloguing the collector's ancient sculptures and gems. He wrote most of the *Recherches* during this period.

vases, *Antiquités étrusques, grecques, et romaines tirées du Cabinet de M. Hamilton* (1766–76).[2] Astle, on the other hand, was a paleographer, soon to be Keeper of Records at the Tower of London and engaged in writing a treatise on ancient language, *The Origin and Progress of Writing* (1784). Showcasing Townley's accomplishments as a discerning collector, the painting is also a group portrait of the homosocial circle who shared his intimate and impassioned appreciation for the classical world.[3]

Art history is not wanting for interpretations of Johann Zoffany's *Charles Townley and Friends* (1781–1790, 1798) (hereafter the Townley Zoffany), a lively imagining of the inner sanctum of Townley's home in Park Street, Westminster, situated opposite St. James's Park.[4] Colette Crossman, for example, suggests that a series of private subtexts alluding to the eroticism of the ancient world are embedded within the painting's "overtly public iconography."[5] That these allusions to Priapus and bacchanalian rites were made within the erudite space of the gentleman's library confirms what Bruce Redford identifies as the dual motive behind the Society of Dilettanti itself: to embrace both learning and libertinism, a blend of rakish conduct

[2] Hereafter referred to as the *AEGR*. Recent studies on Hamilton's vase collecting include Thora Brylowe, "Two Kinds of Collections: Sir William Hamilton's Vases, Real and Represented," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 23–56, and Emmanouil Kalkanis, "The Visual Dissemination of Sir William Hamilton's Vases and their Reception by Early 19th-Century Scholarship (c. 1800s–1820s)," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 75, no. 4 (2012): 487–514.

[3] Colette Crossman, "Priapus in Park Street: Revealing Zoffany's subtext in 'Charles Townley and friends,'" *The British Art Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2005): 71.

[4] Studies of this painting include Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 152–158; Wolfgang Ernst, "Frames at Work: Museological Imagination and Historical Discourse in Neoclassical Britain," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 3 (1993): 481–498; Gerard Vaughan, "The Townley Zoffany: Reflections on Charles Townley and his Friends," *Apollo*, CXLIV no. 417 (1996): 32–35; Crossman, "Priapus in Park Street."; Viccy Coltman, "Representation, Replication and Collecting in Charles Townley's Late Eighteenth-Century Library," *Art History* 29, no. 2 (April 2006): 302–324; Viccy Coltman, "The lecture on Venus's arse': Richard Cosway's Charles Townley with a Group of Connoisseurs, c.1771–5," in *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain Since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Martin Postle, *Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed* (New Haven and London: Yale Centre for British Art, 2011), 241–242; Miriam Al Jamil, "Hidden Dimensions and Elusive Forms in Johan Zoffany's Charles Townley and Friends in his Library at Park Street, Westminster, 1781–1783, 1798," *Antiquity and Enlightenment Culture*, ed. Felicity Loughlin and Alexandre Johnston (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 104–128.

[5] Crossman, "Priapus in Park Street," 71. Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 138.

and sincere intellectual pursuit constituting the period's evolving cultures of connoisseurship.[6] Martin Postle similarly notes that Zoffany imagines "an ongoing intellectual dialogue between the present and the ancient past," fashioning "an emblem of Enlightenment enquiry."[7] The painter documents the social world of the lettered antiquarian, whose expanding purview was made possible through the collation of artifacts and individuals, ancient learning and modern science. We know, for example, that both Greville and Astle, were proponents of Townley's "System of Generation" as theorised in d'Hancarville's *Recherches* and Knight's *Discourse*.[8] This theory suggested that ancient artists found the visual and material means to represent the power of divine creation—or the abstract principle of generation as d'Hancarville called it. Thinking through the intellectual network presented in Zoffany's canvas, the conversation piece emerges as a commentary on the collective research of this homosocial circle and the works of art that embodied ideas and values exclusive to that community. This chapter proceeds from the idea that Townley's collection manifested the cosmology of a modern cult of Priapus, whose scholarly pursuits shaped and gave definition to the artifacts therein. I ask: what happened to these 'associational' meanings when the artifacts were displaced from this context as they would be following Townley's death in 1805?

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[6] Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 3. Viccy Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006). See especially her chapter entitled "(Neo)classicism in the British Library." Anne Bermingham, "The Aesthetics of Ignorance: The Accomplished Woman in the Culture of Connoisseurship," *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 2 (1993): 13. Other studies on the Society of Dilettanti include Jason M. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti: Archeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

[7] Postle, *Johan Zoffany RA*, 242.

[8] Letter from Sir Joseph Banks, dated Dec. 13th, Soho Square, to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum, TY 7/1838. We find, Knight, for example citing Astle in *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet* (London: J. Nichols for P. Emsley, 1791), 5. We equally find Astle referencing the *Discourse*. Thomas Astle, *Observations on Stone Pillars, Crosses, and Crucifixes* (London: Thomas Bensley, 1800).

Highlighting comparative, associative and erotic ways of knowing privileged by an erudite viewership, this chapter follows Townley's antiquities from their home in Park Street to the British Museum, where they became first a centerpiece of the collection and later a catalytic agent for institutional reform. Of course, the assimilation of a collection like Townley's into a larger entity was not unusual. Many private collections would be absorbed into the British Museum and comparable public institutions in the years around 1800.[9] However, the debates set in motion by the Townley bequest are remarkable insofar as they reveal much about the transmutability of classical antiquities and erotic artifacts in the age of Enlightenment. I demonstrate that the acquisition of collections belonging to prominent Dilettanti including Townley, Hamilton and Knight constituted a crucial problem—one invariably linked to the emergence of a diverse viewing public. *Who* was the British Museum for? Was it to become a temple for the modern cult of Priapus—a space to practice that exclusive branch of erotic antiquarianism detailed in the previous chapter and visualised in the Townley Zoffany? Or was it to become a public monument, a rival to the Louvre and open to all? To address these questions, I examine the reception of Dilettanti collections in the British Museum from the 1770s until the present moment. I focus primarily on the decades leading up to and following the turn of the nineteenth century, a period that I argue witnessed one vision of the institution give way to another. If Townley's museum functioned as a ritual space for the Society of Dilettanti—one that

[9] In 1799 the British Museum received the Cracherode Collection. See Antony Griffiths, *Landmarks in Print Collecting: Connoisseurs and Donors at the British Museum Since 1753* (London: The British Museum Press, 1996). Earlier, in 1772, Sir William Hamilton's first collection of antiquities was purchased by the British Museum for £8410. See Nancy H. Ramage, "Sir William Hamilton as Collector, Exporter, and Dealer: The Acquisition and Dispersal of His Collections," *American Journal of Archaeology* 94, no. 3 (1990): 469–480. The Museum likewise received an extensive ethnographic collection from Sir Joseph Banks in 1777 to which more material was added following his death. See Neil Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum: The World of Collecting, 1770–1830* (London: Routledge, 2007), 10. Sarah Sophia Banks's extensive collection likewise found its way to the British Museum in 1818. David Mackenzie Wilson, *The British Museum, A History* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 76. Richard Payne Knight's collection was bequeathed to the institution in 1824.

materialised the collective values of an elite antiquarian community, the British Museum became a democratic space designed to address the British public. This chapter explores the fallout that occurred when these radically different kinds of museums converged.[10]

II. Belonging(s)

Inside the British Museum, the Townley collection would assume national importance, but it lost its mythic import without Townley's idiosyncratic interventions. Inevitably, curators found new frameworks to make sense of his sculptures and the relationships between them. Those favoured by Townley had, after all, coalesced around private conversations with the Baron d'Hancarville. His conceptual frameworks mobilised an eccentric and specialised research into the erotic and emblematic visual culture of antiquity. While important for members of the Society of Dilettanti, for which Townley's collection served a social and symbolic function, they carried little weight in the public sphere. This section focuses on those conceptual frameworks central to Townley's collecting. Once again, Zoffany's conversation piece offers ample evidence. As noted above, the setting is Townley's library—an ideal space for a discussion concerning the contents of books. The Baron d'Hancarville and Townley seem to be engaged in just such an activity. Townley points to something in the volume propped open on his lap, while d'Hancarville looks up momentarily from reading, his left hand poised in the act of turning the page. Surrounded by sculpture comprising scenes of erotic pursuit, we can surmise that the conversation is shaped by the milieu in which it takes place. Behind d'Hancarville sits a sculpted nymph struggling to escape a lecherous satyr [Fig. 27], while a similar example of alarmed flight is showcased on a sculpted puteal (a classical wellhead) to his left [Fig. 28]. There, a disguised

[10] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 8.

Hercules seizes Omphale, queen of Lydia, while bacchantes struggle with overzealous sileni. Venus, Cupid, Bacchus and other fertility gods and goddesses also make appearances on their own or accompanied by congregations of nymphs, fauns and maenads. These figures feature in rape scenes, seductions or Bacchanals (festivals honouring the Roman god of wine). Colette Crossman has argued that the artifacts are implicitly linked to d'Hancarville's theories of ancient fertility worship and its expression in material culture and the visual arts. She cites the *Townley Vase* crowning the bookcase in Zoffany's conversation piece as evidence for her claim. It was "due to the vase's subject [a Bacchanalian procession] and its oval shape," she explains, that "d'Hancarville considered it a prime example of the egg of creation penetrated by the Être Générateur."[11] This primeval creative force or divine being was worshipped in the ancient world, as d'Hancarville would explain in the *Recherches*. But this is only one of the intertextual riddles crafted by Zoffany to commemorate the best artifacts in Townley's collection. Another can be found in the tome which lies open on the floor, identified by scholars as the sixth volume of *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte* [*The Antiquities of Herculaneum*] (1771). It conspicuously showcases plate xlii, an engraving of the *Drunken Faun* in bronze. It is the near equivalent to the *Silenus Recumbent* on whose plinth the book rests its cover. The juxtaposition calls our attention to the formal similarities between Townley's marble and the bronze original in the Museo di Ercolano. The handwritten guidebook that Townley designed for visitors to his museum likewise emphasised the likeness. In fact, Townley's version had been restored to enhance the resemblance, despite the fact that his 'variant' was a fragment of a more common composition featuring a hermaphrodite struggling against the sexual advances of a satyr.[12] But the reference

[11] Crossman, "Priapus in Park Street," 78.
[12] Townley's Park Street catalogue entry likewise compares the two works, stating that it is "nearly similar to that of the Faun in bronze, engraved in the 2d vol. of the bronzes in the museo di Ercolano, page 161." Coltman,

suggests a persuasive relationship between owning and knowing. Visitors were to take Townley at his word. Through such couplings, we become attentive to the collector's command of the narrative around his collection. In both the painting and the guidebook, we cannot but hear his authoritative voice. Knowing that Townley intentionally established relationships between artifacts in his collection and those outside of it to enhance its overall prestige, we are invited to read the inclusion of Greville and Astle as an extension of this tactic. Townley's personal achievements extend via his guests to a network of aspiring scholars operating through the Society of Dilettanti. While seated off centre in the painting, Townley is nonetheless the focal point of an antiquarian world of his own design.

The insistent bookishness of Townley's circle in Zoffany's picture is also important.[13] It communicates a shared desire among members of the Society of Dilettanti to increase the social club's academic credibility. While lewd humour and erotic allusion were indivisible from scholarly discussion behind closed doors, the Society privileged the latter when it came to public relations. Consider, for example, Dilettanti publishing activities, which intensified during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[14] Books published under the auspices of the Society relied on the same intertextuality found in the Townley Zoffany—an active, performative mode which situated authors in a learned, cosmopolitan network.[15] This synergetic relationship between collecting and publishing is visualised in a series of Dilettanti portraits. Among them are Sir Thomas Lawrence's painting of Richard Payne Knight [Fig. 29] and its referent, a full-

"Representation, Replication and Collecting," 313–315; Julia Habetzeder, "The Impact of Restoration: The Example of the Dancing Satyr in the Uffizi," *Opuscula. Annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome* 5 (2012): 146–149. There are now over 30 known variants of this work. See Alexandra Retzleff, "The Dresden Type Satyr-Hermaphrodite Group in Roman Theaters," *American Journal of Archaeology* 111, no. 3 (2007): 459–472.

[13] Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 167–168.

[14] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 143–172. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti*, 174–205.

[15] Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 45; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 342.

length portrait of Sir William Hamilton by Sir Joshua Reynolds [Fig. 30].[16] Both portraits were made with the public in mind. Knight's picture was commissioned in 1794, the same year that he acquired an important collection of bronzes from Hamilton.[17] It debuted at the Royal Academy before being installed in Knight's library at Downton Castle. Reynolds's Hamilton was to hang in the British Museum. Complementing an earlier portrait by David Allan which presents Hamilton in his role as a noble diplomat, Reynolds depicts his sitter as a learned dilettante.[18] This was a suitable image for a benefactor to the institution, where the painting was to be viewed in conversation with Hamilton's gift of ancient Greek vases. In fact, both portraits establish an enduring relationship between the collector and his collection. Both gentlemen are likewise fashioned as scholars.[19] Seated in their studies alongside favoured artifacts in their respective possession, Hamilton and Knight are also shown in moments of contemplation. Each pause to reflect while reading books that they themselves had a hand in producing. Hamilton peruses *Antiquités Etrusques, Grecques, et Romaines Tirées du Cabinet de M. Hamilton* (hereafter *AEGR*), his highly esteemed catalogue of ancient vases published under the direction of d'Hancarville, while Knight sits poised with an indistinct folio laid open on his lap.[20] Intriguingly, Lawrence diverts from his model, eschewing a recognisable plate from one of his sitter's many scholarly books in favour of three schematic rectangles. The choice is likely

[16] Lawrence's painting is smaller (127 x 101.5 cm) than Reynolds's expansive canvas (255.3 x 175.2 cm), but no less ambitious an as iconic image of an erudite collector.
[17] Clarke and Penny, eds., *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751–1824: Essays on Richard Payne Knight Together with a Catalogue of Works Exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 69–70. The vessel pictured was likely purchased from Charles Townley.
[18] Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 55.
[19] Reviewing Lawrence's portrait of Knight, the satirist Anthony Pasquin [John Williams] thought Lawrence had gone too far in this respect: "it fills me with the idea of an irascible pedagogue explaining Euclid to a dunce!" Anthony Pasquin, *A Liberal Critique on the Present Exhibition of the Royal Academy* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1794), 28.
[20] Baron D'Hancarville, *Antiquités Etrusques, Grecques, et Romaines Tirées du Cabinet de M. Hamilton*, 4 vols. (Naples, 1766–76).

deliberate since it allows for multiple readings.[21] Having published his first book in 1786, Knight continued to release new titles well into the nineteenth century. In 1794, the same year that Lawrence finished the painting, Knight published an essay on landscape design and the picturesque entitled *The Landscape: a Didactic Poem*.[22] Beginning in the late 1780s and throughout the 1790s, Knight was also involved in the production of the second and third volumes of *Antiquities of Athens* (the second volume was printed with a publication date of 1787, but actually released in 1788 while the third volume appeared in 1794), and the second volume of *Ionian Antiquities* (a project that began in 1783, was near completion in 1795 and finally released in 1797).[23] While the *Discourse* and *The Landscape* might be ruled out for having been published in quarto format, the folio pictured by Lawrence allows us to imagine any one (or all) of the books that Knight saw printed as a member of the Society of Dilettanti's Committee of Publication.[24] Evidently, publishing was as important as physically accumulating artifacts to the public-facing identity of the collector.

The dialogue between these paintings is equally deliberate. It sets up Knight in Hamiltonian terms, an act that Redford has argued communicates a double "will to cultural power."[25] Successor to Reynolds as the Society of Dilettanti's official painter, Lawrence models Knight after Hamilton to signal the "changing of the guard" from one generation of artists and antiquaries to the next.[26] This declaration of inheritance emerges in other ways as well, since

[21] Coltman identifies the plate as 71 from the first volume of the *AEGR*. Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 57.
[22] Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape, A Didactic Poem* (London: printed by Bulmer for G. Nicol, 1794).
[23] For the preparation and publication of *Ionian Antiquities* see See Lionel Cust, *History of the Society of Dilettanti* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 100–104.
[24] Recent studies have suggested that the folio may be a collection of Sicilian views. See Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloane, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and His Collection* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 219; Redford, *Dilettanti*, 85.
[25] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 84.
[26] Redford, *Dilettanti*, 84.

Dilettanti portraits honour sitters' material things as much as their interiority or socio-cultural ambition. But whereas Hamilton is pictured in a room accented with different examples of 'Etruscan' (Grecian) earthenware, Knight is positioned to the left of a singular vessel, a favourite in his collection of over one hundred bronzes. The artifact represented here was discovered at Praeneste (Palestrina) in 1786 and was admired for its elaborate figural handles. While not original to the piece, Knight singled out the handles as being "of the time of the Macedonian Kings" a golden age wherein art embodied "elegance and purity of taste."[27] The choice coincided with his theories about the rise and flourishing of ancient art. It articulates a scholarly position in a debate that Knight actively shaped as a classicist and collector.

Finally, not only does the later portrait adhere to conventions established by Reynolds, but it also seeks to be contextualised within Dilettanti portraiture more broadly. As scholars have shown, Reynolds's pendant portraits of the Society, *Vases* [Fig. 31] and *Gems* [Fig. 32], are abundant in erotic and art-historical allusion, creating a potent image of elite masculine identity tied to classical scholarship.[28] Like the Townley Zoffany, these group portraits also act as emblems of shared values between members of the Society.[29] The pendants are inherently social. Begun in 1777, each sitter paid Reynolds an individual contribution of £36 15s.[30] *Gems* locates the informal gathering in an imagined classical setting, wherein even the architectural elements are made to speak the language of *virtù*. The Doric columns framing the scene are exemplary,

[27] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry Into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne, 1805), 175. Clarke and Penny, *The Arrogant Connoisseur*, 134.
[28] Shearer West, "Libertinism and the Ideology of Male Friendship in the Portraits of the Society of Dilettanti," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 14 (1992): 76–104. Dror Wahrman and Bruce Redford have highlighted Reynolds's emphasis on individuality and sexuality in these group portraits. Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 269. Redford, *Dilettanti*, 100.
[29] West, "Libertinism and the Ideology of Male Friendship," 96.
[30] Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti*, 209.

chosen for their Vitruvian association with masculine authority. *Vases* commemorates Hamilton's election to the Society, positioning him at the centre of an animated discourse, enlivened with red wine served in glittering facet-cut stemmed glasses. If the red wine recalls Bacchic revelry, other details confirm that the gatherings encouraged pleasure seeking both within and outside of Society rituals. In *Vases*, John Taylor dangles a woman's garter in the space between Hamilton and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. In *Gems,* the antiquarian gaze is fixated on precious stones held between thumb and forefinger, creating the "ancient ficus gesture"—a euphemism for female genitalia.[31] Crucially, Hamilton appears in *Vases* with both of his attributes: an example of an 'Etruscan' vase and a copy of the *AEGR*, laid open to showcase a similar vessel in print form.[32] Although very little is known about how the paintings were encountered, a letter penned by Reynolds to Lord Grantham (a fellow member of the Society), reveals that the canvases were intended to hang at opposite ends of a specially constructed room in the Star and Garter Tavern in Pall Mall. Here, the Society had held its meetings since 1757.[33] This context, in addition to the visual evidence present in the works themselves, suggests that the portraits commemorate both individual members but also their collective ambition. Publishing is an important signifier not only for Hamilton, but for the Society of Dilettanti. If we consider the four portraits together, the production of knowledge unites them thematically. It was through their learned mediation in print that antiquities acquired meaning.

[31] Both Redford and Coltman provide a comprehensive analysis of the sexual allusions found in Reynolds's pendants. Redford, *Dilettanti*, 101. Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain Since 1760*, 175–176.
[32] The vase shown in the text is of a slightly different shape and has a single handle.
[33] Letter from Sir Joshua Reynolds, dated October 1st, 1777, to Lord Grantham. John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe, eds. *Letters of Joshua Reynolds* (New Have: Yale University Press, 2000), 70. Each was hung on a chimneypiece. See Robin Smith, "Reynolds and the double-entendre: The Society of Dilettanti portraits," *The British Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (2001): 75–76. Smith suggests that the paintings may have been in dialogue with other objects and decorative elements in the room.

But crucial to the story that this chapter unfolds is the instability of this position when laid bare to and received by the public. Where many Dilettanti representations sanction texts as the means to circulate and decode artifacts, critics wondered whether it was not through their bodies that Dilettanti sourced their antiquarian wisdom. Take, for example, poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's striking anecdote describing Knight amongst his bronzes. Coleridge recounts that he first met Knight while "engaged with a gentleman in looking over his collection."[34] It was a memorable, if not frightening encounter. He recollects the following:

> By the by, whether it were that the sight of so many bronzes all at once infected my eye, as by looking at the setting sun all objects become purple, or whether there really be a likeness, Mr. Knight's own face represented to my fancy that of a living bronze. It is the hardest countenance I ever beheld in a man of rank and letters.[35]

Dazzled by the reflective surfaces of so many lifelike sculptures, Coleridge wonders if Knight is not one his belongings, a confusion between the animate and inanimate that activates the uncanny.[36] Even after the vision of "living bronze" subsides, the antiquarian remains a dreadfully severe presence, his face retaining the hardness of metal.[37] Moving with an eighteenth-century fascination with art come to life, this conflation between antiquities and antiquaries was a favourite theme among period diarists. Such accounts offer a counterpoint to the disinterested, authorial voice found in Dilettanti publications. They alert us to the possibility that these highbrow collectors maintained eccentric relationships with artifacts—relationships that blurred the boundaries between stone and flesh. As we will see, this active embrace of possibility: of

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[34] Letter from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, dated Thursday March 8th, 1804, to Sir George Beaumont. William Angus Knight, ed., *Memorials of Coleorton*, (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1887), 1:55. See also Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque*, 17.
[35] Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque*, 17.
[36] Bill Brown, "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny," *Critical Inquiry 32*, no. 2 (2006): 197–99. Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 2, no. 1 (1995): 11–12.
[37] Raimonda Modiano, "Coleridge as Literary Critic: Biographia Literaria and Essays in the Principles of Genial Criticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 222.

sculptures coming to life and of living antiquity, was integral to Dilettanti neoclassicism. Thus, in order to apprehend the semantic consequences of antiquities' reshaping when made public museum property, it is first necessary to map these key pathways of meaning—and their sanction through an aesthetic discourse—that had grown in cloistered, elite privacy.

Townley's erotically charged rapport with his possessions is well documented. Stories told about the famous collector seldom fail to mention that he proclaimed his favourite antique bust, Clytie, to be his wife. His commitment to his stone bride was cemented during the Gordon Riots, when he rescued her alone from the threat of a looming mob reacting against policy that would grant Catholics like Townley more rights in Britain. These are the same slippery borders between art and life that inspired Zoffany to subvert genre conventions in his conversation piece.[38] Returning to the painting once more, we see that the artist upsets our expectations by introducing a household brimming with marbles, not the usual kinsfolk; the familial bonds pictured are those between the collector and his things.[39] The space around the mantelpiece, conventionally reserved for the matriarch in hearth pictures, is given to his marble spouse and choicest specimen.[40] As scholars have argued, the assumed sexuality of this marital union was part of the jest, and his contemporaries were apt to point out with amused concern that Townley was "a little inclined to fornication in virtu" as well as known to "cast a lustful eye" on the marbles of other collectors.[41] Such phrasing consciously confuses the distinction between marble bodies and living women.[42] Zoffany further conflates art and life by calling attention to sculpture's unique sensorial appeal. Greville encircles Clytie, resting one hand on the bookcase

[38] Matthew Craske, "Conversations and Chimneypieces: the imagery of the hearth in eighteenth-century English family portraiture," *British Art Studies* 2 (2016).
[39] Craske, "Conversations and Chimneypieces." See also Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 192.
[40] Craske, "Conversations and Chimneypieces."
[41] Quoted in Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 192.
[42] This was also the language used by dealers to entice Townley to buy. See Al Jamil, "Hidden Dimensions and Elusive Forms," 119.

above her shoulders while caressing the delicate fabric slipping down her arm. The intimate gesture nods to the tactile draw and erotic lure of sculpture which has occupied art theorists and poets since antiquity. Here, Zoffany embraces the associative possibilities of agalmatophilia (sexual desire for statues), recalling for example, the powerful allure of Praxiteles's masterful *Aphrodite of Knidos*.[43] The famous description of the female nude by Pliny the Elder details the marble's sexual magnetism: "People say that a certain man was once seized by desire for the statue and, after hiding there at night he embraced it, leaving behind a stain as a mark of his lust."[44] The myth of Pygmalion and Galatea as told by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* offers a further memorable instance. It is Pygmalion's sexual desire—eros—that animates his sculpted beauty. In fact, we even see an early modern version of the Pygmalion myth unfold at Sir William Hamilton's residence in Naples. His mistress and later wife, Emma Hamilton took advantage of the desire, shared among many Grand Tourists, to see antiquity and sculpture brought to life. Emma created the illusion of living marble during her candlelit performances called *Attitudes*. The series of *tableaux vivants* harnessed the power of eroticism to arrest viewers. Draped in translucent muslin, Emma adopted classical postures inspired by famous sculptures and the painted scenes found on Hamilton's Greek vases.[45] Viewers were struck with the conformity, likening Emma to "a statue of most admirable design."[46] The fantasy thus operated both ways. Sculptures promised to become real, breathing women but women could also transform into

[43] Regina Höschele, "Statues as Sex Objects," in *Sex and the Ancient City: Sex and Sexual Practices in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, eds. Andreas Serafim, George Kazantzidis and Kyriakos Demetriou (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022) 251.
[44] This translation of Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 36.20. by Höschele, "Statues as Sex Objects," 251.
[45] Sarah Carter, "Our Modern Priapus": *Thauma* and the Isernian Simulacra." *Lumen* 39 (2020): 55–77.
See also Ersy Contogouris, "Emma's Attitudes: Movements and Surprising Transformations," in *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth-Century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 66–98.
[46] Éléonore-Adèle d'Osmond, Comtesse de Boigne, *Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne (1781–1814)*, 3 vols., ed. M. Charles Nicoullaud (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907–1908), 1:100.

living antiquities. In fact, this fantastical element is fundamental to freestanding sculpture's aesthetic power. As one scholar argues, "while paintings invite us to enter their world, sculptures are experienced through the possibility that they will enter and become active in our world."[47] If we are to understand the meanings that members of the Society of Dilettanti assigned to artifacts in their collections, we too, must entertain the possibility that human and sculpted bodies could merge or comingle as Coleridge imagines Knight to do. Seen from the point of view of Hamilton's fellow Dilettanti, the collector had fulfilled a Pygmalion prophecy.[48] He possessed Emma as a sculpture in his collection and sexually as his mistress. So, too, did Townley, allowing members of his inner circle to fondle *his* Galatea—further evidence for the intimate link between belonging and belongings in the Society of Dilettanti.

III. Blending in: Homer as Priapus

As seen in the preceding section, members of the Society of Dilettanti performed their shared interests and values in paint. Comparing Zoffany's conversation piece to a miniature of Townley, this section likewise mobilises portraiture to map the association of ideas which generated meanings exclusive to the Society. The theory of the association of ideas enables us to interpret the double entendre and sly sexual innuendo that formed the waggish language and visual culture of the Dilettanti's innermost circle. Providing further clues to the raillery that surely took place during Society meetings, I consider a lively exchange of letters between Townley and Knight. In this correspondence, as in the portraits I will consider, allusion, confusion and resemblance spell hidden meaning. These tactics are seen in the strange synthesis

[47] Hagi Kenaan, "Touching Sculpture," in *Sculpture and Touch*, ed. Peter Dent (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 54.
[48] For a brilliant feminist reading of Emma's agency and innovation see Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth-Century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation*.

that occurs between two ancient Greek figures: the poet Homer and the minor fertility god Priapus.

Hiding in plain sight in Reynolds's aforementioned group portraits, implicit sexuality was essential to the playful, associational dynamics of the Society—that aggregate of former Grand Tourists whose shared passion for the antique, financial resources and social connections allowed the club to graduate from a sociable body into a dominant cultural force. It is particularly visible and vibrant in Dilettanti correspondence. Writing to Townley to express his disapproval at his companion's absenteeism from London in 1785, Knight references an allusive paganism:

> How seducing so ever may be the Charms of your Lancashire Witches I can hardly think them sufficient to detain you among the mountains for so many dreary Months, unless it be true, as I have heard, that one of them has cast such a spell round you - that you are going to be joined to her according to the Act of Matrimony… I paid no Attention to this Report at first but your remaining so long absent from the Gods and Goddesses of Park Street makes me begin to think you have found out some other Object of Adoration. I have paid my respects to them more than once, I cannot express to you how much I was struck with Homer. The Baron's ingenious Note on the Subject rather chagrined, as I should have been pleased in imagining that we had some real Image of that extraordinary Being, who or whatever he was, for his History is as much conjectural as his Portraits.[49]

Contrasting the spurious charms of local prostitutes (the "Lancashire Witches") against "the Gods and Goddesses of Park Street," Knight casts the collection of marbles as a personal pantheon.[50] But more instructive still for diagramming the furtive pathways of connoisseurial meaning is Knight's foregrounding of a bust of Homer, a crucial artifact for both men since their devotion to the antique was of a piece with their admiration for that "extraordinary being." So

[49] Letter from Richard Payne Knight dated 1st of March 1785 at Whitehall to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum, TY7/2082.

[50] See a Letter from Thomas Jenkins dated 9th, November 1768, to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum TY7/298. Herein Jenkins refers to visiting the Penates of other genteel collectors. Quoted in Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 190–191. In Rome, Penates included local gods worshipped by the community as well as gods with personal or familial significance. Harriet I. Flower, *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 48.

essential was this allegiance, that the poet reappears in several portraits of Townley: Zoffany's famous conversation piece and a pencil miniature by John Brown [Fig.33]. The former is the more emphatic of the pair. Zoffany sets his bust of Homer directly above Townley to indicate a physiognomic resemblance between their profiles. They look alike. But he also creates the illusion of an erect phallus with the careful placement of a cap and cane leaning against the pedestal. Matthew Craske puts the compositional stunt in no uncertain terms: "The impression is of an erection, silhouetted against the light of a curtained window."[51] He transforms the bust into an ithyphallic herm, akin to those proliferating in Townley's collection [Fig. 34]. While phallic herms represented different fertility gods in the ancient world, they were closely associated with Priapus in the eighteenth century.[52] Thus, Zoffany visually connects three distinct figures.

Such covert triangulations between Townley, Priapus and Homer could have been licensed in the period via the association of ideas, a theory that married psychology and aesthetics.[53] Association was a form of cognitive conditioning that saw ideas linked together through trains of thought in the mind. Knight diligently engaged in these conversations, publishing his own treatise on the subject in 1805.[54] But his *An Enquiry into the Principles of Taste* was much indebted to previous studies including Joseph Priestley's *Lectures on Criticism* (1777) and Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790). [55] Alison, for one, argued that aesthetic taste was the sum of the association of ideas occurring in the mind of the individual. Building on these conclusions, Knight similarly advanced the idea that taste

[51] Craske, "Conversations and Chimneypieces: The Imagery of the Hearth in Eighteenth-Century English Family Portraiture."
[52] Giancarlo Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1996).
[53] Martin Kallich, *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England: A History of a psychological Method in English Criticism* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 1970).
[54] H. F. Clark, "Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque Tradition," *The Town Planning Review* 19, no. 3/4 (1947): 144.
[55] Kallich, *The Association of Ideas*, 234.

"was a matter of [personal] feeling."[56] Beyond its physiological stimulation, a landscape painting by Claude Lorraine could increase a viewer's pleasure by recalling, say, a verse found in Virgil.[57] Associations thus favored those trained in the classics as well as owners of cultural property; the more associations annexed, the greater the aesthetic pleasure would be. Knight put it this way:

> As all the pleasures of intellect arise from the association of ideas, the more materials of association are multiplied, the more will the sphere of these pleasures be enlarged. To a mind richly stored, almost every object of nature or art, that presents itself to the senses, either excites fresh trains and combinations of ideas, or vivifies and strengthens those which existed before so that recollection enhances enjoyment and enjoyment brightens recollection.[58]

In his book, Knight also relied on ideas advanced by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. Hume theorised that the association of ideas operated according to three principles: resemblance, contiguity and causation. Each principle worked to aid in the formation of ideas. On resemblance, for example, Hume observed that "our imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that *resembles* it, and that this quality alone is to the fancy a sufficient bond and association."[59] Put plainly, things that look alike create a natural bridge—one that brings to mind the other. The closer the resemblance, the stronger the impression. I will suggest in what follows that this theory can assist us in understanding the peculiar relationship between Homer and Priapus emphasised in Zoffany's painting.

[56] Knight, *Principles of Taste*, 3.
[57] Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque*, 143.
[58] Knight, *Principles of Taste*, 143.
[59] David Hume, "Of the Connection or Association of Ideas," in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888 [1739]), 11.

Homer remained an emblem of cultural potency well into the late eighteenth century.[60] His prominence in both Dilettanti portraiture and scholarship suggests that antiquarians found in Homer a powerful means for engaging with the ancients. In addition to a shared interest in his life and work, Townley and Knight were also captivated by his likeness. The pair were keen to discover an accurate portrait of the poet, a problem auxiliary to the "Homeric question," which considered his identity and his authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[61] The eighteenth century witnessed Homer remade, cast in a multitude of cultural roles from impoverished bard to grand philosopher poet.[62] As one scholar has argued of this revival and reinvention, the British intelligentsia were "seeking in the epic poet a myth by which to explain [their] own complex myths of tradition and originality."[63] In the cultural milieu specific to the Society of Dilettanti, Homer became a vehicle for investigating human nature, the origins and progress of art and the sublime.[64]

Homer's perceived artistic genius underwrote the association with Priapus that figures furtively in Zoffany's painting. For the Baron d'Hancarville, the bard inspired a revolution in the arts among the ancient Greeks:

> Homer taught them [the Greeks] to express beauty, which he spoke so much about, which he praised everywhere, and to which he sometimes gave rules. Reading his poems later taught [them] to seek ideal beauty, which alone was able to represent divine figures…

[60] See Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750–1810* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 47–75. Thomas Blackwell's *Inquiry into the Life and the Writings of Homer*, for example, elevated the bard to the status of "Ur-poet." This text was popular in Europe, especially in Germany where it found a receptive audience among the *stürmer und dränger*. Karen Junod, "Henry Fuseli's Pragmatic Use of Aesthetics: His Epic Illustrations of *Macbeth*," *Word & Image* 19 no. 3 (2003): 138–150.
[61] Maureen N. Mclane and Laura M. Slatkin, "British Romantic Homer: Oral Tradition, "Primitive Poetry" and the Emergence of Comparative Poetics in Britain, 1760–1830," *ELH* 78, no. 3 (2011): 688.
[62] Maureen N. Mclane and Laura M. Slatkin, "British Romantic Homer," 689.
[63] Kirsti Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth-Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic* (1688–1798) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 155.
[64] Mclane and Slatkin, "British Romantic Homer," 691.

> [and] the superiority of the artists' genius managed to equal the majesty of the gods they represented."[65]

He is described as no less than a divine prophet: "guided by the sublimity of his genius, Homer, without almost any help, saw into the darkness of the future, and prophesised, so to speak, the great things done by the arts, several centuries after him."[66] Homer, for Knight too, was a visionary, and his passion for the ancient poet coloured many of his scholarly pursuits.[67] In *Specimens of Antient Sculpture, Aegyptian, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman,* published in 1809, he argued that Homer elevated the minds of his contemporaries, forming their taste with a "transcendent genius" one that "still bursts upon us like the rays of the sun, which traverse the immensity of space with undiminished brightness, and diffuse life and motion through the universe."[68] Waxing poetic, his language equates Homer with Primal Eros, the "ruling Priapus" who is said to "pervade the world with the motion of his wings, bringing pure light."[69] Although published much later than Townley's portraits, it is this quasi-religious admiration for the creative force of the "Ur-poet" shared between d'Hancarville, Knight and Townley that likely led Zoffany to blend Priapic and Homeric iconography.

In addition to featuring in intellectual debate, Homer likewise materialised in Townley's museum. The collector owned two busts of the ancient Greek, one of which appeared alongside

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[65] [my translstion] "Homere leur apprit à exprimer la Beauté, dont il tant parlé, dont il par-tout il fait l'éloge, & dont il donne quelquefois les rêgles. La lecture de ses poêmes enseigna dans la suite à rechercher la Beauté idéale, qui seule étoit capable de représenter des figures Divines: la richesse des matieres, bien-tôt surpassée par la beauté des ouvrages, ne fut plus considérée que comme accessoire à des statues, où la superiorité du Génie des artistes, parvint à éegaler la majesté des Dieux qu'ils représentent." Baron D'Hancarville, *Antiquités Etrusques, Grecques, et Romaines Tirées du Cabinet de M. Hamilton*, 4 vols. (Naples, 1766–76), 2:310–317.

[66] [my translation] "ainsi, guidé par la sublimité de son génie, Homere, sans presqu'aucun secours, vit dans l'obscurite de l'avenir, & prophetisa, pour ainsi dire, les grandes choses ececutees par les Arts, plusiers siecles apres lui," D'Hancarville, *AEGR*, 4:118.

[67] Nicholas Penny, "Richard Payne Knight: A Brief Life," 10.

[68] Knight, *Specimens of Antient Sculpture*, xii–xiii.

[69] Knight, *Discourse*, 33. Carter, "'Our Modern Priapus,'" 71.

Clytie and Pericles on his visiting card [Fig. 35] (a circulating invitation that advertised the collection). Homer was likewise the subject of a widely disseminated drawing by John Brown, afterwards engraved by Mariano Bovi [Fig. 36]. Writing to Townley in 1786, Knight expressed his approval of the Scottish artist that Townley had met in Italy and commissioned to translate his bust onto paper:

> The Print of Homer which you are so good as to send me is excellent – indeed much more so than I could have supposed any of our Artists capable of producing. It gives one a perfect idea of the original, tis the first engraved Head of the old Bard that looks like a great Poet instead of a blind ballad Singer… I hope Brown & Bovi will go on, & engrave some of the other very fine Heads in your collection, which I am persuaded will amply repay them as well as be a very valuable Acquisition to the Public.[70]

Despite being a "conjectural portrait" Brown had skillfully captured the essence of the old bard. The drawing was held in such high esteem that when Zoffany's conversation piece was proposed for an engraving in 1802, Townley requested to have the bust remodelled after Brown's exceptional likeness.[71]

The Homer also appears in the miniature portrait of Townley that Brown completed around the same time as his celebrated drawing (c.1786) [Fig. 33].[72] The collector is pictured sitting with his left arm hooked over the back of a chair, directly facing the sculpture. Scholars have been hesitant to cast the unidentified head as Homer. Not only is he missing the "sort of diadem, formed of a strip" that d'Hancarville notes consistently appeared in portraits of the ancient Greek, but he also looks much younger than the bust in Townley's collection.[73]

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[70] Letter from Richard Payne Knight, dated November 5th 1786 to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum, TY/7/2092. Townley sent the engraving to multiple friends.
[71] Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760*, 245. Coltman notes that the engraving was not realised.
[72] There remains uncertainty as to when the drawing was made. Coltman dates it c. 1786, while other accounts suggest that it may have been done in Rome during the mid 1770s. If it is, in fact, Townley's bust of Homer, the former date would be more likely since Townley purchased the bust from Gavin Hamilton in 1780 and received it in 1784.
[73] [my translation] "*Diadême*, formé d'une *bandelette…*" D'Hancarville, *AEGR*, 2:297.

However, if we focus on the privilege of association when engaging with artifacts, the importance of documentary resemblance recedes. D'Hancarville, after all, highlighted the instability of Homer's appearance; his "traits, chosen differently by artists, whose imaginations and feeling were not the same, were for this reason expressed very differently."[74] When Knight refers to having "been pleased in imagining that we had some real Image of that extraordinary being," he was referring to a passage in the *Recherches* in which d'Hancarville undermines the possibility of attaining a *true* likeness. Discussing an ancient bas-relief depicting Homer as Jupiter, d'Hancarville imagined the artist imbuing his depiction with the feeling or spirit of Homeric verse. The diversity of reader experiences would elicit a miscellany of associations in the mind, accounting for discrepancies between portraits: "the heads represent not so much the person but the genius."[75] Pursuing embodied idea over actual resemblance was "an effect of the artistic intelligence of the ancients."[76] Read thus, the Homer featured in the miniature portrait was a product of Brown's imagination, not a faithful reproduction.

That Townley goes head-to-head with Homer, so to speak, is likewise suggested by the position of his right index finger, which marks the page of his book. He looks up momentarily from reading.[77] While we cannot know for sure if he is reading Homer or the work of some other author, the inclusion of the volume highlights Townley's intellectual engagement. He performs his identity as a collector but one with enough learning to commune with the great minds of the

[74] [my translation] "Ces *traits* différemment choisis, par des artistes, dont l'imagination & le sentiment n'étoient pas les mêmes, furent par cette raison rendu très-différemment." D'Hancarville, *AEGR*, 2:315.
[75] [my translation] "Ces idées personifiées ont éteé rendues sous les traits d'un homme ordinairement privé de la vue, comme on sait quel le fut Homere, dont les têtes ne représentent pas tant la Persone que le Génie." D'Hancarville, *AEGR*, 2:313.
[76] [my translation] "un effet de l'intelligence de l'Art des anciens…" D'Hancarville, *AEGR*, 2:313.
[77] It is perhaps worth noting that Townley was also the owner of an important eleventh-century manuscript of Homer's *Iliad* which he purchased at auction in 1773 and is now held in the British Library. But the "Townley Homer," is larger than the book pictured here.

past. That both men are shown in profile is also important. Their expressions mirror one another. Homer looks down while Townley gazes intently ahead. Both are absorbed in "great thoughts," a marker of sublimity in visual representation. These correspondences highlight further the associative potential of resemblance, inviting the viewer to conduct a physiognomic experiment not unlike the one performed by Zoffany.[78] Physiognomic theory supported the idea that a correlation existed between visible surface and invisible spirit.[79] The pseudoscience, with roots extending as far back as classical antiquity, had already been discredited once in the early modern period. However, it experienced a revival precisely at the moment in which Brown was training as an artist in Italy. Brown was surely engaging directly with the writings of the Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801) during the 1770s when he moved in the circle of the physiognomist's childhood companion, the aspiring painter Henry Fuseli.[80] Lavater's status and ambition encouraged widespread support of the idea that the face could be measured, compared and interpreted to reveal the personality traits of individuals.[81] Translated into French and English, his publications saw physiognomy reintegrated into popular culture across Europe.[82] This pictorial technique would have also appealed to his patron. In many ways, physiognomy was a connoisseurial science. Its reliance on the recognition of empirical particulars and visual comparison resembled Townley's own antiquarian sensibilities. One scholar has described how its logic suggested that images alongside bodies constituted "physical

[78] Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 185.
[79] Melissa Percival and Graeme Tyler, eds. *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater's Impact on European Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 25.
[80] His first volume of the *Physiognomische Fragmente* was published in 1775.
[81] Alexander Todorov, *Face Value: The Irresistible Influences of First Impressions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 15; See Annette Graczyk, "Constructs of Life Forms in Lavater's Physiognomy," in *Life Forms in the Thinking of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Michael Baker and Jenna Gibbs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
[82] Kathryn Wood, "'Facing' Identity in a 'Faceless' Society: Physiognomy, Facial Appearance and Identity Perception in Eighteenth-Century London," *Cultural and Social History* 14, no. 2 (2017): 142.

enigmas [and] were indicative of hidden causes legible only to specialized interpreters."[83] Townley already had one in-house specialist promising to interpret "esoteric signs" in the form of artifacts in his own collection.[84] Indeed, d'Hancarville's diligent use of comparative techniques developed a similarly complex system, one that was similarly available only to those 'in the know.' It is thus not hard to imagine that Townley found physiognomy alluring. Not only did it offer the kind of insider knowledge he coveted, but it also had pertinent applications for interpreting art. Sculpted bodies could be read just as well as real ones.

In keeping with physiognomic method, Brown privileges the outline of Townley's face in his portrait. The viewer examines his countenance vis-à-vis its relationship to the bust whose own carefully defined nose and forehead resemble that of his living counterpart. According to Lavater, semblance of features equated semblance of mind. While Brown's juxtaposition naturally invites the viewer to compare facial structures, a second clue toward this intention is found at lower right. Brown has drawn a second profile in faint pencil, facing the same direction as his sitter [Fig. 37]. Making subtle changes in the shape of the nose and chin with layers of line, it suggests a working method attentive to physiognomic ideas. As we have seen, Zoffany also positioned Homer in physiognomic relation to Townley. His playful ruse with the cap and cane reframed the poet as a Priapic figure. Using an association of ideas particular to Townley's intimate circle, Zoffany depicts Homer but alludes to Priapus. Seen together, the portraits create a powerful visual connection between two fertile minds.

The position of the bust in Brown's drawing also suggests a cultural proximity—Homer in conversation with the moderns. This emphasis on dialogue is worth pursuing. Knight, for one,

[83] Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 84.
[84] Stafford, *Body Criticism*, 84.

was embedded in a European debate concerning Homeric genius, which increasingly embraced the bard's orality.[85] Knight explains that "the age of Homer is … so much anterior to all monuments of art, or authentic records of history, that we cannot even tell whether or not he had the knowledge of any letters."[86] The budding classicist does not unequivocally state that Homer was illiterate, but he licenses his demotic qualities. Homer was classed among the blind poets (including Ossian and Milton) whose visual impairment became associated with unbounded creativity among Enlightenment thinkers.[87] He signified a "vernacular antiquity," one dissociated with the decorum and pedantic scholarship that Knight argued would have dulled his brilliance.[88] Writing in response to the German scholar Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), Knight emphasised Homer's "luminous simplicity:"

> the original hearers of the poems were not so critical as to inquire into the reason for such incidents; nor did their credibility depend on nice questions of congruity; students of Homer must be constantly reminded that the old bards did not use the language of professors, did not sing to scholars and grammarians or to any such subtle critics; their hearers were men who indulged their feelings freely and openly and undisguisedly, who had not overlaid their natural emotions with philosophy and the learning of the schools, or blunted their force by the refinement of civilization.[89]

Unrefined maybe, but Homer's unmediated natural feeling was the source of his genius. Sir Thomas Lawrence captured this rustic oral power in *Homer Reciting his Verses* [Fig. 38], a painting completed for Knight in 1790. Encircling the ancient bard, Lawrence depicts those very "hearers" described in the *Prolegomenon* as men of feeling. In keeping with Homer's image as a primal creative force, the scene takes place in a natural clearing. Homer commands our attention

[85] McLane and Slatkin, "British Romantic Homer," 690. See Messmann, *The Twilight of Virtuosity*, 127–132.
[86] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Essay on the Greek Alphabet* (London: printed by J. Nichols for P. Elmsly, 1791), 19.
[87] Georgina Cole, "Blindness and Creativity in Romney's Milton and His Daughters," *Art History* 43, no. 1 (2020): 185.
[88] McLane and Slatkin, "British Romantic Homer," 690.
[89] Translated by M. L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 141. Originally written in Latin in Knight's *Carmina Homerica*, *Ilias et Odyssea* (London: 1808), xxiii.

at the centre of the composition, extending his right arm as if to hush the murmur of his audience. Shown clutching his lyre to his chest with eyes closed, Lawrence alludes to his blindness and inspired, musical oratory.

Returning to the miniature portrait of Townley with Lawrence's picture and Knight's dialogic emphasis in mind, we may reconsider the sitter's carefully delineated ear. It invites us to imagine that Townley sits listening to Homer's *poesis*, if only in his mind's eye. In contrast to official Dilettanti portraits, wherein sitters fashioned themselves as grave authors of learned books, Brown's miniature discloses the *unwritten* side of the antiquarian's world. Using allusion, confusion and resemblance, the Townley circle cast Homer as an embodiment of ancient Priapic spirit. It was for this reason that Knight also invited comparison between himself and the rustic philosopher poet. The 4th Earl of Aberdeen expressed his personal aversion to bearing "such a close resemblance to the sturdy hero of Homer as may be discovered in our friend Knight," but others evidently wished to cultivate such correspondences.[90] It was characteristic for this homosocial group of antiquarians, members of what this chapter terms "the modern cult of Priapus." Their engagement with antiquities aspired to draw the ancients closer—Homer into intimate conversation and Clytie into warm embrace.

IV. The Case of the *Ex Voti* and the *Museum Secretum*

Membership in the modern cult of Priapus required observances best conducted out of the public eye. A series of humorous allusions to ancient Greek custom and modern circumstance proceed one another in letters exchanged among its elite votaries. In a letter to Townley penned in 1784, Knight blends erotic humour with sacrilegious reversal:

[90] Letter from Lord Aberdeen dated 23rd September 1816 to Uvedale Price; Aberdeen Papers, British Library, 43228 f. 61.

> Your having lived 3 months in the country seems to me an Event so extraordinary that I cannot help thinking some Miracle has been wrought to convert you. I bring you back to the Way of Grace. I have no doubt indeed that the Charms of your Wood Nymphs are very seducing, but could never have thought them sufficient to have detained you so long from paying your devotions to those Pagan Idols which you have set up in Park Street. The Wood Nymphs are also very apt to exert their Talents in Propagation, which together with the Fear of the Itch & doctor's commons (from both of which I have had some narrow Escapes) have induced me to build a Nymphaeum of my own at which I pay my devotions regularly, as a pious man ought to. The little κυανοφξυς whom you have seen & heard of, acts as Priestess, & is, I assure you, very expert in the duties of her Office. I am so well contented with the quiet Way of life, that I shall certainly continue here to the Middle of January, if not longer.[91]

Thinly veiled, the suggestion here is that prostitutes, not mythical creatures, have prevented Townley from returning to London. Knight clearly sympathised. The letter suggests that he had been induced to construct a Nymphaeum (brothel) of his own to prevent venereal disease (the Itch referred to scabies) and unwanted attention from the jurors of the Doctor's Commons, an ecclesiastical legal body that ruled on spiritual and moral offences.[92] But again, Knight expresses his surprise at his companion's prolonged absence from his ruling passion. This, of course, was his collection of antiquities, or "Pagan Idols" as Knight calls them. Exchanging Greek mottos with associations to phallic artifacts or discussing the pleasures of time spent with "nymphs" in the forests around Herefordshire and Lancashire, each member in this elite group performs his ancient learning, scintillating wit and pagan credentials.[93] Yet, what is crucial to recognise is that

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[91] Letter from Richard Payne Knight dated 1784 at Downton Castle to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum, TY/7/2081. The Doctor's Commons was an ecclesiastical legal body that ruled on spiritual and moral offences. This word appears in Daniel Scott's classical Greek dictionary, *Appendix as Thesaurum Graecae linguae ab Hen. Stephano constructum; et ad Lexica Constantini & Scapulae*, published in folio in 1745 and 1746. Daniel Scott, *Appendix ad Thesaurum Graecae linguae ab Hen. Stephano constructum; et ad Léxica Constantini & Scapulae* (London: Jac. Bettenham, 1745–46), 2:223. Scott includes κυανοφξυς and references Theocritus' Idyll 18, *The Marriage Song for Helen*, which describes Helen as a tree goddess. See Maria C. Pantelia, "Theocritus at Sparta: Homeric Allusions in Theocritus' Idyll 18," *Hermes* 123, no. 1 (1995): 76–81.

[92] Noelle Gallagher, *Itch, Clap, Pox: Venereal Disease in the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

[93] See also the letter from Sir Joseph Banks, dated December 13th at Soho Square to Charles Townley, Townley Archive; British Museum TY 7/1838. Banks declares "My Dear Sir / Soter Cosmas or ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ which I

these debates were not merely the stuff of free-thinking connoisseurs inclined to libertinage since the artifacts at their center would be donated to Britain's premier collection: the British Museum. How collectors envisioned such "Pagan idols" incorporated into the Museum is a pertinent question. Neither histories of the institution nor those of individual benefactors have addressed it. This section, along with those that follow, considers this gap. Here, I will focus on the early patronage of Sir William Hamilton.

First, we must understand what kind of institution the British Museum was at its outset. In 1753, the British parliament passed a bill to consolidate three important collections that needed a new home: the Cottonian Library, the Harleian manuscripts and the collection of Sir Hans Sloane. These three discrete entities would form the nucleus of the new "British Museum." Its first collections were thus primarily manuscripts and specimens of natural history, although Sloane's bequest was decidedly eclectic, comprising natural and manmade curiosities from across the globe.[94] As decided by the same act of parliament, the Museum would be governed by a board of forty-one trustees, consisting of such illustrious figures as the Lord Chancellor, the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Archbishop of Canterbury.[95] Other state officials and leading members of notable London institutions such as the Royal Society and the College of Physicians were likewise appointed alongside six family trustees (two for each of the founding collections: Sloane, Cotton and Harley).[96] Installed at Montagu House on Great Russell Street in

write in Greek characters to prove as an Irishman would do that I cannot write Greek." Banks was referring to the infamous statue in the Papal collection that had likewise appeared on Plate II of the *Discourse.* It depicted a creature half man, half rooster with a phallus for a beak and ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ (Savior of the World) inscribed at its base.

[94] James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[95] Wilson, *The British Museum*, 21.

[96] Wilson, *The British Museum*, 21. Jonathan Williams, "Parliaments, Museums, Trustees, and the Provision of Public Benefit in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2013): 213.

Bloomsbury, the new Museum also hired a small staff. It employed a Principal Librarian, three Under Librarians and three Assistant Librarians to manage three departments: Natural and Artificial Productions; Printed Books; and Manuscripts, Coins and Medals. In 1758, a Keeper for the Reading Room was added.

Access to the Museum during these early years was highly restrictive. Gentlemen were admitted to the Reading Room by trustee permission as early as 1753, but even they had limited use of the collections. They were allowed to consult books, prints, drawings, natural history materials and presumably antiquities, but only under the close scrutiny of the librarians.[97] In 1759, the institution was officially opened to the public. Access to the galleries was free, but tickets needed to be applied for in advance and approved by the board of trustees.[98] On Mondays and Thursdays, authorised groups of visitors would be guided through the galleries along a predetermined route.[99] Only slowly and with much deliberation on the part of the trustees did the Museum become more accessible. By the 1780s, anyone with sufficient time and patience to procure a ticket could participate in a guided tour. At this time, visitors were not permitted to wander the galleries alone.

During these early years the collections grew gradually. The Museum had very little funding, so new materials were accumulated primarily by donation. The antiquities collection was modest, although the institution did manage to purchase a set of Greek vases from Sir William Hamilton in 1772 for £8,410.[100] These were housed in the department of Natural and Artificial Productions until 1807, when a new department of antiquities was created (to which

[97] Wilson, *The British Museum*, 37.
[98] Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet*: *A History of the British Museum* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 1974), 63.
[99] Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 320.
[100] This vote took place on March 20th, 1772. See *Acts and Votes of Parliament Relating to the British Museum*, *with the Statutes and Rules Thereof, and the Succession of Trustees and Officers* (London: Cox and Baylis, 1814), 81.

Taylor Combe was appointed as Keeper). Prior to this moment, the British Museum channeled its resources into its foundational departments. It was perhaps for this reason that Hamilton's relationship with the institution was less than ideal.[101] Despite the purchase of his vase collection, it soon became clear that the Museum had other priorities. If in 1772, Hamilton could dictate how his collection should be shown—indicating in which rooms and in which cabinets—such influence did not last long.[102]

Hamilton became disillusioned with the Museum following the disregard of its staff toward a series of gifts that he made to the institution in the 1770s. In 1774, Hamilton presented the trustees with a Roman bowl cast in bronze supported on a folding tripod. In 1775, he gave a Roman marble candelabrum dubbed the "Capri Altar," and in 1776, he donated a selection of Roman sculptures including a bust of Hercules [fig. 39].[103] But Hamilton was dissatisfied with the treatment of these artifacts. He expressed his growing irritation in a letter written to his nephew, Charles Greville. Away at Caserta in southern Italy, he pressed Greville to intercede on his behalf:

> Do let the Hercules bust be well placed, [Gavin] Hamilton declares the head is better than that of the Farnese. The presents I have made, & have further to make to the Museum since my return here have, I am sure, cost me near £300, tho' the old dons do not so much as thank me when I send a work of art. They are delighted with a spider or a shell, & send me many thanks for such presents. I do not care, it is the honour of the Hamiltonian collection that spurs me on.[104]

The lack of gratitude detailed in Hamilton's note is not surprising since the trustees valued and promoted the natural history collection above any other during this period. But what is intriguing

[101] Nancy H. Ramage charts Hamilton's relationship with the British Museum through his correspondence with Greville. See Ramage, "Sir William Hamilton as Collector," 469–480.
[102] See Wilson, *The British Museum*, 47. The British Museum Archive CE4/I, f. 275.
[103] Ramage, "Sir William Hamilton as Collector, Exporter, and Dealer," 477.
[104] Quoted in Ramage, "Sir William Hamilton as Collector, Exporter, and Dealer," 477. See A. Morrison, *The Hamilton and Nelson Papers* (London: Printed for private circulation, 1893–94), 1:44.

is the fact that Hamilton envisioned his antique gifts as contributions to the "Hamiltonian collection," which he described as if a constituent part of the British Museum. The letter suggests that new acquisitions such as the Hercules bust would increase the prestige of his namesake entity within the broader context of the institution.[105] Notwithstanding Hamilton's anxieties, the Hercules was given a prominent position at the apex of the grand staircase in Montagu House. Greville, nevertheless, contended that the bust was "not felt by them [the curators] … at least some of them [who] going [on] their rounds observed 'Well, at least we have enough antiquity now.'"[106] One exception to such thinking was the presentation of additional Greek vases. These could be added to complete the collection already housed in the Museum and were thus duly received. Sculpture, on the other hand, was less easily integrated and therefore more likely to be shuffled into storage. To address this problem, Hamilton modified his approach. He decided to retain some of his better pieces and ensure their wider circulation via print instead. His letter of 1790 clarifies his rationale:

> A treasure of Greek, commonly called Etruscan, vases have been found within these twelve months, the choice of which are in my possession, tho' at a considerable expense. I do not mean to be such a fool as to give or leave them to the British Museum, but I will contrive to have them published without any expense to myself, and artists and antiquarians will have the greatest obligation to me.[107]

Hamilton affirms that a lavishly illustrated book was a practical alternative for promoting a collection (even better if someone else paid for it). If made available to both English and

[105] Hamilton was not the only affiliate to identify personally with a national museum. As Andrew McClellan has shown, the Comte d'Angiviller likewise dubbed the construction of the Grand Gallery in the Louvre "my project." See Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51.
[106] Morrison, *The Hamilton and Nelson Papers*, 1:75.
[107] Letter from Sir William Hamilton, Caserta dated March 2nd, 1790, to Charles Greville. A. Morrison, *The Hamilton and Nelson* Papers, 1:142. This volume was published as *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases Mostly of Pure Greek Workmanship discovered in Sepulchres in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies but chiefly in the Neighbourhood of Naples* … (Naples: Wilhelm Tischbein, 1791–1795).

continental audiences, publications could accrue cultural capital across geographic boundaries. Moreover, it allowed Hamilton to maintain control over how his antiquities were shown and thus received—a marked contrast to the absence of control he exerted over artifacts given to the British Museum. Finally, as Viccy Coltman has argued, his earlier book designer the Baron d'Hancarville was even bold enough to have his artists "improve" the vases engraved for the *AEGR*, visually restoring imperfections and reworking the painted designs.[108] Print allowed Hamilton to present his collection in its ideal form.

These considerations notwithstanding, when Hamilton found compelling evidence for the survival of a cult of Priapus in rural Abruzzo some years later, he looked again to the British Museum. This choice is curious. As we have seen, Hamilton was not convinced that the Museum's interests were aligned with his own. Moreover, the artifacts he wished to house in the national repository were erotic in content. Why would Hamilton and other members of the Society of Dilettanti deem a public space—one focused predominantly on natural history and manuscripts—the best destination for erotically charged antiquities? Consider the correspondence between Sir William Hamilton and Sir Joseph Banks from April 1782 concerning devotions "still paid to PRIAPUS." Through his network of local informants, Hamilton had learned of a Christian festival celebrated in the remote town of Isernia. Blending Catholic piousness and pagan rite, the female inhabitants of the impoverished community gathered to present votive offerings (*Ex Voti*) to the saints Cosmus and Damianus. The women placed their devotions in the vestibule of the local church in exchange for the blessing of fertility. Hamilton was intrigued with one aspect of the festival in particular: the beeswax votives were cast in the shape of phalluses. He confessed that "there are also waxen vows, that represent other

[108] Coltman, "Sir William Hamilton's Vase Publications (1766–1776)," 1–16.

parts of the body mixed with them," but added assuredly that "there are few in comparison of the number of Priapi."[109] It was a practice that would offend Catholic sensibilities under normal circumstances, but the region's inaccessibility had allowed this religious observance to continue. Only with the construction of a new road had the annual fête come to light. Lucky for Hamilton, his source had been one of its engineers.

While the wax phalluses (or *Ex Voti* as Hamilton called them) recovered through Hamilton's research would become the prompt for Knight's *Discourse* as examined in the previous chapter, the institutional transaction underpinning Hamilton's letter is worth stressing. That is, Hamilton requested Banks to liaise on his behalf with Dr. Daniel Charles Solander (1733–1782), the Swedish botanist who had served as Keeper of the natural history collections at the British Museum since 1773. Hoping to find in the Museum a permanent home for the *Ex Voti*, Hamilton highlights the need for Solander's curatorial expertise this way:

> I have waited in vain for a good opportunity of sending Solander the collection of Ex Voti representing the great Toes of St. Cosmo, they are too valuable to be risked at Sea during the war & too fragile to be sent by land, I hope however to place them safely one of these days in the museum – en attendant excuse the liberty I take of inclosing Solanders letter to you – you will find an exact drawing of the precious originals and a true account of the Feast of our modern Priapus in the inclosed which I have left with[out] applying Seal that you may have the first reading.[110]

The letter is surprising insofar as Hamilton's desire to see his unusual collection of waxen vows installed in the Museum is enough to pronounce them "too valuable" to be shipped via conventional methods. Clearly, Hamilton thought that he had stumbled upon something extraordinary since he insists on delivering the "great Toes of St. Cosmo" in person. But his

[109] Knight, *Discourse*, 9.

[110] Letter from Sir William Hamilton, dated April 23rd, 1782 at Naples to Sir Joseph Banks. British Library Add MS 34048, ff. 16. Dr Daniel Charles Solander (1733–1782) was a Swedish botanist who studied under Linnaeus. He moved to London in 1760 and served as Keeper of the natural history collections in the British Museum beginning in 1773. It is in this capacity that Hamilton references him since Hamilton intended to gift the Ex Voti to the museum. Banks likely acts as an intermediary between Hamilton and Solander because of their close acquaintance. Solander accompanied Banks on the *Endeavour* voyage under Captain James Cook between 1768–71.

confidence in their suitability for the British Museum provokes further questions. How would the votives have been apprehended in this context?

In the 1780s, Hamilton's idea of the British Museum was still closer in concept to the private cabinets of the preceding century than the modern, public institution that the British Museum would become in the following.[111] Thus, when the Earl of Pembroke Henry Herbert wrote to Hamilton in 1781 that he "shall like to see our Matrons handling the great toe of Santo Cosmo in the British Museum," he was likely being facetious.[112] The comment entertains the possibility of an encounter between British ladies and the disembodied casts, but Hamilton had likely not envisioned casual visitors engaging with the *Ex Voti* in the galleries. Rather, he imagined the Museum as forming essential infrastructure for knowledge production in Britain—a space for scholars to gather material "facts" or for artists to study.[113] While placing the votives on display at Montagu House was not unthinkable, the fragile "proofs" were probably intended for storage until researchers requested to see them in the Reading Room. Then, as now, this liminal space allowed for "privileged access" to the storerooms and archives.[114] The *Ex Voti*, Hamilton hoped, would be studied alongside similar artifacts already in the collection by those pursuing studies in comparative religion or adjacent fields.

Scholars have stressed the ways in which comparison emerged as a crucial analytic tactic for beholders engaging with artifacts of unfamiliar belief systems.[115] Within the conceptual framework of a nascent universal museum, one which formed the evidentiary basis of

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[111] McClellan charts a similar transition at the Louvre under d'Angiviller. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 50.
[112] Letter from the Earl of Pembroke, Hampton Court, to Sir William Hamilton, dated May 1st, 1781. Morrison, *The Hamilton and Nelson Papers*, 1:70.
[113] Hamilton conceptualised his natural history gifts along the same lines. See Kim Sloan and Andrew Burnett, eds., *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 21.
[114] Mirjam Brusius and Kavita Singh, eds., *Museum Storage and Meaning Tales from the Crypt* (London: Routledge, 2017), 4.
[115] Peter N. Miller, "The Antiquary's Art of Comparison: Pereisc and Abraxas*," in *Peiresc's Orient Antiquarianism as Cultural History in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2012), 38–74.

Enlightenment scholarship, comparison substantiated connections between both natural and cultural phenomena. It was a particularly viable method for historical cultural studies. Hamilton intended his findings apprehended in the Museum through such comparative techniques. As he put it, having found

> … that the Women and Children of the lower class, at Naples, and in the neighborhood, frequently wore, as an ornament of dress, sort of Amulets, (which they imagine to be a preservative from the *mal occhii, evil eyes,* enchantment) exactly similar to those which were worn by the ancient Inhabitants of this Country for the very same purpose, as likewise for their supposed invigorating influence; all of which have evidently a relation to the Cult of Priapus. Struck with this conformity in modern and ancient superstition, I made a collection of both the ancient and modern Amulets of this sort, and placed them together in the BRITISH MUSEUM, where they remain.[116]

Hamilton highlights similitude between ancient and modern practices. His amulets were crucial evidence for "conformities" between them, and his votives likewise functioned as "fresh proof of the similitude of the Popish and Pagan Religion."[117] As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the aims of the comparative framework that structured the *Discourse* was to expose the "impurity" of Catholicism. "I mean to deposit the authentic proofs of this assertion in the BRITISH MUSEUM," so wrote Hamilton regarding his motives.[118] But his concerns were also art historical insofar as his unusual collection suggested the survival of phallic *forms*. While of modern manufacture, the votives were understood to be continuous with the past in shape and meaning. That is, they were material evidence for the improbable survival of a ritual practice that venerated the phallus.[119] But this living history would only be at its most vibrant and visible

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[116] Knight, *Discourse*, 4–5.
[117] Mary Helen McMurran argues that comparison served a number of Protestant writers who used similarities or "conformities" between pagan and Catholic rites to prove "the impurity of the Church's historical foundations." Mary Helen Mcmurran, "Rethinking Superstition: Pagan Ritual in Lafitau's Moeurs des sauvages," in *Mind, Body, Motion, Matter* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 114.
[118] Knight, *Discourse*, 4.
[119] Helen Wickstead explores the anthropological drive of collecting images that featured sex as ritual practice. Helen Wickstead, "Sex in the Secret Museum: Photographs from the British Museum's Witt Scrapbooks," *Photography and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2018): 352. Davis similarly explores this anthropological preoccupation with

when the votives could be seen alongside comparable ancient phallic ornaments in the British Museum.

Apprehending the Museum's function as a resource for scholars sheds instructive light upon the fragile *Ex Voti* that Hamilton plotted to place in its keeping. When on leave from his diplomatic post in Naples, he placed the votives in the care of the new Keeper of the Natural and Artificial Productions department, Paul Henry Maty (who assumed the post following Solander's death in 1782). He wrote again to Sir Joseph Banks in June of 1784 to explain his precise actions:

> I have deposited the Original Letter of the Governor of Isernia and the Great Toes of St. Cosmo in the Museum - & I have recommended to Maty to keep hands off them – I send you the first Account I received of the Ceremony from an Engineer also the Second Governor's Letter with a Copy of all the [illegible] inscriptions found about Isernia. I had given this commission to the Governor in hopes of finding some traces of a Temple of Priapus near St. Cosmos Shrine but tho I did not succeed these inscriptions may be of some use in making up the Dissertation that is to be printed & beg you will communicate them to the Committee.[120]

Besides the "precious originals," Hamilton brought home the body of his wife Catherine, who had died two years previous, and the Barberini Vase (Portland Vase).[121] That the votives travelled alongside such treasured cargo under Hamilton's personal supervision confirms their peculiar importance. But what exactly happened to the *Ex Voti* following their placement in Maty's care is a matter of speculation. The trail goes cold. What evidence we do have suggests that Maty, or the readers under his supervision, did not follow Hamilton's instruction to "keep hands off them." When they finally surfaced in Museum records some eight decades later, two of

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"survivals." See Whitney Davis, "Wax Tokens of Libido," in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 115–116; Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[120] Letter from Sir William Hamilton to Sir Joseph Banks, dated June 7th, 1784. British Library Add MS 34048, ff. 17 (and verso).

[121] Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus*, 3.

five were listed as broken [Fig. 40].[122] Such mishaps were not uncommon in the British Museum during the eighteenth century, where touch was licensed as an appropriate mode of engagement with artifacts.[123] But if the votives were deemed too fragile to allow for unnecessary manipulation at the time of their deposit, who might have handled them and when?

While absent from the official records, we learn from one nineteenth-century collector that the *Ex Voti* had not been forgotten. They were evidently well known to the physician George Witt (1804–1869), who shared Hamilton's interest in Priapus and his cult. Writing to the Museum regarding his own bequest in 1865, Witt addressed the Director with the following appeal:

> Dear Sir,
> During my late severe illness it was a source of much regret to me that I had not made such a disposition of my Collection of 'Symbols of the Early Worship of Mankind,' as, combined with its due preservation, would have enabled me in some measure to have superintended its arrangement.
>
> In accordance with this feeling I now propose to present my Collection to the British Museum, with the hope that some small room may be appointed for its reception in which may also be deposited and arranged the important specimens, already in the vaults of the Museum – and elsewhere, which are illustrative of the same subject.[124]

When Witt suggested that his collection (which included phallic votives [Fig. 41]) be juxtaposed with similar material "already in the vaults," he was thinking of Hamilton's "Great Toes" and other erotic artifacts from Dilettanti collections. But when Witt was granted his request, it was not in the way he imagined. In 1865, his collection would be added to Hamilton's, establishing

[122] Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus*, 131. See also Jenkins and Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes*, 238–39.
[123] As Matthew Hunter has shown, such practices had a long history. In the seventeenth century at the Museum of the Royal Society at Gresham College in London, members of the Society actively experimented on artifacts held in their trust. Matthew Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence*: *Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 177. See also Constance Classen, "Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 895–914.
[124] Quoted in Catherine Johns, *Sex or symbol: Erotic Images of Greece and Rome* (British Museum Publications: 1982), 28.

the *Museum Secretum*, a special cabinet for sexually explicit artifacts.[125] This *Museum Secretum* was not as secret as its name suggests, but a special application was required to access it. As with the Museum's Private Case (its collection of erotic books), one needed to declare one's intellectual intentions in advance.[126] Witt must have been relieved that the Museum had accepted his donation at all since, as one scholar has pointed out, it was offered at an inopportune time.[127] In 1857, the British government passed the Obscene Publications Act thereby increasing the censorship of books and images thought to "deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences."[128]

Although evidence pertaining to the *Museum Secretum* is sparse, we find an account of the collection published in 1877, twelve years following its foundation. This appeared in a book by Henry Spenser Ashbee, pen name Pisanus Fraxi, entitled *Index Librorum Prohibitorum; Being Notes Bio: Biblio: Icono: graphical and Critical, on Curious and Uncommon Books*.[129] Ashbee's *Index* is a bibliographic marvel, and cached within its pages are clues toward determining the status of erotic antiquities in the British Museum in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ashbee juxtaposes opposing accounts, a clever tactic that highlights curatorial negligence. Embedded in Ashbee's thorough note on the *Discourse* is an optimistic portrait. He relates that in 1865, under the auspices of "John Camden Hotten, of Piccadilly" a reprint of the *Discourse* (also private) was issued in "125 copies only." Not one to exclude

[125] Johns, *Sex or symbol*, 29.
[126] For a history of the private case and its access restrictions see Peter Fryer, *Secrets of the British Museum* (New York: Citadel Press, 1966), 36–57.
[127] Marina Wallace, "Under Lock & Key," in *Seduced: Art & Sex from Antiquity to Now*, eds. Marina Wallace, Martin Kemp, Joanne Bernstein (London: Merrell, 2007), 34.
[128] As quoted in Wallace, "Under Lock & Key," 34.
[129] Ian Gibson, *The Erotomaniac: The Secret Life of Henry Spencer Ashbee* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001). See also Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Routledge, 2009 [1966]).

pertinent information, he reproduced the circular "as afterwards enlarged and adopted by Mr. J.W. Bouton of New York":

> R. P. Knight, the writer of the first 'Essay,' was a Fellow of the Royal Society, a member of the British Parliament, and one of the most learned antiquaries of his time. His Museum of Phallic objects is now most carefully preserved in the British Museum. The second 'Essay,' bringing our knowledge of the worship of Priapus down to the present time, so as to include the most recent discoveries throwing any light upon the matter, is said to be by one of the most distinguished English antiquaries – the author of numerous works which are held in high esteem. He was assisted, it is understood, by two prominent Fellows of the Royal Society, one of whom has recently presented a wonderful collection of Phallic objects to the British Museum authorities, who are fitting up an especial chamber for their reception and private display.[130]

Hotten envisions scholars affiliated with respectable societies working together with diligent curators to promote greater awareness of the cross-temporal worship of Priapus. Ashbee's reader, no doubt, would have found the cheerful collaboration described in the advertisement highly dubious, a suspicion readily confirmed in a footnote that stresses a different curatorial drive. Writing just over a decade after Hotten, Ashbee contradicts the circular:

> The objects left to the nation by Knight, and Witt, now form one collection, which, to the shame of the British Museum authorities, is consigned to a dark room in the basement, difficult to access, and where the interesting specimens it comprises can be inspected only under the greatest disadvantages.[131]

According to Ashbee, oversight, not curiosity, informed curators' relationship with erotica in the British Museum. Indeed, the very formation of the *Secretum* confirms an idea articulated by James Delbourgo: "that storage provides a way of retaining things that might compromise the authority of the museum without making hard decisions about throwing things out or having to affirm their value through public display and interpretation."[132] The *Secretum* operated like any

[130] Pisanus Fraxi [Henry Spencer Ashbee], *Index librorum prohibitorum: being notes bio- biblio- icono- graphical and critical, on curious and uncommon books* (London: printed privately, 1877), 8.
[131] Ashbee, *Index*, 8.
[132] James Delbourgo, "Performances of museum storage," in *Museum Storage and Meaning Tales from the Crypt*, edited by Mirjam Brusius and Kavita Singh (London: Routledge, 2017), 47.

other storage space under or adjoining the main galleries. It nullified the danger and/or embarrassment that its erotic contents posed to the institution and its audience. But if the *Ex Voti* constituted a moral dilemma in the 1860s and 70s, a moment governed by Victorian sensibility, I stress that institutional decorum at the British Museum in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was far more ambivalent. As seen by a leader in the traffic of antiquities such as Hamilton, the British Museum was in fact a logical and desirable destination for erotic material culture. His phallic votives would be accessible to other antiquarians of the same cast and would form part of the "Hamiltonian collection" already installed in the galleries and storerooms. This subsidiary, so hoped Hamilton, would maintain the spectral authority of the absent collector. Indeed, ensuring that he remained a key interlocutor in the reception of his benefactions, Hamilton presided over his collection in proxy—as a portrait by London's premier painter and president of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds [Fig. 30]. Perusing the *AEGR* while surrounded by the same vases that he had earlier given to the Museum, Hamilton ensured the durability of his material legacy in print, paint and pottery. His guests, he surmised, would be antiquarians like himself.

V. Double Doctrine: Private Readings at Park Street

This optimism concerning the function and primary audience of the British Museum did not endure long into the nineteenth century. Charles Townley, who once hoped that his own collection might reside alongside Hamilton's at Montagu House, scrambled to make alternative arrangements prior to his death in 1805. Prominent collectors sensed a new direction for the institution, one increasingly at odds with their interests. While it would continue to serve gentleman scholars in the reading room, the Museum began to service a growing public who

demanded better access to the rich culture contained within. This posed problems for Townley, who, like Hamilton, envisioned his private collection as an asset to a community of scholars.

We get a glimpse of these ideas in his correspondence. On August 12th, 1778, Charles Greville enclosed alongside his letter to Townley a gift of imitation marble or "ancient Sca[g]liola."[133] Greville wrote reverently: "It ha[s] been my constant wish that this Country should be possessed of as many Facts as possible which lead to the knowledge of the arts of the ancients. I cannot complete my Object so effectively as by desiring you to give this fragment a place in your collection."[134] Extolling Townley's collection as a boon to the nation, Greville likened the museum in Park Street to a national repository. It was a comparison that necessarily called into question the purpose of the British Museum, an institution that aspired to that function. Greville's choice speaks to the idea that private collections were thought to be collective assets belonging to the nation held in trust by the landed elite.[135] It also reveals ideas about their perceived value. Townley's collection offered a cohesive vision of the ancient past. Such collections were places where the best examples of any one thing, from ancient Greek sculpture to "cristalized Barytes," could be brought together under one roof and made available to the antiquarian gaze.[136] Gifting the "ancient Sca[g]liola" to Townley, Greville apprehends the artifact as a singular component of a historical whole, the same antiquarian thinking that led Edward Clarke to muse on the assemblage of Greek marbles at Cambridge University: "The

[133] Letter from Charles Greville dated August 12th, 1778, to Charles Townley; Townley Archive, British Museum, TY/7/1044.
[134] TY/7/1044.
[135] Anne Goldgar, "The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century," *A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 32, no. 2 (2000): 196–197.
[136] Letter from Greville dated Nov 2nd, 1802, Paddington to Charles Townley; Townley Archive, British Museum, TY/7/1059.

great mass of historic truth is formed by the collection of single facts."[137] On their own, artifacts told humble micronarratives, but when brought into conversation with others of the same kind in a curatorial program, these eclectic remains laid bare, in Greville's words, the "History of the Art" and "the true principles of Taste of the Ancients."[138] While Greville surely awarded the fragment to Townley as an act of goodwill between friends, it was perhaps also because Townley owned more pieces of the historical puzzle.[139] Whether fragments of "Sca[g]liola" or freestanding marble statuary, ancient things derived their meaning from the "associational world" of the antiquarian, fixed on the relationality between the classical corpus, other artifacts and the expertise of an exclusive scholarly community.[140] In Townley's Museum, antiquities were given a rich contextualisation which relied on his learned interposition and that of his fellow antiquarians.[141] One future for the British Museum (the one Hamilton had envisioned) would allow this tradition to continue. But what would happen to these same artifacts if—as another, increasingly likely future unfolded—they should cross from elite collections into public museums where they would meet, for the first time, the multitudes?

This question was an uncomfortable one and it must have occupied Townley as much as any collector in the period. Musing on the potential for misunderstanding and reconfiguration in

[137] TY/7/1044. Edward Daniel Clarke, *Greek Marbles, brought from the shores of the Euxine, Archipelago, and the Mediterranean, and Deposited in the Vestibule of the Public Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1809), ii. Quoted in Ernst, "Frames at Work," 481.
[138] TY/7/1044. This logic confirms what Susan Stewart has argued: that a "collection as a whole implies a value—aesthetic or otherwise—independent of the simple sum of its individual members." Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 166.
[139] As Peter N. Miller has shown, during the early modern period, it was assumed that the more one owned and could use for comparative studies the more accurate one's findings would be. See Miller, "The Antiquary's Art of Comparison: Pereisc and Abraxas*."
[140] Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Townley's preference for quantity over quality in his collecting of medals and gems speaks to his interest in their comparative value. For more on Townley's mass collecting campaigns in Italy see Gerard Vaughan, "The Collecting of Classical Antiquities in England in the 18th Century: a study of Charles Townley (1737–1805) and his circle," PhD Diss., (University of Oxford, 1988), 224, 237.
[141] Ernst, "Frames at Work," 481–498.

such transfers, Stephen Bann has wondered whether collections ever maintain the organisational logic of the collector; "given that the original placing of each object within a defined series of contiguities was indeed the result of his [the collector's] intentions, we might ask if these intentions are likely to have been conveyed to the new stewards of his collection in the form of a comprehensible system?"[142] And as James Delbourgo has shown, this had been a pressing concern for Sir Hans Sloane, whose expansive collection formed the basis of the British Museum. Sloane knew all too well that "preserving collections whole was … essential to preserving the memory of the collectors themselves."[143] Himself a trustee and thus a steward of Sloane's material legacy, Townley would have been sympathetic to these concerns when deciding what to do with his own collection. And the decision was not easily made. One early draft of his will, dated November 29th, 1802, stated that his antiquities would be bequeathed to Sir John Lawson, Bt. and Thomas Eccleston in trust for the British Museum. This was only on the condition that the trustees dedicate a room or series of rooms "sufficiently spacious and elegant to exhibit the antiquities most advantageously to the public; such room or rooms to be exclusively set apart for the reception and future exhibition of the said antiquities—a suitable inscription to be conspicuously placed therein."[144] However, on December 22nd, 1804, less than two weeks before his death, Townley amended his will. He "revoked the trusts declared by his Will of the said ANCIENT MARBLES for the benefit of the BRITISH MUSEUM." He proposed instead that his brother, Edward Townley Standish, or his uncle, John Townley, "expend not less than the sum of four thousand five hundred pounds in placing the said Marbles

[142] Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 77.
[143] Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 309.
[144] *Acts and Votes of Parliament, Relating to the Brits Museum: With the Statutes and Rules Thereof and the Succession of Trustees and Officers* (London: Cox and Baylis, 1814), 69.

in a proper and suitable manner, for exhibition in his mansion at Townley" or else find a suitable space in London.[145]

Townley's change of heart is not surprising. He was intimately familiar with the difficulties facing the British Museum at the turn of the nineteenth century. The institution struggled to define its identity, to meet the needs of its growing audience and to settle on its governance. Moreover, changes within European museological culture threatened to hinder the visibility of his collection should it move into the damp, crowded halls of Montagu House. In many ways, Townley was right to reconsider his bequest. His final wish to see his marbles installed at Towneley Hall in Lancashire would have insured his collection against a more precarious future in the public sphere, even if the latter did offer an element of prestige.

In fact, as early as 1790, Townley began adopting measures that would protect his collection should it move into the British Museum. Writing to Thomas Astle on May 24th of that year, he persuaded his friend to refrain from recommending him for election to the board of trustees of the British Museum. He explained,

> It is realy [*sic*] presumption in me to suppose a possibility of my being ever thought of as a Trustee for the British Museum but from the last conversation I begin to fear that your friendship and good wishes towards me have induced you realy to mention me with partiality to your respectable colleagues in that honorable trust. Therefore as I am uncertain when I may have an opportunity of seeing you, I cannot delay my earnest request that you would forbear all thoughts of recommending me to that public Situation, in which, having no pretensions to it either from rank or the requisite Abilities I should only be exposed to unpleasant animadversions…[146]

[145] *Acts and Votes of Parliament Relating to the British Museum: With the Statutes and Rules Thereof, and the Succession of Trustees and Officers* (London: G. Woodfall, 1824), 52–53.
[146] Letter from Charles Townley dated May 24th, 1790, to Thomas Astle. Townley Archive, British Museum, TY7/1743.

But if Townley initially expressed no desire to become a trustee, he changed his mind in a matter of months. He was elected in 1791 and joined the board alongside Sir William Hamilton (elected 1783) and Sir Joseph Banks (elected 1778). While inclined to remain "more calmly" and "more pleasantly" in the private sphere, conflicts within the institution threatened to undermine its viability as a suitable home for his collection. This problem likely compelled him to add his voice to those of the other Dilettanti on the board.

As we have seen, 1753 marked the formation of an all-powerful board of trustees "in whom the collections were vested in perpetuity for public benefit."[147] However, the board was highly fractious. While trustees were generally members of the elite class, individual interests in the Museum differed substantially, leading to an atmosphere of dissension.[148] As Anne Goldgar put it: "the issue was not only the consolidation of an elitist power base, but also a continuing interior conflict of values about the proper dissemination of culture."[149] This was certainly the case for those members of the Society of Dilettanti who were also trustees. Knight perceived this volatility as a threat to Dilettanti collections. He communicated his concerns explicitly in an undated letter to the 4th Earl of Aberdeen, George Hamilton-Gordon (1784–1843), a fellow member of the Society of Dilettanti (elected 1805) and a museum trustee (appointed 1812). Knight wrote of the danger that a cacophony of voices held for his own collection:

> Whatever Quantity of Wisdom there may be in a Multitude of Counsillors, the difficulty of bringing any of it into actual Use seems to be proportional to the Extent of their Number; so that I now begin to despair of any thing being done at the Museum, or of ever seeing a Stable provided for the Hobby which I have ridden for so many years, & which I hoped to leave in a secure repository, where others might hereafter ride him in company with other Nags of the same Breed.[150]

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[147] British Museum Act, 1753 (26 Geo. 2, c. 22). See also Wilson, *The British Museum, A History*, 18–24.
[148] Anne Goldgar, "The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture," *Albion* 32, no. 2 (2000): 199.
[149] Goldgar, "The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture," 199.
[150] Letter from Richard Payne Knight, dated December 15th, Stonebrook Cottage, to Lord Aberdeen, British Library; Aberdeen Papers, Add MS 43231, ff. 26.

He describes a bureaucratic impasse. It was difficult to mobilise the collective wisdom of the trustees because they were too numerous. Accordingly, the British Museum had no singular vision, and the more 'experts' it admitted into its administrative ranks, the more difficult the decision-making process became. This was problematic for his own bequest, which he hoped would be given a suitable space where other antiquarians and men of learning would find it useful and where similar collections might also be housed. This motive, to ensure the visibility and continued scholarly utility of his collection, was shared with other members of the Society of Dilettanti, including Townley, Hamilton and Sir Joseph Banks.[151]

Townley likely shared Knight's concerns. Moreover, it is doubtful that his reservations concerning his appointment as trustee were related to his suitability as a candidate. He was, after all, well qualified for such a position. He had substantial experience managing a collection—his own was carefully curated and highly esteemed. Townley's (semi)public facing initiatives are evidence of his diligence. He painstakingly shaped the reception of his museum through engravings and guidebooks. We have already encountered the visiting card commissioned from William Skelton [Fig. 35]. But Townley's guidebooks contain further clues that he faced a distinct problem in deciding where to place the contents of his private museum: his collection told two radically different stories.

The first story was designed for his semipublic audience at Park Street. While Townley began compiling catalogues for his own use in the 1780s, he also completed a dual volume set of

[151] Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum*, 7–10.

"Parlour Guides" in 1804 which were designed exclusively as an aid for his guests.[152] His visitors usually comprised elite men and women from across Europe, artists and foreign intelligentsia.[153] This was consistent with the demographic of visitors to other famous private collections in the late eighteenth century. These spaces were made accessible "to everyone who counted" or that "finite group of personal friends, rivals, acquaintances and enemies… in whom the chains of patronage, "friendship," or connection converged."[154] Townley's audience was no different, and his guide, organised by room, led guests in a linear fashion around the house. It offered basic information about each artifact including dimensions, findspot and provenance. It also featured any notable mentions (publications in which the artifact had been discussed or engraved), a summary visual description with rudimentary iconographic interpretation and occasionally, an outline drawing [Fig. 42; 43] [Fig. 44 and Fig. 45]. We find, for example, one entry detailing the imagery found on a marble bas relief:

> A Bas Relief three feet long & two feet high, purchased at a sale of marbles, belonging to Mr Jennings – In the centre is a pilaster=Cippus, supporting a vase with handles of Griffin's heads – Behind the Cippus is a flourishing tree of the pine=genus – On the right is an Ibis, pecking at a decayed tree, and on the left a Terminus of the God of Lampsacus, placed upon a rock, behind it are the pedum & syringa, and before it two geese –.[155]

Other notations pay scrupulous attention to inscriptions which are offered in the original Greek or Latin and wherever possible, invoke the esteemed authority of Winckelmann. Such tactics

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[152] TY12/1–TY12/6, Catalogues of Marbles in Park Street, undated, Townley Archive, The British Museum, London. B. F. Cook*, The Townley Marbles* (London: The British Museum Press, 1985), 32–33. Eloisa Dodero, *Ancient Marbles in Naples in the Eighteenth Century*: *Findings, Collections, Dispersals* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 44. Copies of the Parlour Guide, of which there are two versions, are now in the collection of the British Museum. Visitors usually had a personal connection to Townley or one of his friends. In instances where there was no social contact to broker the invitation, a request could be sent directly to Townley to arrange the visit. See Bryant, *The Museum by the Park*, 55.

[153] Townley recorded visits. See Al Jamil, "Hidden Dimensions and Elusive Forms," 106.

[154] Carol Duncan, "From Princely Gallery to Public Art Museum," *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 317; Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1972]), 43.

[155] Page 19 (recto) of the Townley Parlour Catalogue, vol. I in the collection of the British Museum (2009.5002.1).

firmly situate the collection in an established art historical tradition and align Townley with illustrious collectors of the past. The parlour catalogues thus act as an interface with a larger public.

But in their cursory descriptions, the catalogues disclose a double doctrine. Conspicuously absent from the parlour catalogue are details regarding the broader thematic which married the sculptures together. Townley volunteered descriptions designed to impress, but only members of the modern cult of Priapus were privy to the theoretical and formal links that structured the arrangement. The parlour catalogue is forthcoming in its simplicity. It plainly states that extraneous comment upon the marbles will be intentionally "avoided" since it is "likely to be tiresome to cursory spectators, for whose sole use this list has been made."[156]

As Max Bryant has convincingly argued, the curatorial program of the ground floor mirrored the "the initiation ritual of a Bacchic mystery cult."[157] Townley, like many of his contemporaries, organised his collection with space in mind.[158] Each room corresponded to a stage in the initiation ritual. The viewer began in the entrance hall which represented descent into the underworld through its collation of death-related artifacts including a sarcophagus and *cineraria*. Moving from the chthonic realm into the world of the living, the viewer entered the parlour. This space was abundant in depictions of animal life and presided over by a veiled image of the fertility goddess Ceres. The viewer would then arrive at a liminal space between the parlour and the dining room at the base of the stairs. Positioned above the door to the latter was a marble relief depicting a Roman marriage ceremony that represented the "mystical marriage

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[156] Charles Townley*, Catalogue of Ancient Marbles Collected in Mr Townley's House Park Street Westminster* Vol. 1, British Museum, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, London. 2009.5002.1, ff. 2.
[157] Bryant, *The Museum by the Park*, 55.
[158] Joan Coutu, *Then and Now: Collecting and Classicism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 17.

(*hieros gamos*)" or the initiate's union with god.[159] The ritual progression concluded in the dining room, which served as the *telesterion* and housed many of the larger marbles. D'Hancarville noted that the modern architectural ornament was also in keeping with the function of the room as a space for dining and revelry. It was, he wrote,

> relative to the attributes of those gods, who were supposed by the antients to preside over the festival board… festoons of Ivy, and trophys composed of the instruments used in orgies. The capitals and columns are taken from an ancient model found at Terracina… The choice and disposition of these ornaments leave no doubt that this capital was intended to characterise a building consecrated to Bacchus and Ceres, whose feasts and Mysteries were celebrated together in the famous Temple of Eleusis.[160]

Initiated thus, the viewer would progress to the first floor via the staircase where the library and several drawing rooms accommodated Townley's collection of Greek masterpieces, placed to highlight their aesthetic qualities. These spaces offered "a more intellectual environment, closer to virtù and the modern idea of an art gallery."[161] But the written entries found in the guidebook make no mention of this progression. In fact, as one scholar has noted about the description of the *Townley Nymph and Satyr*, it "evade[s] its sexual nature," commenting only on the "exerted muscles, and graceful female shapes" of this "most spirited composition."[162] Priapus himself is listed with strange decorum as the "god of Lampsacus" on the "B. R. [bas-relief] with Terminus," although the drawing is faithful to his bold virility [Fig. 45].[163] Finally, while the parlour catalogues contain notes on numerous artifacts with Bacchic or satyric themes (fifteen in

[159] Bryant, *The Museum by the Park*, 60.
[160] Quoted in Cook, "The Townley Marbles," 27. The original was written in French, likely by D'Hancarville himself.
[161] Bryant, *The Museum by the Park*, 61.
[162] Victoria Donnellan, "Ethics and Erotics: Receptions of an Ancient Statue of a Nymph and Satyr," in *Sculpture, Sexuality and History: Encounters in Literature, Culture and the Arts from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, eds. Jana Funke and Jen Grove (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 155.
[163] Manuscript Catalogue of Ancient Marbles Collected in Mr Townley's House Park Street Westminster, Vol. 1, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum, London, 2009.5002.1, ff. 19.

the dining room alone), only the 1795 catalogue references d'Hancarvillian symbols.[164] Clearly, some guests were to remain in the dark about the true nature of the collection. A comparison can thus be drawn between the Eleusinian mysteries themselves and Townley's presentation. The parlour guides initiated visitors into the lesser mysteries by providing the basic information needed to appreciate Townley's antiquities as works of ancient art. But it was only through Townley's personal mediation that guests were admitted into the Greater mysteries. Acting as hierophant (the high priest who inducted initiates into the mystery cult), Townley would verbally explain what the parlour guides omitted: the fact that his collection simulated a Bacchic (Dionysian) rite.

It is important to note that certain artifacts were entirely off limits to visitors with no personal connection to the collector. Some Indian artifacts were shown in the drawing room, but the erotic temple fragment and *the fragmented group of a Satyr and a Goat* copulating (the same sculpture featured as the tailpiece to the *Discourse*) [Fig. 14] were excluded from the official tour. It was, however, still possible to see them—one need only to inquire in advance. We find, for example, Charles Blundell writing to Townley regarding his discretionary tactics: "[I have] not yet seen that famous group which you was afraid would be indecent to exhibit to your friends in Park Street. I fancy it is only for such amateurs whose passion for virtu will make them overlook the subject."[165] The catalogues confirm what Zoffany's conversation piece only suggests: that there existed a private Priapic or Bacchic reading of the collection, and a less inflammatory "public" one.[166] This was by no means a practice invented by Townley; a similar

[164] Max Bryant has argued that there was a clear "distinction between the objects sacred to Bacchus and those sacred to virtu." The latter were concentrated on the first floor and the former on the ground floor with the "theatrical showpieces" on display in the Dining Room. Bryant, *The Museum by the Park*, 41. See Cook for a discussion of the 1795 catalogue. Cook*, The Townley Marbles*, 55.
[165] Letter from Charles Blundell dated October 9th, 1791 to Charles Townley, TY 7/1361, British Museum.
[166] Crossman, "Priapus in Park Street," 74; Ernst, "Frames at Work," 494–495.

sculptural depiction of a satyr penetrating a goat had been not so secretly assimilated into the Royal Museum of Portico. While neither exhibited nor advertised, Knight notes in the *Discourse* that it was "well known."[167] One simply had to be in the right circles to know about it. In summary, while the parlour guides fulfilled the needs of curious tourists, only Townley's embodied presence could complete the collection.[168] As one scholar wrote of such private collectors, "his brain alone stored the invisible yet vital cross-references."[169]

Considering how best to communicate his ideas to posterity may have contributed to Townley's decision to amend his will only weeks before his death. If it could be avoided, Townley would see his collection maintained privately. But in 1805 the terms set out in the codicil were deemed unfeasible by his executors. Thus, the collection was sold to the British Museum for the sum of £20,000. There was, however, one way in which Townley's interests could be safeguarded. In 1814, Townley's cousin Peregrine Edward Townley was granted the power to appoint the Townley family Trusteeship to a qualified individual of his choice.[170] Knight was the obvious candidate. In fact, Knight should have already been considered for a trusteeship given his prominent position as a classicist. But, as Sir Joseph Banks explained, his previous indiscretion in print (the *Discourse*) had undermined his eligibility. Banks put the matter thus:

> I take the Liberty of requesting of you, that before you sign & seel your appointment you will do me the Favor of indulging me with a Conversation on the Subject of it. My chief motive for asking The Favor is, that tho Mr Knight certainly is the very Properest person in this metropolis to be intrusted with the care and superintendance of the works of art in

[167] Knight, *Discourse*, 56. Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*, 6.
[168] Crossman, "Priapus in Park Street," 78.
[169] Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior: The British Collector at Home, 1750–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 8.
[170] The line of succession for Townley's trusteeship was as follows: first to Townley's brother, Edward Townley Standish Esq., then in 1807 to Charles's uncle John Townley Esq. of Chiswick and upon his death in 1814, his son Peregrine Edward Townley Esq. decided to appoint Knight. Upon Knight's death in 1824 Peregrine Edward Townley became Trustee.

> the museum, the prejudices of succeeding Archbishops arriving from a misconstruction of his motives in Publishing the Priapeie has Renderd it wholly impossible to succeed in Electing him a Trustee, & there is no possible way by which he can be brought into the Italiers[?], but by the nomination of some Family[?] that has the right of appointing a Trustee, the Duke of Portland would have nominated him and would have resigned his own Situation of a Trustee for that Purpose, on account of the Eminent Propriety of his having a place at the Board, had not the Act of Parliament unfortunately made no Provision for the Resignation of a Trusteeship, by which alone we were disappointed[?] of the benefit of his Graces good intentions. R. P. Knight was the intimate friend as well of Ch Townley as of your Father, a more able and Elective [?] Protector of the Townley marbles could not I think be Found, & I cannot help thinking that were it possible that their advice could be taken both would unite their wishes to have you (in case you do not yourself make London your chief residence as they did) nominate him as the Guardian of your Family[?] interest in the Collection.[171]

According to Banks, Knight had inadvertently become the face of modern paganism and could therefore only become a trustee by private appointment. Appointing Knight as the Townley family trustee thus solved two problems at once. First, it circumvented those barriers which had prevented Knight from assuming a position that he surely coveted. Secondly, choosing Knight ensured that Townley's collection would be cared for according to his wishes at a particularly decisive moment in the history of the British Museum. While the dilettante of the nineteenth century had to contend with "a newly delineated culture of polite sociability" which encouraged a transition from "virtú to virtue, civitas to civility," Knight would defend the values of elite, learned bodies until his death in 1824.[172] Finally, while Banks alludes to disgruntled archbishops who would see the Museum scrubbed clean of Priapic associations, it is important to note that there was no prescribed edict toward the marginalisation of erotic artifacts. As we will see in the following section, several considerations dictated the treatment of the Townleian Collection. Concerns related to what was appropriate for an expanding and increasingly diverse audience

[171] Letter from Sir Jospeph Banks, dated Nov. 30th, 1813, Soho Square to Mr. Peregrine Edward Townley, Townley Archive, British Museum, TY21/23/1.
[172] Terry F. Robinson, "Eighteenth-Century Connoisseurship and the Female Body," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2017): 22. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.013.139. Accessed 27 September 2022.

were important, but no more so than inadequate space, museological innovation and changing attitudes and tastes.

VI. Meeting the Masses

In the late eighteenth century, the British Museum was under pressure to authenticate the "imagined community" of Britain itself, that "fusion of people and culture that derives its essential unity from the deep past…"[173] But how the British Museum would create, disseminate and sustain the idea of Britain as a nation was controversial, not least because it needed to contend with its more radical French counterpart, the Louvre. In the wake of the French revolution, the Louvre was declared "among the most powerful illustrations of the French Republic."[174] It became an emblem of the new regime and its instrument. Collecting and exhibition practices were revised to assert democratic values, and the Louvre set out to educate and discipline the French public.[175] While the British Museum similarly aspired to serve and mould the British state and its people, the institution was much slower to innovate than its rival. This section considers the logistical challenges the Museum faced leading up to and following the turn of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps its biggest obstacle was a resistance among the trustees to wholly embrace public edification and universal access, ideals enthusiastically promoted across the channel. While the Louvre's public disposition earned high praise among English visitors to Paris, the proposition that the contents of a national museum were "the property of all,'" could not have

[173] Tony Bennett, "Museums, nations, empires, religions," in *Museums, Power, Knowledge Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 2017), 79.
[174] McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 91–123.
[175] Eileen Hooper Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 171.

met with much enthusiasm on the board of trustees of the British Museum.[176] They would take a more conservative approach to the stewardship and presentation of the collections in their care. This was partly due to the model of governance adopted by the British Museum at its outset. Whereas decisions at the Louvre fell to a single director who operated under the French government, decisions at the British Museum were made by a collective.[177] The board was accountable to the beneficiaries (the British public), but opinions differed as to who exactly constituted this public. Disagreement ensured that change was more gradual.

It was also uneven. Curatorial practices transformed under the supervision of internal authorities. During its formative period, the British Museum maintained and expanded the "global vision" of its founder, Sir Hans Sloane, whose collecting mantra might well have been "anything and everything." As Delbourgo put it, Sloane set out to accumulate and "inventory the glorious variety of the divine creation as a whole."[178] The British Museum remained eclectic in its holdings, but the curiosity which drove Sloane to collect was soon discarded in favour of new organisational strategies. Inside Montagu House and under the aegis of the first Principal Librarian Gowin Knight, a new logic would prevail. Knight embraced a curatorial program based on the Chain of Being.[179] God occupied the apex of this system while angels, humans, animals, plants and minerals found their places in a descending hierarchy.[180] Knight was keen to highlight this natural order, organising the rooms to guide the viewer "from the simplest to the most

[176] McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 98.
[177] Williams, "Parliaments, Museums, Trustees," 198.
[178] Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 266.
[179] Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 318.
[180] Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 318.

compound & most perfect of nature's productions."[181] Initial zeal to bring the Museum up to date with scientific classification systems soon waned, however. When Charles Morton assumed the position of Principal Librarian in 1776 (a post he held until 1799), the institution lost "its sense of purpose and direction."[182] Further complicating efforts to modernise was the democratic structure of the governing body, which impeded "independent and purposeful action" on the part of individual trustees who might have otherwise found ways to mitigate Morton's inertia.[183]

Yet still other changes were afoot. In the late eighteenth century, the Museum began to shift its collecting and curatorial emphasis from natural history toward antiquities. The purchase of Sir William Hamilton's vases in 1772 marked an important moment in this transition.[184] The institution increasingly served a public drawn to the Museum's collection of ancient art. It was thus no longer predominantly a space for independent research on the natural world. In fact, during the last three decades of the 1700s, the Museum occupied an awkward middle ground between these two identities. Neither audience seemed to be satisfied. Researchers complained about the cramped and cold conditions of the reading rooms as well as the cumbersome borrowing procedures, while casual visitors voiced opposition to the Museum's admission policies and guided tours, both of which were held to be excessively restrictive.

Trustees were made aware of these complaints, but paltry financial resources made addressing them a longstanding and formidable problem. In 1777, when the trustees petitioned

[181] Gowin Knight, "A Plan for the General Distribution of Sr Hans Sloane's Collection." Original Letters and Papers, British Museum Archive, f. 51. Quoted in Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 318. For a discussion of Solander's organisational strategies see Edwin Rose, "Specimens, slips and systems: Daniel Solander and the classification of nature at the world's first public museum, 1753–1768," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 51, no. 2 (2018): 1–33.
[182] Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum*, 1.
[183] Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum*, 2.
[184] Wilson, *The British Museum*, 47; Sloan and Burnett, *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, 21, 174.

the government for more funding, John Wilkes delivered an impassioned plea to the House.[185] "It is a general complaint that the Museum is not sufficiently accessible to the public," he began, in keeping with his image as a politician for the ordinary man and a bulwark against oligarchical power.[186] "This must necessarily happen from the deficiency of their revenues," he continued: "the trustees cannot pay a proper number of officers and attendants."[187] Recalling public libraries in Rome and Paris open to "all strangers," Wilkes appealed to nationalist sentiment. Should Britain not have the same? The M.P. also called for the purchase of additional printed books and paintings, which he equated to State treasures. He justified the additional expense by likening the British Museum to the Parthenon or the Temple of Minerva, which embodied the power and wealth of ancient Greece or Rome. Wilkes would see the British Museum rival such monuments—a modern temple to art and learning, accessible to all. Wilkes was not alone in aligning his political goals with financial support for the British Museum. In the same debate, Edmund Burke moved to amend the motion and grant £5,000 instead of £3,000 to the venerable institution. How little was being given, Burke wondered aloud, when compared to sums paid for waging war in America.[188] Surely, he reasoned, encouraging the liberal and polite arts was a better cause. The amendment failed to pass, but the debate on funding reveals that the institution was embedded in a broader discussion about Britain and its global identity. Among its advocates, the British Museum epitomised the nation's cultural ambitions.

[185] For more on Wilkes and funding for the arts see Jonathan G. W. Conlin, "High Art and Low Politics: A New Perspective on John Wilkes," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 64 no. 3/4 (2001): 356–381.
[186] *The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London: T. C. Hansard, 1814), 19:189–92. For more on John Wilkes see John Brewer, "Personality, Propaganda and ritual: Wilkes and the Wilkites," in *Party Ideology and the Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 163–200.
[187] *The Parliamentary History of England*, 19:189–92.
[188] *The Parliamentary History of England*, 19:191.

But popular opinion stated that the Museum had long failed to address the needs of the public it sought to address—that social entity which, per Jürgen Habermas and others, acquired political force in this period.[189] According to the Museum's critics, the problem was in the narrow definition of "the public" that the trustees subscribed to.[190] Class and gender exclusions, for example, are clearly articulated in a document preserved among the papers and memoranda of the British Museum. Entitled the "Case of the Gardens of the British Museum," the record details a dispute that took place in 1779 over access to the Museum grounds. Writing to the trustees, a Mr. George Keate implored to have his daughter's casual access to the gardens restored after having been suddenly denied. His argument revolved around the institution's relaxed rules; "the Children of Gentleman residing in the Neighborhood of the Museum, and the Maid Servants attending them" had for sixteen years been welcomed into the gardens although no tickets had been granted to them for the purpose.[191] The trustees met to discuss the matter and concluded that his daughter was not to be granted further privileges despite past leniencies. The main hindrance, they noted, was that Miss Keate was of "an Age that makes it necessary for her to be attended by a Servant" and servants were not permitted entry according "the present established Rules of the Museum."[192] Important here is Mr. Keate's response, which invoked a longstanding position: the British Museum was a publicly funded institution. He insisted that

[189] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991 [1989]), 57–67, 89–102; Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985); and David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 27–28.
[190] These questions were not exclusive to the late eighteenth century. Similar debates around knowledge production, scientific communities and who should and did constitute "the public" occurred in seventeenth-century Britain. See Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
[191] "Case of the Gardens of the British Museum," in Papers relating to official business in the British Museum, formerly in the possession of Sir Joseph Banks, Bart.; 1755–1796. British Library; Add MS 31299, ff. 3
[192] "Papers Relative to the Dispute between Mr. Keate and the Trustees of the Brit. Mus. 1779," in Papers relating to official business in the British Museum, formerly in the possession of Sir Joseph Banks, Bart.; 1755–1796. British Library, Add MS 31299, ff. 6.

"this Indulgence [his daughter's access to the gardens] should be less denied in a place, which not only owed its original Existance to the Public, but is still maintained by it, and looks forward to the same Public for its future Support."[193] If the Museum relied on public money, from the inaugural lottery which provided the funds to purchase Sloane's collection to the annual government grants that covered its operating expenses, should it not be accessible to that same public? As the "Case of the Gardens of the British Museum" makes clear, class was an important consideration. While Miss Keate, the daughter of a gentleman, could access the gardens, her maidservant could not. Servants may have been British nationals, but their status as members of the "public" remained ambiguous. Equally, it demonstrates that the Museum and its adjoining spaces were not neutral cultural assets, but active sites of contested negotiation in the formation of public and national identity.

Cumbersome regulations around access continued to incite criticism. In 1782, securing a ticket was easier than it had been in the previous decade, but the process still required several week's time.[194] Adding to the frustration, once finally admitted, visitors were given little independence or information. Mirroring the strict measures that governed its exterior spaces, circumnavigation inside the Museum was also limited. Grievances against these policies were aired in periodicals and other popular forms of printed media. In 1785, for example, one visitor published an account of the unfavorable circumstances in which he had been admitted to the Museum. The book, entitled *Journey from Birmingham to London* (1785), offered a scathing review of the British Museum and other 'elitist' institutions in the metropolis.[195] Its author, Mr.

[193] "Case of the Gardens of the British Museum" Add MS 31299, ff. 3 (verso).
[194] Henry Charles Shelley, *The British Museum: Its History and Treasures; a View of the Origins of that Great Institution, Sketches of Its Early Benefactors and Principal Officers, and a Survey of the Priceless Objects Preserved Within Its Walls* (Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1911), 61.
[195] Susan E. Whyman, *The Useful Knowledge of William Hutton: Culture and Industry in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 121.

William Hutton, wrote of his disappointment at having been rushed unceremoniously through the galleries while given little explanation of the treasures contained therein. Hutton vividly described his experience of being "hackneyed through the rooms with violence:"

> We began to move pretty fast, when I asked with some surprise whether there were none to inform us what the curiosities were as we went along. A tall genteel young man in person, who seemed to be our conductor, replied with some warmth: 'What! Would you have me tell you everything in the museum? How is it possible? Besides, are not the names written upon many of them?[196]

Unable to engage meaningfully with any one artifact, Hutton found the guided tour objectionable. "If a man spends two minutes in a room, in which are a thousand things to demand his attention, he cannot find time to bestow on them a glance a piece… It grieved me to think how much I lost for want of a little information."[197] That neither the curatorial infrastructure nor the staff provided sufficient instruction concerning the collections is a recurring theme among visitor accounts. Once inside, it was difficult to acclimate both for the speed at which the tours were conducted and for the vast number of things exhibited. However reliant on literary tropes such accounts may be, the idea that the British Museum lagged behind other European institutions was commonplace. Not only were the staff too few to supervise and educate visitors, but much of what was in the Museum had not been catalogued. Meanwhile a myriad variety of things continued to flow into the galleries and storerooms.

Questions surrounding space became more urgent in 1802 when the Museum acquired an important collection of Egyptian antiquities. Captured from the French in Alexandria the previous year, the artifacts were enthusiastically received.[198] In addition to the philological and

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[196] William Hutton, *A Journey from Birmingham to London* (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1785), 189–96.
[197] William Hutton, *A Journey from Birmingham to London*, 189–96.
[198] The Rosetta Stone was among the arrivals. As there was no available space in the Museum, the stele fragment was quickly installed in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries where its demotic, hieroglyphic and Greek

archeological interest that the collection inspired, the antiquities were celebrated as the spoils of war.[199] But the scale of the material confiscated from the French posed a challenge. Many of the artifacts were large stone sculptures which made transportation and placement difficult. The deficit in available space necessitated the construction of a purpose-built wooden shed in the courtyard to temporarily house the treasures.[200] Meanwhile, plans to renovate Montagu House were drawn up to accommodate the new collection. A standing committee of trustees including Banks, Townley, and Hamilton (and later Thomas Astle, who replaced Hamilton following his death in 1803) oversaw the extension to the premises. The committee met in Townley's home to discuss the design, an atmosphere which provided "abundant opportunities of studying the most approved methods of exhibiting works of Sculpture to advantage …"[201] The proposed renovations likewise occasioned further debate around access and conservation.

In 1804, the trustees petitioned Parliament for £16,000 to accommodate the new collection, and in 1805, the M.P. for Christchurch, George Rose, pressed for further financial aid to enlarge the building "for the purpose of depositing the Egyptian antiquities."[202] In both instances, concerns over public access were voiced. At the prospect of spending so large a sum as £16,000, Whig M.P. Richard Brinsley Sheridan questioned whether "the public ought in return to have greater facility of access to the curiosities which the museum contained."[203] This was the same argument that Mr. Keate had made as early as 1779. During the debate the

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inscriptions were recorded and published. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, 64. Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 73–75.

[199] Pascal Griener, "The Fascination for Egypt During the Eighteenth Century: History of a Configuration," in *Beyond Egyptomania: Objects, Style and Agency*, ed. Miguel John Versluys (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 55–56.

[200] Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities*, 73.

[201] Original Papers of the British Museum BM 4/2 768. Quoted in Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum*, 97.

[202] *The Parliamentary Debates from the year 1803 to the Present* (London: T. S. Hansard, 1812) 3:409–10. For more on these debates See Derek Cash, *Access to Museum Culture: The British Museum from 1753 to 1836* (London: British Museum, 2002).

[203] *The Parliamentary* Debates, 2: 901–902.

following year, Henry Bankes, M.P. for Corfe Castle, thought it pertinent to address admission policies once more, preferring to give "ready and uninterrupted access to the valuable matter it [The British Museum] contained."[204] But such pleas met with opposition. M.P. John Fuller advanced a longstanding anxiety. Opening the doors of the Museum to the public would put its precious contents at risk. He warned "that without proper precautions it would be very dangerous to suffer all sorts of persons to have promiscuous access."[205] While these concerns were largely unfounded since the Museum experienced few thefts or damages in this period even as it nearly doubled its daily visitors (which had increased to seventy-five compared to forty-five in 1802), the fear itself was tangible, a consequence of violent encounters with an insurgent public during the Gordon Riots of 1780. While several decades had since passed, the "spectre of public insurrection" loomed in the collective consciousness well into the nineteenth century.[206] The rioters' apparent "contempt for genteel property" would have been particularly memorable. A mob had set fire to aristocratic holdings including William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield's collection of fine furniture, "some very capital pictures" and the contents of his library.[207] He had been targeted for his sympathetic views toward religious minorities. Townley, too, had fled Park Street with Clytie in hand for fear of anti-Catholic reprisal.

Thus, care of the various collections held in trust included keeping them "whole and entire," but also safe from actual violence. While some trustees endlessly warned of the dangers posed by the multitude inside the Museum, when it came to Townley's collection, Knight was far more concerned with dangers looming outside of London. Writing to Townley's brother

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[204] *The Parliamentary Debates*, 3:409–10.
[205] *The Parliamentary Debates*, 3:409–10.
[206] Ian Haywood, *Bloody Romanticism: Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation, 1776–1832* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 181.
[207] *Annual register, or a view of the history and politics and literature for the year* (London, 1780): xxiii, 261. Quoted in Haywood, *Bloody Romanticism*, 185.

Edward Standish Townley Esq. in May of 1805, Knight expressed his desire to see Townley's sculptures placed safely in the British Museum:

> In the many conversations which I had at different times with your late Brother concerning some permanent disposition of his collection, he always expressed great dread of it's ever being exposed to such violences and outrage as destroyed the Gentleman's Seats in the neighborhood of Birmingham; and which may at any time destroy the Gentleman's Seats in any remote manufacturing province of this island, such as Lancashire pre-eminently is. It was also his anxious wish that they might be so disposed as to be at once of service to the public, and of benefit and honour to his own family; and it is this wish that has been my Guide in what I have done, & in what I now take the liberty of proposing to you with the consent and approbation of Government and consequently by Authority. Namely, That two of your Family shall be perpetual trustees, to be named by yourselves, in the same manner as the Harleian, Sloanian & Cottonian.[208]

While the Museum was not exempt from the dangers of unruly crowds, it was surely better fortified against rebellion than provincial estates—especially those in manufacturing centres such as Birmingham and Lancashire, the latter the location of Townley's seat. The Birmingham riots of 1791 had exposed their vulnerability. Homes belonging to Joseph Priestley and other members of the Lunar Society had been burned to the ground.

In some respects, the British Museum offered a safe haven. But the institution was not the ideal repository that Knight, Townley or Hamilton had hoped for. Increasingly under pressure to accommodate the needs of a public who had proven *not* to be an unruly mob that some envisioned, the British Museum was changing its shape. The question as to who the Museum should serve remained as pertinent as the trustees were irresolute. Was it gentlemen of leisure and learning for whom the Museum would act as a proverbial stable for the antiquarian's "hobby-horse" or the impersonal entity that operated under and catered to a more inclusive definition of British public? As the minutes from trustee meetings demonstrate, these questions were not easily resolved. Deliberations seemed ever encumbered by the ambiguity of terms set

[208] "Copy of Mr. Knight's Letter – Whitehall 17 May 1805," TY/18/3, Townley Archive, British Museum, London.

out by Sloane as well as the mutable definition of the public in the eighteenth century. The will, penned in 1753, specified that Sloane's collections be "visited and seen by all persons desirous of seeing and viewing the same... [and] rendered as useful as possible, as well towards satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons."[209] The British Museum Act would reign in Sloane's directive. It stated that his collection would

> be kept for the use and benefit of the publick, with free access to view and peruse the same . . . under such restrictions as the Parliament shall think fit'; and that 'a free access to the said general repository, and to the collections therein contained, shall be given to all studious and curious persons, at such times and in such manner, and under such regulations for inspecting and consulting the said collections, as [determined] by the said trustees.

The trustees were tasked with working out the details, but opinions differed as to what exactly should be done. Some argued for unequal degrees of access citing a desire to accommodate scholars while others promoted free admission in keeping with Sloane's parting wishes.[210] Protecting the collections, improving accessibility and meeting the demands of visiting scholars in the reading rooms necessitated a delicate balancing act.

The establishment of art institutions in the long eighteenth century allowed for greater access to fine art which was frequently hidden from view except in special circumstances when private collectors opened their doors to the public.[211] Institutions like the Royal Academy which opened in 1768 met a growing demand, but inadvertently generated crowds of entertainment seekers in its rooms at Somerset House.[212] Instead of a polite space for enlightenment, the

[209] Quoted in Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 310–311.
[210] Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 318.
[211] Anne Nellis Richter, "Improving Public Taste in the Private Interior: Gentleman's Galleries in Post-Napoleonic London," in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Denise Baxter and Meredith Martin (Farnham: Ashgate 2010), 169. Anne Nellis Richter argues that by 1819, private galleries were well established spaces for displaying and viewing art in London.
[212] John Brewer describes how this "larger public" was conceptualised Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 341.

exhibition hall became a venue for leisure.[213] Crowds generated revenue, but whereas the Royal Academy embraced the fiscal benefits of galleries thronging with members from all social classes, the British Museum was earnest in attempting to reshape public encounters with art, shifting emphasis from "private pleasure" to "public instruction."[214]

As we have seen, the trustees considered and reconsidered admission policies at regular intervals, usually in conjunction with discussions concerning diminishing economic resources. Proposals to charge admission fees were made in 1774 and again in 1784 in an attempt to alleviate the Museum's running annual deficit. In 1786, the issue resurfaced once more: "in consequence of the Resolution of the last General Meeting the standing Committee took into consideration a plan for shewing the Museum in such a manner as to create a fund towards the support of it."[215] Such fees would balance a budget that in 1784 had been several thousand pounds in the red. The trustees ultimately voted against implementing a fee structure citing unfeasibility, especially during the winter months when there were already "too few Applications to fill up the regular hours."[216] In 1801, admission fees were considered anew. This time, however, the motives were slightly different. In addition to generating much needed revenue, the price of admission was proposed to deter the unorderly and illiterate from visiting the Museum. According to Sir Joseph Banks, whose presidency at the Royal Society made him *ex officio* trustee, the guided tours by which guests were ferried through the space too readily facilitated

[213] See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1978); David Solkin, *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001); Christopher Frayling, "Fuseli's The Nightmare: Somewhere between the Sublime and Ridiculous" in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*, ed. Martin Myrone (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 9.
[214] Bennett, *Museums, Power, Knowledge*, 32; Solkin, *Art on the Line.*
[215] Minutes of the Trustees, Minutes from January 16th, 1784, The British Museum Archive, 1857–1858, ff. 1850. The British Museum, London. The deficit was £1092-19-8.
[216] Minutes of the Trustees, Minutes from January 16th, 1784, The British Museum Archive, 1857–1858, ff. 1857, The British Museum, London.

comingling between members of different classes. Visitors whose principal aim was "idle curiosity" disrupted the elevated engagement of the upper classes, or so argued Banks.[217] He called for reform noting that "the senseless questions of the former [those indulging their idle curiosity] continually interrupt all rational communication between the officers & the latter descriptions of persons [upper class men and women]."[218] Worse still, the officers were afraid to handle artifacts in the collection for fear of damage at "the rude hands of those who croud [sic] round [them]."[219] Such complaints were dismissed, and the Museum continued to admit greater numbers of visitors each year. Weekly admissions were increased from 180 to 360 between 1803 and 1805.[220] In 1808, access was on the agenda again. This time, the Principal Librarian Joseph Planta provided a detailed report with recommendations for improving accessibility. Planta explained that "the public will be satisfied with nothing short of immediate free admission such as they are told is allowed at Paris."[221] Amendments saw opening hours expanded, ticket applications streamlined, and free admission upheld. In 1810, the public succeeded in gaining universal access: the ticketing scheme was abolished, and the trustees hired staff to monitor the rooms and maintain order.[222] The average annual number of visitors climbed sharply from only 12,000 in 1805 to over 200,000 by the 1830s.

The final challenge faced by trustees forced to negotiate between private and public demands was curatorial in nature. What would happen when nineteenth-century masses

[217] Cash, *Access to Museum Culture*, 59.
[218] Original Letters and Papers 2, The British Museum Archive, (18 May 1801): fol. 745–47. Quoted in Cash, "Access to Museum Culture," 59.
[219] Cash, "Access to Museum Culture," 59.
[220] Cash, "Access to Museum Culture," 66.
[221] British Museum Archives, Original Letters and Papers 2 (18 February 1808): fol. 865–68. Quoted in Cash, "Access to Museum Culture," 69.
[222] Cash, "Access to Museum," 2.

confronted the prone bodies and ancient erotica in which the Townleian Museum had gloried? [223] Although they anticipate the opening of the British Museum's Townley Gallery in the spring of 1808, three pencil drawings by Henry Fuseli are instructive. Made at the Louvre during his 1802 visit or shortly thereafter, the first pair of pen drawings (which occupy the recto and verso sides of the same sheet), *The Woman before the Laocoön I* [Fig. 46] and *The Woman before the Laocoön II* [Fig. 47] confront the problematic in explicitly gendered terms, picturing an erotically charged meeting between a fashionable woman and the famous Laocoön sculpture. In *Laocoön II*, Fuseli depicts the central figure of the antique triad, augmenting the lifelike quality and erotic potency of the Trojan priest through the erasure of narrative action. Not only are the coiling snake and Laocoön's sons excluded, but the hero meets the female viewer in a decontextualized space, a choice that further intensifies the eroticism of the one-on-one engagement. Fuseli concentrates entirely on the writhing musculature of the central figure, neglecting even to finish the head. In both variants, the women act timidly, almost surprised. In *Laocoön I*, the female figure spins around as if for a double take and in *Laocoön II*, she approaches cautiously with rigid arms and clenched fists. Martin Myrone has convincingly argued that the cause of alarm derives from the "spectacularization of the heroic body … which is intrinsically ambivalent, indeterminate in its meanings and connotations—including the sexual."[224] Fuseli further increases this ambiguous sexuality with sartorial flourish. The ruffles, draping fabrics and bows that decorate the female bodies serve to highlight their exposed breasts. The drawings posit that far from modelling the aesthetic disinterest necessary to properly engage

[223] On the intensification of religious debate over suitable displays in the Victorian era, see Dominic Janes, "The Rites of Man: The British Museum and the Sexual Imagination in Victorian Britain," *Journal of the History of Collections* 20, no. 1 (2008): 101–112.
[224] Martin Myrone, "The Body of the Blasphemer," in *Queer Blake*, eds. Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 82.

with art, the female spectator cannot help but find herself embedded in a highly sexualised chance meeting with such potent virility.[225] While the Laocoön was housed in the Louvre, Fuseli may have had any number of cultural spaces in mind. His own Milton Gallery, for example, was perceived as facilitating a similar experience.[226] Even the Royal Academy faced criticism when in 1780, the institution opened its collection of plaster casts to a wider public including women. Such brazen exposure of the male body was considered dangerous. One critic wrote to Sir Joshua Reynolds in *The Morning Post* to complain of the "shameful state of nudity" in which the sculptures were shown. They were no less than "… the terror of every decent woman."[227] The author, who signed off as Peeping Tom, called for the offending parts to be covered. If the usual fig leaves were out of season, he ventured, cabbage leaves might "fully answer the purpose."[228] Another commentator likened Somerset House to a "temple of Priapus" and a threat to female delicacy.[229] These complaints were noticed, and the "brawny statues" quickly given "vine-leaf addenda" until more permanent plaster leaves could be fashioned the following year.[230]

A third drawing by Fuseli, *Woman in the Antique Room* [Fig. 48], compliments the pair discussed above. Here the viewer occupies a low vantage point, looking up toward an extravagantly dressed woman and the exhibition space she occupies. Her back is turned, but her posture communicates poise. She holds the train of her garment with one hand while flourishing

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[225] Jennifer Tyburczy, *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 26. Fuseli suggested that the work "characterised every beauty of virility verging on age" in his lectures on art. Henry Fuseli "First Lecture. Ancient Art," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741-1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 1:54.
[226] Luisa Calè, *Fuseli's Milton Gallery: Turning Readers into Spectators* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 187.
[227] *The Morning Post*, *and Daily Advertiser*, 6 May 1780. Quoted in John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 196.
[228] *The Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, 6 May 1780.
[229] *The Morning Post*, *and Daily Advertiser*, 15 May 1780. See Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 34.
[230] *The Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, 25 May 1780. Martin Postle, "Flayed for Art: The écorché Figure in the English Academy," *British Art Journal* 5, no. 1 (2004): 60.

a fan in the other. Compared to the woman meeting the *Laocoön*, she appears less threatened by the sight of exposed genitals, to which her downturned gaze is seemingky directed. She might also be unaware of the sculptures since she could equally be looking down so as not to trip on the voluminous dress pooled about her feet. Although a perspectival ruse, she challenges the stature of the marbles in her midst. The eye is drawn upward from the oversized bow at her waist to her fantastical hairstyle which is likewise highlighted in opaque watercolour. Curled and pinned into its own sculptural form, she offers a point of contrast to the similarly 'modelled' marbles in the gallery, *Menelaus Carrying the Body of Patroclus* as described in the *Iliad* at left and a colossal Jupiter at right. Presented to us thus, she reads less like a viewer in a gallery than an *objet d'art* in her own right, outperforming her sculptural rivals in both stature and artifice. Juxtaposing the modern, fashionable woman with heroic, ideal nudes, Fuseli pits proverbial feminine beauty against elevated masculine sublimity. This distinction is strengthened by his monochrome treatment of the classical statuary which contrasts starkly with the opaque blue and pinkish watercolours that highlight the bow, sleeve and hair of his female viewer.[231] As a group, the drawings render female participation in serious art criticism unviable. *A Woman before the Laocoön* and its verso suggest that women risk becoming erotically invested in or emotionally perturbed by "brawny statues" and their "distinguishing parts," to borrow a phrase from the disgruntled contributor to *The Morning Post*. On the other hand, less delicate women might remain unruffled in the face of sculpted penises, but only because they themselves are wrapped up in their own ruffled gowns. Such women attend art exhibitions for sociable entertainment; to see and be seen in society. The implication here is that only serious, learned men could master themselves when confronted with sculpted nude bodies.

[231] Martin Myrone, *Henry Fuseli* (London: Tate Britain, 2001), 54.

But more importantly for our purposes, the drawings visually experiment with what was a very real problem faced by curators at the British Museum. What could be shown to a British public that included women, children and the lower classes?[232] One scholar has considered this question by following Townley's *Nymph and Satyr*.[233] Comparing editions of the *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum*, Victoria Donnellan reveals that when the Townley marbles first arrived, the work was displayed in room VII of the Museum. However, between 1810 and 1812, the sculpture was removed. This was the precisely the moment in which the Museum abolished its ticketing system, allowing "all persons of decent appearance" to peruse the sculptures in the Gallery of Antiquities at their leisure from ten o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon. Of course, this could be coincidental, but it remains a strong possibility that curators pulled the artifact and others like it because of its perceived eroticism. Seen from certain angles, the satyr appears to be penetrating his captive nymph. Without the intervention of a guide, such works may have been considered unsuitable for a popular audience.[234] It is important to note that evidence suggests that the Museum also followed Townley's lead when it came to even more explicit artifacts in the collection. The "fragmented group of a Satyr and a goat" was likely never on public display.[235] The erotic potency of ancient sculpture required careful governance when installed in an institution facing a wholly modern urban public.

VII. The Enlightenment Gallery

[232] Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*, 26–27.
[233] Donnellan, "Ethics and Erotics," 153–163.
[234] Donnellan, "Ethics and Erotics," 160–161.
[235] As Donnellan has traced, the "fragmented group of a Satyr and a goat" is absent from the 1808 *Synopsis* and is catalogued as 'not exhibited' in the 1848 Register. It was integrated into the *Museum Secretum*. Donnellan, "Ethics and Erotics," 160.

Perhaps even more pressing to the collection at hand, however, were changing attitudes toward classical antiquities. By 1824, the year of Knight's death, a proposal was made to reconsider the placement of Townley's collection. A document held at the British Library entitled "Remarks on the Proposed Removal of the Marbles from the British Museum" foregrounds the problem. While the anonymous author ultimately resists the removal of Townley's marbles, his argumentation sheds light on the reasons for their diminishing importance:

> The nature of the collection of marbles in the British Museum is in some respects peculiar. A very large proportion of them cannot with propriety be said to possess any ornamental character; nor are they likely to excite much general interest of attention on the part of the publick. The greatest portion therefore, of this collection appears to be more closely connected with literature than with art, and [verso] derives its chief importance from the degree in which it may illustrate the history, mythology, manners and language of the nations of antiquity…[236]

According to this account, Townley's antiquities had lost their "ornamental" value. Nineteenth-century curators would prioritise form over content, a choice that conservative Museum staff saw as a bias against things thought "simply curious" or "fit only to be studied through the spectacles of the antiquary."[237] Writing in support of the old collections, first Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, Sir Charles Newton, argued that this new curatorial framework was too narrow. Newton envisioned the Museum serving multiple audiences: the general public, practicing artists, students of art, archeologists and historians. "Why should not all these classes meet on common ground?" so Newton wondered rhetorically in his essay.[238] But the report of 1824 was responding as much to emerging curatorial practices as it was to a recent

[236] British Museum: Remarks on the proposed removal of the Marbles to Charing Cross or Pall Mall: 1824, British Library; Aberdeen Papers, Add MS 43231, ff. 135–138.
[237] Charles Thomas Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology* (London: Macmillan and co., 1880), 68.
[238] Charles Thomas Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology* (London: Macmillan and co., 1880), 70.

and momentous event in the Museum's history: the installation of the Parthenon sculptures. In 1816, the 7th Earl of Elgin had introduced Phidias to the British public, usurping Townley as Britain's cultural liaison with ancient Greece. As traced in the previous chapter, their impact was dramatic. Confronted with true Greek originals, it became increasingly clear that many of Townley's marbles were Roman copies. Further undervaluing the sculptures was the extent to which they had been restored. While they shed light on the esoteric rites of the ancients (an argument that Hamilton likewise claimed for his votives), this profound engagement with cosmology was, as Townley had put it in his own catalogue, "likely to be tiresome to cursory spectators." They were accessible only through the learning of an increasingly outmoded culture of elite antiquarianism. The Society of Dilettanti maintained a formative role in the British Museum in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but 1824 marked the end of an era. No longer catering to gentlemen scholars, the British Museum began to tailor its displays to the general British public. It thus positioned the more aesthetically significant Parthenon sculptures at the apex of its program. Recalling Wilkes's hopes that the British Museum would rival the Parthenon as a national monument, the acquisition of the Parthenon's sculptures signalled the cultural aspirations of Britain for which the Museum became an important icon.

Townley's sculptures remained in place until the 1840s when the Gallery was demolished in sections to make way for Sir Robert Smirke's new building. When completed, the "Townley Gallery" as a distinct entity had vanished, although some of his antiquities were accommodated into other areas. In the mid twentieth century, the Townley Gallery experienced a momentary revival when the Museum received an endowment from the Wolfson Foundation.[239] Basement storage facilities under the Duveen gallery were converted into a suite of exhibition spaces. In

[239] Cook, *The Townley Marbles*, 62.

1984, Townley's collection was once again made available to the public, although it now occupied a subordinate position below the Elgin marbles, one inadvertently circumscribed in space [Fig. 50] [Fig. 51]. Just over two decades later, all eight of the underground rooms were permanently closed due to inaccessibility concerns and to reduce the cost of staff. Townley's collection was once again dispersed.

Other Dilettanti collections would face similar challenges in the nineteenth century. Knight, like Townley, had planned to cement his legacy. He "bequeathed his magnificent collection [to the British Museum], on the sole condition that his family should be added to the number of family Trustees."[240] This would ensure that his interests were upheld. The British government assented, and by the Act of George IV, "the said Thomas Andrew Knight, being such descendent as aforesaid, [was] added to and associated with the trustees for the time being of the said British Museum…with perpetual succession to his descendants in the direct male line so long as any shall exist."[241] However, only eleven years later, hereditary trusteeships along with other aristocratic privileges met with criticism by those who would see the Museum reformed. Detractors wondered why the landed elite should have so much influence in a public institution. In the words of one social critic speaking in the House of Commons in 1833: "Of what use in the wide world, was this British Museum, and to whom, to what class of persons, was it useful?"[242] The question had become rhetorical. It served a select few, and its management was "as bad as bad could be."[243] Social frictions led to concrete action. In 1836, in response to accusations of "nepotism, corruption, inefficiency and maladministration," the British Parliament

[240] Miller, *The Noble Cabinet*, 108.
[241] *Acts and Votes of Parliament relating to the British Museum, with the Statutes and Rules Thereof, and the succession of Trustees and Officers* (London: printed by G. Woodfall, 1824), 76.
[242] Quoted in Miller, *The Noble Cabinet*, 138.
[243] Quoted in Miller, *The Noble Cabinet*, 138.

ordered that "a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum."[244] The Committee questioned whether the situation could be ameliorated if the Board of Trustees diversified its membership. When asked if a "governing body consisting of men of high rank and public functionaries… [was] the most desirable for an institution like the British Museum," the antiquarian and advocate for reform, Sir Harris Nicholas, did not waver in his response. "Certainly not," he replied, "It has always appeared to me to be a great anomaly."[245] The Museum needed to be restructured from the inside out.

Contemporaneous with the waning influence of elite collectors on the Board, erotic antiquities belonging to Townley and other members of the Society of Dilettanti long accumulating in the basement of the British Museum were officially addressed. This occurred in 1865 when the arrival of Witt's collection of phallic artifacts prompted the foundation of an official *Museum Secretum*.[246] If museums can be conceptualised as a form of infrastructure that manufactures and maintains the collective memory of a community, secret museums emerged as their dark, closeted counterparts.[247] Their hidden vaults became spaces of collective forgetting (as opposed to collective memory). While still accessible to those who knew of them, they facilitated the same disorienting experiences as other modern, sterile spaces. In the words of one contemporary scholar, they produced a "sense of tedium and profound desolation… result[ing] from the fact that they are like waiting rooms at railway stations; everything is out of context and there is no landscape."[248] But if curators thought that the sequestering of erotic material culture would mitigate unseemly behaviour by limiting opportunities for sexual arousal, the secrecy and

[244] Miller, *The Noble Cabinet*, 138.
[245] *Report from the Select Committee on British Museum; together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* (London, 1836), 290.
[246] Johns, *Sex or Symbol*, 29–30. Wilson, *The British Museum,* 166.
[247] Susan Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2000).
[248] Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus*, 48.

ritualisation around the *Secretum* likely had the opposite effect. Indeed, Michel Foucault has described "manifold sexualities," some of which "haunt spaces."[249] The intimate setting and exclusive encounter that secret cabinets afforded would have heightened the sensuality of the viewing experience, transforming them into sites of "extreme sexual saturation."[250] The space was certainly unpractical for serious research since the *Secretum* created an experiential distance even as the viewer confronted a vast collection of erotic things in the liminal space of a subterranean room. The artifacts, one scholar observes, were "stacked at random with no regard to their type, period or place of origin."[251] And as Ashbee lamented, when consigned to a dark room in the basement, cherished artifacts became disassociated fragments. Again, this process was not exclusive to erotic antiquities. As discussed above, much of Townley's collection suffered decontextualization in the nineteenth century. Galleries were reorganised according to new ideas and standards of decorum. "The paradigm of individual imagination" that once governed Park Street was unintelligible to curators schooled in modern protocols of academic archaeology.[252]

However, reclamation of Townley's "hang" and its attendant ways of knowing has recently been attempted through the British Museum's *Enlightenment Gallery* which opened in 2003 to commemorate the institution's 250th anniversary. Curated by Kim Sloan, the expansive neoclassical room is some 300 feet long, 41 feet high and 30 feet wide. It is filled with natural and artificial "curiosities," evoking the collecting practices of the Museum's foundational collectors including Sloane, Townley and Hamilton. On either side of the door that joins the

[249] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990 [1976]), 47.
[250] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 46.
[251] Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus*, 1; see also Johns, *Sex or Symbol*, 31.
[252] Ernst, "Frames at Work," 486.

gallery to the Great Court, for example, visitors will find a selection of Hamilton's black and red figure Greek pottery arranged in a series of wooden wall cabinets that tower over the viewer. Venturing a little further into the room, restored to evoke its former function as the King's Library (1823–7), the collectors themselves make an appearance. One finds a peculiar grouping of three marble busts set on identical stone pedestals [Fig. 52] [Fig. 53].[253] Richard Payne Knight stoically occupies the helm of the triangular composition, flanked by Christopher Hewetson's portrait of Charles Townley on his left and a marble bust of a Roman woman (Antonia?) on his right. But what is this Patrician Roman woman doing among former trustees, a viewer might wonder? The ambiguous arrangement misleads us since it equalises the collector and the collected. What we are looking at is, of course, Clytie, Townley's cherished marble spouse. The apposition suggests (perhaps unconsciously) the same subject/object reversals that deeply troubled Coleridge when he imagined Knight's complexion radiating the cold, metallic sheen of bronze. The formation thus capitalises on the slippery borders between art and life that captivated Dilettanti collectors.

Also of note are the nineteenth-century manuscript cases that surround them, containing a multiplicity of artifacts including Pre-Columbian ceramics and South Asian wood carvings. In keeping with Enlightenment curatorial strategies, the space is minimalist in labelling and maximalist in eclectic juxtaposition. The purpose of this presentation is twofold. The spacious cases allow for greater visibility of artifacts that would otherwise remain hidden, thus creating "visible storage."[254] Secondly, the cabinets invite contemporary visitors to embody their early modern counterparts. Viewers are introduced to the Museum's early history and encouraged to

[253] The neoclassical space was constructed by Robert Smirke between 1823–1827.
[254] Beth Lord, "Representing Enlightenment Space," in *Reshaping Museum Space*, edited by Suzanne Macleod (London: Routledge, 2005), 153.

think about the conceptual frameworks that informed eighteenth-century collecting and display practices.[255] As one scholar has poignantly observed of such curatorial techniques, meaning is not drawn from the artifacts themselves but from their mnemonic potential to evoke the Museum's past. Such "antiquities have lost the antique," so to speak.[256] This is not to suggest that all Dilettanti relics have been demoted to mnemonic devices. Many still inhabit prominent positions within the Museum. The *Townley Caryatid* majestically presides over the South Staircase while the famous Cameo glass vessel known as the *Portland Vase*, brokered by Sir William Hamilton, is one of the central attractions in the department of Greek and Roman antiquities. In Room 70, it competes for attention only with the *Warren Cup*, a Roman silver drinking vessel depicting pederastic sex that the Museum purchased in 1999.

In fact, since the 1990s Dilettanti *erotica* has experienced a revival. In 1995, a pair of Hamilton's wax votives were restored for the exhibition *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his Collection* [Fig. 54]. More recently, a show entitled *Tantra: Enlightenment to Revolution* (September 2020–January 2021), featured Townley's Elephanta fragment alongside other sexually explicit sculptures with Tantric themes. This renewed attention reflects our changing attitudes toward sexuality, but it also speaks to the instability of meaning ascribed to artifacts. When we follow a collection from the private world of antiquarianism to the public world of a national Museum, we discern the ways in which these meanings change. Rather than prompting authentic "cultural memories," antiquities assembled under the eccentric supervision of collectors like Townley, Hamilton and Knight might blur the boundaries between real and

[255] Lord, "Representing Enlightenment Space," 150.
[256] Ernst, "Frames at Work," 484.

ideal, past and present.[257] The careful unfolding of the wax votives chronicle has shown that even seemingly humble objects embodied complex temporal and cultural relationships in specific circles and settings—relationships that are not always immediately evident to modern viewers. Now these same objects tell a story about early modern collecting and knowledge-making practices.

As this chapter has shown, the production of classical cultural memory aligned with cultural leadership. We are reminded that "to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths."[258] This is perhaps why the British Museum became a battleground for rival factions on the board of trustees as well as between the board and an emerging British public whose voice demanded to be heard. Such challenges to the elite stewardship of the nation's cultural heritage also coincided with new ways of conceptualising the past. Changing tastes compounded with new information, emerging curatorial practices, diverse audiences and the rise of Victorian propriety, all of which contributed to the nineteenth-century identity of the Museum. Seeking to understand the marginalisation of erotic antiquities without these manifold considerations in mind diminishes the complexity of their fascinating story, one which provides new insight into the origins of the British Museum and the socio-political landscape it inhabited.

[257] Joan Coutu, "On Being There: The Significance of Place and the Grand Tour for Britons in the Eighteenth Century," in *Agents of Space: Eighteenth-century Art, Architecture, and Visual Culture*, ed. Christina Smylitopoulos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 21.
[258] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 8.

CHAPTER THREE

Art and Eros in the Circles of Henry Fuseli

I. Reading, Painting and Infidelity

In 1781, visitors to the Royal Academy would have been surprised to find that Sir Joshua Reynolds, the venerable President of that institution, had been lured into a confrontation.[1] What better way to make a splash in the art world than by challenging its figurehead, so schemed the enterprising young painter, Henry Fuseli. Months earlier, Fuseli had encountered Reynolds in his studio, struggling with a large painting of Vergil's Dido and so decided to work up his own canvas of the tragic heroine.[2] He likely chose the scale and vertical orientation of his *Dido on the Funeral Pyre* (1781) [Fig. 54] to ensure that it would be viewed opposite Reynolds's *The Death of Dido* (1175–1781) [Fig. 55] in the Great Room at Somerset House during the annual exhibition. The ruse would force the paintings into comparative dialogue and thus generate critical interest in his work, which had failed to attract the desired attention the previous season.[3]

Both paintings register the emotional turmoil described by Vergil in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas leaves Carthage to fulfill his destiny as the founder of Rome. Unable to bear the loss of her lover, Dido ends her life. Her sister Anna discovers the suicide but is too distraught to perform the necessary funerary rites. Instead, it falls to the divine messenger Iris to cut the lock of hair that

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[1] Fuseli attempted to draw attention to himself at the Academy the previous year with three oil paintings: *Ezelin Bracciaferro, Musing over Meduna, Destroyed by Him, for Disloyalty during his Absence in the Holy Land*; *Satan Starting from the Touch of lthuriels Lance*; and *Jason Appearing before Pelias, to Whom the Sight of a Man with a Single Sandal Had Been Predicted Fatal*. For a discussion of Fuseli's Academy debut and his calculated self-promotion see David A. Brenneman, "Self-Promotion and the Sublime: Fuseli's Dido on the Funeral Pyre," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 62, no. 1–2 (1999): 68–87.

[2] Brenneman, "Self-Promotion and the Sublime," 79. See also Christopher Frayling, "Fuseli's *The Nightmare*: Somewhere between the Sublime and the Ridiculous," in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*, ed. Martin Myrone (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 9–19.

[3] Brenneman, "Self-Promotion and the Sublime," 84. See also Martin Myrone, "The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836*, edited by David Solkin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 77–91.

will release her soul from earthly bondage. Each painting frames Dido's languishing form on a crimson drapery. But whereas Reynolds focuses the viewer's attention on Dido's sensational last breath, Fuseli draws the eye upward toward his Tyrian queen by way of a gruesome, bloodied sword. This difference alone is striking, but Fuseli makes other bold pictorial choices. His Dido lies upright. Her pallid face rests expressionless on her shoulder, exposing the porcelain white gleam of her neck. Emphasising her decolletage further, the waistline of her dress bisects her torso. Its diaphanous fabric creates an S shape as it clings to each articulated curve. Overwrought, Anna slumps languorously over her sibling's thigh and elongated calf. Their disproportioned bodies soften into one another, disregarding academic naturalism. As David Brenneman rightly observes, the figures look as though they have no bones; Fuseli is less interested in anatomical accuracy than in facilitating the lofty aesthetic experience of the sublime.[4] Reynolds, on the other hand, uses rich colour and loose brushstrokes to appeal to the eye.

Seen by period critics, Fuseli had pledged his fidelity to source texts over pictorial media. According to a writer for the *St. James's Chronicle*, he had demonstrated "more reading than painting," a phrasing that underscored his faithfulness to Vergil.[5] A similar review appeared in the *London Courant*. Puffing the picture, the reviewer (the maker himself or a close ally), declared Fuseli's picture the more authentic of the pair. Writing under the pseudonym Ensis, the author declared that Reynolds had based his composition on a translation of the *Aeneid* (either Caro's or Dryden's) whereas Fuseli had drawn directly from the Latin. This precision allowed for a more profound visual statement for the former production mirrored the "vain flutter" of the

[4] Brenneman, "Self-Promotion and the Sublime," 82.
[5] "An Account of the Exhibition of the Royal Academy for the Year 1781," in *St. James's Chronicle*, no. 3146 (April 28th – May 1st, 1781).

translations themselves. Reynolds had offered "beauty alone expiring," but Dido's leading feature was a "heroism, assailed and driven to despair by love."[6] This sublime feeling Fuseli had given expression to: "unconquerable majesty stamps the face and frame of Dido in all the convulsions of death, subdues the clamours of the sister to silent grasping agony, and struggles only to meet the extended arm of fate."[7] Evidently, the critical discourse that erupted around the rival canvases had been carefully manipulated. The episode speaks to Fuseli's audacity as well as his early views on art. The aspiring painter would argue that excellence in his profession required more than a fleeting engagement with its source material, just as it sometimes required a temporary suspension of nature's laws.

Respect for ancient models surfaces elsewhere in Fuseli's seminal initiatives. In 1765, he would translate an important work by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768).[8] Published in London by Andrew Millar, his translation of *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755) [*Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*] (1765) promised artistic revival through a strict diet of philhellenism.[9] As Marcia Allentuck has shown, his Anglophone audience was primed to receive Winckelmann's ideas with enthusiasm.[10] Classics were the focal point of aristocratic education, and the flow of antiquities to Britain by way of Grand Tourists ensured that ancient sculpture remained in vogue.

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[6] Ensis [likely Fuseli], "For the London Courant," *London Courant*, Monday, May 7, 1781.
[7] Ensis [likely Fuseli], "For the London Courant," *London Courant*, Monday, May 28, 1781.
[8] Fuseli earlier published "A Description of a Marble Trunk of Hercules, commonly called the Torso of Belvedere. Translated from the German of John Winckelmann, Librarian of the Vatican" in the *Universal Museum* in January of 1765. For Fuseli's translations of Winckelmann see Marcia Allentuck, "Fuseli's Translations of Winckelmann: A Phase in the Rise of British Hellenism with an Aside on William Blake," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century II*, ed. R. F. Brissenden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 163–185; Alexander Regier, "Crossing Channels: Fuseli, Hamann, and Lavater," *Exorbitant Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 94–107.
[9] The translation of Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755) was intended to facilitate a more vibrant intellectual exchange between England and Germany. See John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 1:27.
[10] Allentuck, "Fuseli's Translations of Winckelmann," 168–169.

As discussed in previous chapters, Winckelmann provided a theoretical basis for engaging with this influx of classical art. But, as Fuseli ventured, writing along the same lines as his contemporaries including collectors like Sir William Hamilton and classicists like Richard Payne Knight, those same ideas had important implications for practicing artists. "There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled," so Fuseli would memorably translate the German, "I mean, by imitating the antients."[11] However, this chapter follows a different path from Winckelmann into British culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, for in spite of an initial embrace of neoclassical mimesis, enthusiasm to imitate the Greeks soon cooled. Fuseli would later concede that his encouragement had led artists on a "hopeless chace" after insipid beauty.[12] Stronger medicine was required to remedy the cultural decline thought to be troubling modern Europe. Countering the supposedly emasculating effects of capitalist modernity, this chapter argues that Fuseli and members of his circle turned to a fitful, experimental eroticism. This approach to art differed radically from that with which the chapter began. Turning from a faithful delivery of source material to polymorphous association, syncretic hybridization and radical sexuality, Fuseli, together with the poet/painter/engraver William Blake and the poet/natural philosopher Erasmus Darwin, conceived an Eros born of modern mythopoeia. This Eros was freed from the original sources that concerned antiquarians and collectors. But crucial to the narrative that this chapter unfolds is the fact that this creative alliance had an artificial origin. A closer look at the intimate, internal life of the British art

[11] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks: With Instructions for the Connoisseur, and an Essay on Grace in Works of Art*, translated by Henry Fuseli (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1765), 2.
[12] Henry Fuseli, "Introduction," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 1:20.

world—its working realities—reveals that collaboration was not always a fertile allogamy between like minds. Instead, it could be a perverse coupling.

The first section of this chapter, "Thinking through Collaboration: *The Fertilization of Egypt*," considers the engravings that Fuseli and Blake produced for Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1792). Working within but also extending Darwin's mythological framework, their designs challenged the usual limits of illustration. Not only do they assert the creative agency of their makers, but they intervene in period debates concerning ancient mythology and semiotics. The second section, "Goddesses, Gorgons and *The Temple of Nature*," explores yet another Darwinian production: *The Temple of Nature* (1803). Here, I read the frontispiece of the volume against a series of drawings that Fuseli made between 1800 and 1810 to explore the feminine sexuality first introduced in the previous section as the antithesis to the creative virility (Anubian phallicism) of *The Fertilization of Egypt*. Stressing the relationship between seeing and knowing, I demonstrate that Fuseli linked secret truth to danger that lies in wait through loose intertextuality and appropriated Medusan iconography. The following section, entitled "Sex Dreams," considers a final series of etched collaborations between Fuseli and Blake to argue that the pair invited their reader/viewers to follow divergent interpretive pathways. "On the Ocean of Business," then contextualises the collaboration explored in previous sections within the concentric working worlds of painters, engravers, poets and printers wherein commerce and culture are shown to be uncomfortable but necessary bedfellows. The final section "Eros Commodified / Prometheus Bound," returns to Fuseli. Building on the work of Camilla Smith, Kevin Salatino and Andrei Pop, I argue that the painter/professor transforms ancient Priapic rites

into disturbing scenes of modern erotic encounter, prompting an aesthetic experience that I call the sexual sublime.[13]

Denis Diderot offers a compelling period definition for the sexual sublime when he describes the

> Powerful effects [that] arise when the voluptuous and the terrible are intertwined. For example, beautiful, semi-nude women who offer us delicious drinks in the bloody skulls of our enemies. This is the model for everything that is sublime. It is this that makes the soul fill with pleasure and shudder with fear. These mixed feelings induce an extraordinary state; it is the essence of the sublime to move us in this exceptional way.[14]

Fuseli not only harnesses this complex aesthetic feeling through a heady mixture of sensual beauty and terror, but he also uses it strategically. I contend that the reversals at the heart of his erotic drawings afford potent criticism of the state of modern art, pressed to contend with the rising tide of commerce, the dictates of fashion and vanity, and the ubiquity of the antiquarian eye. In such a climate, primal Eros, emblem of "the General Creative Power of the great Active Principle of the Universe" could not but be transfigured into a rosy cherub.[15]

Finally, this chapter brings the rise and fall of the Milton Gallery into conversation with Fuseli's erotic drawings. As scholars have shown, the Milton Gallery emerged from and failed on account of the same, unforgiving market conditions. Although calculated to impress the British public, Fuseli's visions of "moping melancholy and moonstruck madness" were too

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[13] See, Camilla Smith, "Between Fantasy and Angst: Assessing the Subject and Meaning of Henry Fuseli's Late Pornographic Drawings, 1800–25," *Art History* 33, no. 3 (2010): 425, 428; Kevin Salatino, "Fuseli's Phallus: Art and Erotic Imagination in Eighteenth-Century Rome," in *Roma Britannica: Art Patronage and Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century Rome,* eds. David R. Marshall, Susan Russell, Karin Wolfe (London: The British School at Rome, 2010): 303–14. Pop compellingly argues that Fuseli "rehabilitate[s] sex aesthetically." See *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 151–212.

[14] [My translation]. The original French reads: 'Les grands effets naissent partout des idées voluptueuses entrelacées avec les idées terribles; par exemple de belles femmes à demi-nues qui nous présentent un breuvage délicieux dabs les crânes sanglants de nos ennemis. Voilà le modèle de toutes les choses sublimes. C'est alors que l'âme s'ouvre au plaisir et frissonne d'horreur. Ces sensations mêlées la tiennent dans une situation tout à fait étrange; c'est le propre du sublime de nous pénétrer d'une manière tout à fait extraordinaire. » Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. Georges Roth, 16 vols. (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958), 4:196. See also Ian Balfour, "Torso: (The) Sublime Sex, Beautiful Bodies, and the Matter of the Text," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 323.

[15] Richard Payne Knight, *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (London: Printed by T. Spilsbury, 1786), 176.

visually abrasive and esoteric to meet with the hoped for success.[16] According to a writer for the *Daily Universal Register*, despite his best efforts to seduce the middling classes with pictures based on the homegrown poetry of John Milton, his works were "not intelligible to the capacity of the million." They "resemble[d] fine authors in an obsolete or dead language, which are understood only by the educated, and what is more unfortunate, will never bear translation."[17] In distancing himself from the faithful transmission that he performed in his gambit with Reynolds, Fuseli became incomprehensible to the masses. And while translation remains an operative mode for apprehending illustration and poetical paintings alike, this chapter argues that it only guides us so far. As we will see, Fuseli and Blake increasingly privileged infidelity to their source materials.[18] More than classical literacy, they demanded imaginative flexibility.

II. Thinking through Collaboration: *The Fertilization of Egypt*

In his advertisement to *The Botanic Garden: A Poem, in Two Parts*, published in several editions between 1792 and 1799, the author explains his purpose "to inlist Imagination under the banner of Science."[19] A tour-de-force of erudition, the book includes extensive discursive footnotes connecting the poem's fanciful imagery of amorous flora and elemental creatures to recent developments in botany, physics, chemistry, natural history and comparative religion. The book itself is divided into distinct poems. The first, *The Loves of the Plants*, was written circa

[16] Asia Hout, "Barry and Fuseli: Milton, Exile, and Expulsion," in *James Barry, 1741–1806, History Painter*, eds. Tom Dunne and William L. Pressly (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 109. Calè, *Turning Readers into Spectators*, 172.
[17] *Daily Universal Register* [The Times]. May 10, 1786, 2.
[18] This idea builds on the work of David Weinglass, for whom "the illustration of works of literature and drama is an act of both creative imagination and translation." See D. H. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), xiv.
[19] Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden. A Poem, in Two Parts. Part I. Containing The Economy of Vegetation. Part II. The Loves of the Plants. With philosophical Notes*, (London: Joseph Johnson, 1791), v. The copy consulted throughout this chapter is now held in the Lawrence Lande Collection at McGill Rare Books and Special Collections.

1783 and published alone in 1789. It initiates readers into Linnaean taxonomy, explaining the reproductive processes of plants through anthropomorphic tales of romance and sexual intrigue.[20] The second poem, *The Economy of Vegetation,* extolls British ingenuity and industry. It first met with readers in 1792 when it appeared alongside a reprint of *The Loves of the Plants* in the first edition of *The Botanic Garden*. In addition to its dual poems, *The Botanic Garden* also featured an impressive set of engravings designed to entice and instruct.[21] In this section, I will focus on a pair that derive from the prodigious imaginations of Henry Fuseli and William Blake: *Fertilization of Egypt* [Fig. 56] and *Tornado* [Fig. 57].[22] The first not only enriches the allegorical mode introduced in the verse but mobilises ancient "Egyptian remains [to] lead us into unknown ages."[23] The second delivers a dramatic vision of Titanic violence. But who set the agenda for these strange images? I resist that question. Instead, I triangulate between Darwin, Fuseli and Blake to consider the interpretive possibilities afforded by an emphasis on collaboration. What associative networks might collaboration lead to or evoke in the mind of the viewer?[24] The division of labour between Darwin writing in Derby, Fuseli drawing in

[20] *The Loves of the Plants* was first published in 1789 by Joseph Johnson but without Fuseli's work. Encouraged by its success, Darwin had the poem reprinted alongside *The Economy of Vegetation* under the new title of *The Botanic Garden* in 1792, this time with the engravings. Although the title page reads 1791, the year the engravings were finished, the book was not published until 1792. See Adam Komisaruk and Allison Dushane eds., *The Botanic Garden by Erasmus Darwin* (London: Routledge: 2017), 8.

[21] For more on the strategic uses of paratext in *The Botanic Garden*, see Dahlia Porter, "Epistemic Images and Vital Nature: Darwin's Botanic Garden as Image Text Book," *European Romantic Review* 29, no. 3 (2018): 295–308; for further discussion of Fuseli's imagery, see Asia Haut, "Reading Flora: Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, Henry Fuseli's illustrations, and various literary responses," *Word & Image* 20, no. 4 (2004): 240–256; Martin Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye': Prints and Impressions in Fuseli and Erasmus Darwin," in *Romanticism and Illustration*, ed. Ian Haywood, Susan Matthews, and Mary L. Shannon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 94–118.

[22] The plate *Tornado* appeared for the first time in the 1795 edition.

[23] Knight, *Discourse*, 90.

[24] This approach finds inspiration in Darwin's own discussion of the power of the Painter or Poet to induce reverie by way of the association of ideas. "When by the art of the Painter or Poet a train of ideas is suggested to our imaginations, which interests us so much by the pain or pleasure it affords, that we cease to attend to the irritations of common external objects, and cease also to use any voluntary efforts to compare these interesting trains of ideas with our previous knowledge of things, a compleat reverie is produced." Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, *Part II*, 52–53.

Marylebone, and Blake cutting copper plates in Soho (and possibly Lambeth) invites this approach.[25]

As scholars have shown, far from commissioning Fuseli to illustrate his poem *en route* to print, the artist may have been the driving force behind its public debut, having encouraged Darwin to contact his own publisher, Joseph Johnson, to bring *The Botanic Garden* to market.[26] In fact, Darwin's correspondence discloses that in addition to acting as an intermediary, Fuseli promised to deliver "some ornament for the work," a provision that may have encouraged Darwin and Johnson to work together.[27] In addition to its somewhat unconventional route to publication via Fuseli, the book is also notable for its intertextuality. Modelling the poet's skillful use of the "looser analogies" to "dress out the imagery of poetry" and encourage the reader toward philosophy, *The Botanic Garden*'s striking visuals thrust outward into Enlightenment culture.[28] The 1799 edition is particularly rich in visual/textual cross reference since it includes an engraving based on Fuseli's infamous painting *The Nightmare,* which first enchanted Darwin in 1782.[29] The verse he penned in response to the canvas would accompany a popular print

[25] In 1788, Fuseli moved with his wife Sophia Rawlins to 72 Queen Anne Street East (now Foley Street) in Marylebone, London. Knowles, *The Life and Writing of Henry Fuseli*, 1:158. Blake was at this time living at 28 Poland Street, Soho where he had moved in 1785. Blake relocated to Hercules Buildings, Lambeth in 1790, a considerable distance from the mainstay of London's publishing scene. See Martin Myrone and Amy Concannon, eds., *William Blake* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 221.
[26] Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 96.
[27] Letter from Erasmus Darwin to Joseph Johnson, dated May 23rd, 1784. Erasmus Darwin, *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 235.
[28] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, *Part I, Containing the Economy of Vegetation*, v. I build on the seminal work of Irwin Primer who argues that Darwin's poetry is best understood when considered in conjunction with its footnotes and illustrations. Irwin Primer, "Erasmus Darwin's Temple of Nature: Progress, Evolution, and the Eleusinian Mysteries," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, no. 1 (1964): 59.
[29] Darwin published a poem based on the painting in a London periodical of that year. See *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 71, no. 494 (September 1782): 165. Martin Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 100. The Holloway engraving after Fuseli's second painted version of *The Nightmare*, (1790–91), now at the Goethe Museum in Frankfurt, was printed in octavo in 1791 before being incorporated into the fifth edition of *The Loves of the Plants*, published in 1799. For a detailed bibliographic note see Komisaruk and Dushane, *The Botanic Garden by Erasmus Darwin*, 198–199. Christopher Frayling has suggested that Darwin may have offered his advice on the composition. Frayling, "Fuseli's *The Nightmare*," 15.

engraved by Thomas Burke and published in 1783 [Fig. 58]. The lines (which he extended) reoccurred in his own text more than a decade later alongside an engraved variant of the picture. As Martin Priestman has noted, there exists an extraordinary circularity between the painting, the poem and successive engravings, with each mediatic form responding to the version that came before it.[30] As I will demonstrate, this species of dialogue is found throughout *The Botanic Garden* where verse and visuals respond to and draw meaning from each other. I suggest that this internal reciprocity is so successful because it mirrors the close working relationship that occurred behind the scenes. Fuseli had, after all, encouraged Darwin to publish in the first place, offering his "poetic eye" as an incentive to follow up with Johnson about printing his work.

The professional alliance between Fuseli, Darwin and Johnson would grow to include William Blake, already a peripheral member of the Johnson circle and a friend of the eccentric Swiss émigré.[31] When and where Fuseli and Blake first met is difficult to determine, but they may have crossed paths while living in the same neighborhood circa 1780, when Fuseli moved to no. 1 Broad Street, close to Blake's family residence at no. 28.[32] While Fuseli would soon remove to St. Martin's Lane (1782) and Blake to Poland Street (1785), their working relationship nonetheless flourished. They began working together on an intimate and continuous basis in the late 1780s, a moment which Blake qualified poetically as a time when Fuseli had been given to him for a season.[33]

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[30] Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 100.
[31] To what extent Blake remained peripheral is still debated by scholars. G. E. Bentley and Gert Schiff suggest that Fuseli brought Blake into the Johnson circle. See G. E. Bentley, *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 40. Gert Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli 1741–1825* (Zurich: Verlag Berichtshaus, 1973), 1:160. For Blake and Fuseli's early relationship see Carol Louise Hall, *Blake and Fuseli*: *A Study in the Transmission of Ideas* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 56–63.
[32] Myrone and Concannon, *William Blake*, 27.
[33] Hall, *Blake and Fuseli*, 57. The first product of their close partnership was a frontispiece for a translation of German aphorisms penned by Fuseli's childhood companion, the physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater. Published

Blake's involvement with *The Botanic Garden* was twofold. In addition to joining forces with Fuseli, he also worked independently on a series of four engravings of the Portland Vase, the Roman cameo glass vessel sold by Sir William Hamilton to the Duchess of Portland. The glass featured in Canto II of the poem. "Or bid Mortality rejoice and mourn / O'er the fine forms on PORTLAND's mystic urn."[34] Unable to resist a chance to discuss its esoteric imagery in more detail, Darwin returned to the vase in the additional notes (which functions as an appendix). Blake was thus employed to execute a series of engravings to attend the longer essay, which appeared between entries on enamels and coal at the end of the first volume. Spanning more than a dozen pages, his speculations on its function and pictorial program draw on the expertise of Josiah Wedgwood, the Baron d'Hancarville, Jacob Bryant, William Warburton and a cadre of classical authorities.[35] The production of the engravings likewise involved a network of allies; Darwin and Johnson brokered agreements between antiquarians, collectors and cultural

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under the auspices of Johnson as *Aphorisms on Man* in 1788, the octavo volume offered the first tangible juncture between the creative trinity that would contribute much to Darwin's illustrated poem. It was around this time that Johnson began contracting Blake as an engraver, a professional arrangement that only dissolved in 1801. Blake engraved plates for Johnson in 1780 as well as between 1782 and 1783. Johnson, it seems, intended to publish Blake's original political poem, *The French Revolution*, in the same year that Blake was working on plates for *The Botanic Garden*. Only a partial copy of this work exists which Keynes suggests is likely a proof. Geoffrey Keynes, *Blake Studies Notes on his Life and Works in Seventeen Chapters* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), 69; Myrone and Concannon, *William Blake*, 56. Jon Mee, "Networks," in *Blake in Context*, ed. Sarah Haggarty (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2019), 16.

[34] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, *Part I*, 88. The Italian decorative painter and engraver Francesco Bartolozzi first made engravings after the vase but when it came time for Darwin to publish his own illustrations, logistical decisions had to be made. Darwin requested to see Bartolozzi's plates, and Darwin thought he might have them engraved again by Blake if necessary since the outlines of the vase as rendered by Bartolozzi were in his opinion, "too hard, & in some places not agreeable." Writing to Josiah Wedgwood on July 9th, 1791, he requested that Bartolozzi's prints be sent "Mr Johnson St. Paul's Churchyard, —or let him know if He can have them at your house in Greek Street—as he said he can not anywhere procure them." Darwin, *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, 386.

[35] In addition to his in-text citations, we learn from a letter to Josiah Wedgwood, dated October 1789, that Darwin was hunting for sources on the Portland vase. He writes, "Pray send me d'Hancarville. I will also peruse[?] Spence's Polymetis, and Bryant's mythology (the Bacon's works I saw were at Sir B. Boothby's in quarto) and try to add more learned quotations." Darwin, *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, 347. Adam Komisaruk suggests that the discussion of the vase that appears in *The Botanic Garden* is less an afterthought than the culmination of the book's overall argument. Adam Komisaruk, *Sexual Privatism in British Romantic Writing: A Public of One* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 155.

producers to ensure that Blake had access to the vase. The production of the engravings thus involved a material exchange that may have included Wedgwood's replica made from jasperware at his factory *Etruria,* prints made by the Italian decorative painter and engraver Francesco Bartolozzi and possibly the borrowed original.[36]

But if Blake was thought a superior engraver to Bartolozzi and thus a valuable contributor, he was not an equal partner in the enterprise. Darwin's correspondence reveals that even as late as 1791, he knew of Blake only impersonally as "Johnson's engraver."[37] Nonetheless, Blake came to know Darwin through his involvement in *The Botanic Garden*. His own views would align in many ways with those of the physician turned poet and other radical thinkers within and on the margins of the Johnson circle.[38]

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[36] The arrangements for the engravings were conducted via post between Johnson and Darwin. Blake was at their disposal, but as to whether the Portland Vase was to be engraved and included in the publication was neither a question of expense nor Blake's ability but of accessibility. On July 23rd, 1791, Johnson wrote to Darwin regarding his proposal for a new plate: "It is not the expense of purchasing Bartolozzi's plates that is any object; they cannot be copied without Hamilton's consent, being protected by act of parliament. Blake is certainly capable of making an exact copy of the vase, I believe more so than Mr. B[*artolozzi*], if the vase were lent him for that purpose, & I see no other way of its being done, for the drawing he had was very imperfect. This you will determine on consulting Mr. Wedgwood, & also whether it should be copied as before, or reduced & brought into a folding plate… The reason Mr. H[*amilton*] assigns for not allowing his plates to be copied is that he is a considerable sum out of pocket, the sale not having indemnified him for his expenses. I could wish for particular instructions for the engraver." Keynes suggests that Blake likely "obtained access to the Portland Vase itself, or had the loan of a Wedgwood replica, during the autumn of 1791." John Bugg, ed., *The Joseph Johnson Letter Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8. Keynes, *Blake Studies*, 69. Thora Brylowe argues that Bartolozzi's prints were likely Blake's only source. Thora Brylowe, "Antiquity by Design: Re-Mediating the Portland Vase," in *Romantic Antiquarianism*, eds. Noah Heringman and Crystal B. Lake (Romantic Circles Praxis Series: https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/antiquarianism/praxis.antiquarianism.2014.brylowe.html, 2014).

[37] For more on Darwin and Wedgwood's negotiation regarding the engravings of the vase, see Darwin, *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, 384–386.

[38] According to Ya-feng Wu, Blake engages directly with Darwin's ideas in *The Book of Thel* (1789) and the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). See Ya-feng Wu, "Blake's Critique of Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*," *The Wordsworth Circle* 50, no. 1 (2019): 55–73. Jon Mee likewise argues that Blake's mythography has more in common with the radical ideas of Erasmus Darwin, C. F. Volney and John Toland than the Christian apologists with whom he is more often associated. Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 121–160; See also Saree Makdisi, "Immortal Joy: William Blake and the Cultural Politics of Empire," in *Blake, Nation and Empire*, ed. Steve Clark and David Worrall (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 20–39; Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). And for the Johnson circle, see Leslie F. Chard, "Joseph Johnson: Father of the Book Trade," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 79 (1975): 51–82. Helen Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent: Joseph*

Blake scholars have increasingly paid attention to the artist's commercial engravings, although their designation as reproductive prints long hampered efforts to critically engage with them.[39] What has emerged from this work is that even among his engravings after other artists, Blake often took artistic liberties or otherwise exerted an unconventional degree of creative agency. Exemplary of this candid approach to reproductive printmaking are the plates that he completed in collaboration with Fuseli for *The Botanic Garden*. Printed below *The Fertilization of Egypt* in miniscule lettering, the inscription "H. Fuseli, RA: inv" and "W. Blake. sc." casts Fuseli as inventor of the design [invenit/invented] and Blake as the plate's executor [sculpsit/engraved]. On its own, the inscription suggests that Blake played only a minor role as the engraver of Fuseli's design—mediating the intellectual property of his mentor. However, citing the extraordinary differences between the rough outline given to Blake by Fuseli and the final engraving, Blake scholars have often overturned these designations in an effort to substantiate comparisons between the bearded rain god gliding toward the viewer and Urizen, Blake's despotic god of reason.[40] Only recently have such myths of singular authorship on either side of the Fuseli/Blake debate been dismantled.[41] Resisting the privilege of attribution to an originary, causal agent central to the discipline of art history, I build on the work of

Johnson and the Cause of Liberty (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Daisy Hay, *Dinner with Joseph Johnson Books and Friendship in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

[39] An important study of his commercial engravings is Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations, A Catalogue and Study of the Plates Engraved by Blake after Designs by Other Artists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[40] Albert S. Roe, "b in *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Providence, Brown University Press, 1969), 160, 174; John Beer, *Romantic Influences: Contemporary - Victorian - Modern* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1993), 35. More recently Martin Priestman has suggested that Fuseli's role remained "embryonic" and speculates that "a great deal of the final picture's detail is purely the work of … William Blake." Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye'," 105. Robert N. Essick and Rosamund A. Paice discuss the debate in detail and propose that the verso sketch of the sistrum was added by Blake. Robert N. Essick and Rosamund A. Paice, "Newly Uncovered Blake Drawings in the British Museum," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2003/2004): 88.

[41] John Beer and Susan Matthews have convincingly taken the 'middle path' and argued that the engraving reflects an active dialogue between the artists. Beer, *Romantic Influences*, 38. See also Susan Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality, and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 45.

contemporary scholars to ask: what do we see when we embrace authorial confusion? I argue that an emphasis on collaboration can enrich our understanding of Enlightenment book production, resituating the image at a critical juncture where different ideas concerning ancient material culture, religion and sexuality compete and converge.[42] Approached thus, the illustrations in *The Botanic Garden* are neither pictorial embellishments nor mere ornaments as Darwin's wording might lead us to believe. Rather, they are autonomous statements that respond to the verse and make claims of their own.[43]

Leading us into *The Botanic Garden* is Darwin's authorial voice. Echoing the assault against common sense that I traced in Knight's *Discourse*, Darwin begins his poem with a reminder that nothing is as it seems. In ancient myth:

> Many of the important operations of Nature were shadowed or allegorized … as the first Cupid springing from the Egg of Night, the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, the Rape of Proserpine, the Congress of Jupiter and Juno, Death and Resuscitation of Adonis, &c. many of which are ingeniously explained in the works of Bacon… Allusions to those fables were therefore thought proper ornament to a philosophical poem, and are occasionally introduced either as represented by the poets, or preserved on the numerous gems and medallions of antiquity.[44]

Darwin borrows this indirect mode of delivery for his verse. He sets out to decipher and bewilder, instruct and delight, disclosing scientific fact via rhyming couplet whilst invoking an entire pantheon of ancient gods and their amorous relations. While an unusual format for a work

[42] This method is consistent with recent Blake scholarship which contextualises his visual and poetic oeuvre in a network of exchange. This body of literature confronts Blake as an active member of concentric intellectual and artistic circles. Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality, and Bourgeois Politeness*, 13. See also Robert Essick, "Erin, Ireland, and the Emanation in Blake's *Jerusalem*," in *Blake, Nation and Empire*, ed. Steve Clark David Worrall (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 201–213.
[43] Sophie Thomas, "Poetry and Illustration: 'Amicable strife'," in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. Charles Mahoney (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 356. Sophie Thomas, "'With a Master's Hand and Prophet's Fire': Blake, Gray, and the Bard," in *Romanticism and Illustration*, ed. Ian Haywood, Susan Matthews, and Mary L. Shannon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 48. See also from the same volume, Peter Otto, "The Ends of Illustration: Explanation, Critique, and the Political Imagination in Blake's Title-pages for Genesis," in *Romanticism and Illustration*, ed. Ian Haywood, Susan Matthews, and Mary L. Shannon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 25–46.
[44] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part I,* vii.

with scientific pretensions, Darwin hoped to appeal to a broad audience; all readers were welcome initiates to "the philosophy of the works of Nature."[45] That is, Darwin was hopeful to capture the middle market as well as appeal to the more conventional collector of books. Its demotic impulse can, however, assist in our understanding not only the content and unusual format of the poem (which combines lively verse and dense, erudite footnotes), but its engravings as well.[46] The images thrust outward radially, recalling meanings that would be evident to reader/viewers familiar with the philosophical and historical debates of the period.

Consider a set of drawings preserved in the British Museum, works in which the reciprocating responses of Fuseli and Blake to Darwin's text become visible. The first is a preliminary sketch that Fuseli delivered to Blake to indicate the basic design for the *Fertilization of Egypt* [Fig. 59], while the second, a wash drawing, belongs to Blake and elaborates the details of the design in preparation for the engraving [Fig. 60]. Together they duplicate *The Botanic Garden*'s liberal prosopopoeia, (ancient Greek rhetorical device; personification) a choice well suited to both artists, known for their ability to express complex emotions and abstract ideas through the human body.[47] In both the sketch and the wash drawing, a monumental god is shown from behind, straddling the banks of the Nile which flows between his muscular legs. His powerful triangular stance acts to frame another figure, transformed by Blake from a faint outline into an aged man, who glides toward us on spread wings. Water flows from his extended arms

[45] While this phrase derives from Darwin's later poem *The Temple of Nature*, it is applicable to all his philosophical poems. Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, 72.
[46] Blake, too, was markedly against "closed texts and the careful regulation of knowledge and power." He invited his audience to govern their own engagement. As Saree Makdisi has shown, his texts were defiantly accessible, "suggestive of a kind of reading that would open out from the text, rather than trying to seduce the reader into its hidden confines." See Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 162. Fuseli too theorised that an artist should give preference to a singular idea, "*one* great expression," but that this idea would invite innumerable associations is implicit. John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*: *'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 266–267.
[47] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part II*, 97. Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 98.

and cascading beard while lightening sparks from his fingertips. The pair of figures are prompted by the following passage from Darwin:

> Sailing in air, when dark Monsoon inshrouds
> His tropic mountains in a night of clouds;
> Or drawn by whirlwinds from the Line returns,
> And showers o'er Afric all his thousand urns;
> High o'er his head the beams of Sirius glow,
> And, Dog of Nile, Anubis barks below.[48]

The annual procreant flooding of the Nile is given animal/human form as the Egyptian deity Anubis, a move which cleverly weds nature and culture. If the association is not clear from the verse alone, Darwin follows up with a discursive footnote detailing the timing of the summer monsoons in Africa, drawing from Volney's *Travels* and Scottish traveller James Bruce's 1790 account of the Nile springs.[49] The footnote also cites the comparative mythographer Abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche's *Histoire de Ciel* for the cultural signification of Anubis, whose image, the reader learns, was hung on temples to warn the populace of the rising flood water which coincided with the appearance of the dog star Sirius.[50] But these citations are far from neutral. They point to contested sites of negotiation in Enlightenment scholarship. Blake and Fuseli confront the complexity of those debates in their design.

The decade leading up to the publication of *The Botanic Garden* witnessed considerable activity in the field of comparative religion and mythography. Antiquarians continued an ongoing debate concerning the origin of ancient gods and the diffusion/transmutation of their mythos. Pluche's *Histoire du Ciel*, for example, exposed "the abuse of the symbolical figures

[48] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part I*, 126–127.
[49] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part I*, 126–127.
[50] Abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche, *The History of the Heavens, considered according to the Notions of the Poets and Philosophers, compared with the Doctrines of Moses*, trans. J. B. De Freval, esq. (London: Printed for J. Osborn, 1743), 1:27.

mistaken for real objects" among the Egyptians.[51] Crucially, those supposed errors also show up in the final Fuseli/Blake design. As Martin Priestman has argued, the plate visualises the conflation of signifier and signified since "the dog-headed figure worshipping the dog-star both *is* the god Anubis, and the Egyptian priests' deliberate construction of this figure out of the astronomical facts they have observed."[52] And while the design exemplifies a Darwinian concept of culture, wherein myth finds its origin in a desire to describe and understand the natural world, it also invites us to reconsider the problematic relationship between emblem and meaning. In drawing the eye upward from Anubis to his celestial counterpart, the dog star, Blake and Fuseli contrive an exercise in semiotics, one in which such misrecognitions are revealed and considered.

The image resonates with Blake's interest in the process by which meaning is made: the act of interpretation. Consider, for example, the representation of material culture. In his initial sketch, Fuseli concentrates on the musculature of the figure, the canine head and the star. However, another element (albeit faint) commands our attention as well. Overlapping with Anubis's right foot, it is possible to discern the faint outline of a sistrum, a musical instrument associated with religious ritual practice in ancient Egypt. While given no more attention than the

[51] Pluche, *The History of the Heavens*, 106.
[52] Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye'," 104–105. Mee suggests that Blake and Fuseli offer a critical interpretation of Darwin's lines with an emphasis on the corrupting influence of priestcraft, an idea he associates with Volney. Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 158. The design thus intersects with contemporary interest in different "species of worship" and the origins of apotheosis among the ancients, a theme which both Darwin and Blake explored along the same lines as classicists like Thomas Blackwell and, closer to their own moment, Knight. David Fallon points to James Barry's lectures as a source for Blake's ideas concerning ancient Egyptian religion, wherein Barry argues that a "traditional, pure theology" was corrupted via sabaism, stellar worship and apotheosis in ancient Egypt, which he qualifies as a "horrid state of things." David Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment: The Politics of Apotheosis*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 31–32. It was held among these thinkers that despotic priests had corrupted the poetic tales of the ancients, transfiguring a pure, sublime theology using "vulgar fable" and "poetical allegory," a deceit that Blake described on Plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as "attempting to realize the mental deities from their objects." Knight, *Discourse*, 31; quoted in Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 124.

other perfunctory contextual details on the sheet's recto such as the pyramids, the verso offers a nuanced rendering of the musical device [Fig. 61]. Drawn in sharp detail, the rattle occupies the same position as its counterpart on the opposite side of the page, superimposed over the outline of the foot which is visible through the paper. This intriguing inclusion prompts several questions. Why was so much care lavished on this singular detail? And what associations would such an instrument recall in the mind of an eighteenth-century reader/viewer?

In 1786, Knight gave prime visual real estate to the sistrum in his *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* [Fig. 62]. The "mystic instrument," he explained, was an attribute of the goddess Isis. Drawing upon Plutarch, "one of the most grave and learned of the Greeks," Knight described each of its emblematic elements in turn:

> The Curved Top… represented the Lunar Orbit, within which the creative attributes of the Deity were exerted, in giving motion to the four Elements, signified by the four Rattles below. On the centre of the Curve was a Cat, the emblem of the Moon; who from her influence on the constitutions of women, was supposed to preside particularly over the passive Powers of Generation.[53]

We learn elsewhere in Plutarch's *Moralia* that the sistrum's combination of motion and sound nullified the violent wind and volcanic tumult of Typhon, the Titan god of storms. Plutarch explains,

> [that] the sistrum also makes clear that all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about, and never to cease from motion but, as it were, to be waked up and agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid. They say that they avert and repel Typhon by means of the sistrums, indicating thereby that when destruction constricts and checks Nature, generation releases and arouses it by means of motion.[54]

Servius, yet another familiar authority on the artifact in the eighteenth century, is even more explicit in connecting Isis, the sistrum and the power to move the floodwaters of the Nile: "Isis is

[53] Knight, *Discourse*, 165–166.
[54] Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," in *Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 5:149.

the genius of Egypt, who by the movement of her sistrum, which she carries in her right hand, signifies the access and recess of the Nile."[55] In the print, Fuseli and Blake contextualise the sistrum within a sonorous ritual practice that highlights these relationships. Anubis presses his hands together with a clap while his Isiatic instrument lies close at hand. He readies himself to challenge the oncoming monsoon, an embodied force of nature that recalls the second collaborative engraving between Fuseli and Blake that appeared in *The Botanic Garden*. *Tornado* embraces the thunderous violence of *The Fertilization of Egypt*. It depicts Zeus and Typhon manifesting the same elemental powers of the aerial god in *The Fertilization of Egypt*, wind, rain and lightening.[56] While only included in the 1785 edition, *Zeus Battling Typhon* was likely executed at the same time as *The Fertilization of Egypt*, a fact that reinforces the thematic correspondence between the plates: primordial worlds shaped by opposing forces.[57] That is, if the sistrum recalls Isis and the passive powers of generation, the instrument becomes an emblem of the feminine and thus the complement to the Anubian virility dominating the design. That the instrument appears on the verso of the sketch enhances this diametrical opposition. In fact, one compelling way to approach the sistrum delineated on the verso is to apprehend it as a ghostly effect. That is, an image "that lingers as an apparition in rear view, faint but attached."[58] Interpreted thus, the dualistic relationship between feminine and masculine power is realised by the clever use of the page—overlaid on opposite sides, but never visible at the same time. This

[55] "Isis autem est genius Aegypti, qui per sistri motum, quod gerit in dextra, Nili accessus, recessusque significat." Servius, ad *Aeneid*, 8.696.
[56] Kazuya Okada, "'Typhon, the lower nature': Blake and Egypt as the Orient," in *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, eds. Steve Clark and Masashi Suzuki (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 32–33.
[57] Ruthven Todd, "Two Blake Prints and Two Fuseli Drawings with some possibly pertinent speculation," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 5, no. 3, (1971–72): 177.
[58] Shira Brisman, "Image/Vessel/Waste," *Grey Room* 80 (Summer 2020): 69.

spectral quality is particularly vibrant since Anubis is visible through the paper on the verso and the sistrum is traced faintly through the sheet on the recto.

Brimming with erotic potential, the image also conflates procreative acts. The focal point of the image is the god's loin cloth, just sheer enough to reveal the contours of the upper thigh and glute. While we see an abundance of flood water streaming toward us between parted legs, the pose and title of the engraving invite us to envision the fertile waters as seminal fluid streaming from the male figure, an echo of the overall theme of the text which unites eroticism and natural processes.[59] It was a particularly potent theme for Fuseli (and Blake, for that matter), who mobilised heroic virility as a visual idiom for creative genius. This stratagem was not lost on his contemporaries. One vocal critic, the Reverend R. A. Bromley, accused Fuseli of being among the "libertines of painting" in his *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts* (1793).[60] The implicit critique of Fuseli's *Genie*—an unbridled imagination—was its ambiguous power. It produced "that [which] is not of our acquaintance, but of a new creation."[61] Here, Bromley cites Dryden's translation of Charles du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica*, wherein libertines of painting are described as those who refuse to follow nature:

> As there are Libertines of Religion, who have no other Law but the Vehemence of their Inclinations, which they are resolv'd not to overcome […] [so] there are the Libertines of Painting, [who] have no other Model but *Rhodomontado Genius*, and very irregular, which violently hurries them away.[62]

[59] Susan Matthews connects the eroticism of the image to the work of William Hayley, who associated the Nile with erotic love. See Matthews, "Africa and Utopia: Refusing a 'local habitation,' in *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, eds. Steve Clark and Masashi Suzuki (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 111.
[60] Robert Anthony Bromley, *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (London: The Philanthropic-Press, 1793).
[61] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 1:184.
[62] John Dryden, *De Arte Graphica. The Art of Painting By C. A. Du Fresnoy. With Remarks. Translated into English, Together with an original preface, containing a parallel betwixt painting and poetry. By Mr. Dryden* (London: Printed by J. Heptinstall for W. Rogers, 1695), 134–135.

The criticism is directed at the painter who not only arrogantly fashions himself as a great creator (and therefore has no need of models fashioned by a Christian divinity), but who also indulges in too much sensuality and imagination.[63] It is a pertinent critique when considered alongside *The Fertilization of Egypt,* for it accuses the artist (and defiant engravers like Blake), of usurping the authority of the original—in this case not only God or nature but also Darwin as the author of the book.

Of course, *The Botanic Garden* embraced such flights of fancy, or, in the words of one of Darwin's contemporaries, the exploration of "new worlds of mind."[64] With its congeniality between makers, images and ideas, the book became a breeding ground for the kind of ingenuity that disgruntled prosaic critics like Bromley. Its collaborative ambit and apparent cross fertilization with texts like the Baron d'Hancarville's *Recherches* and paintings like Fuseli's *The Nightmare* suggest that *The Botanic Garden* should be read less as the product of a singular author than of a radical intellectual climate, one that nurtured interest in the erotically charged ethos of the ancient world. In a similar vein, reading *The Fertilization of Egypt* as a product of a milieu as opposed to an individual hand allows us to perceive not only the legibility but also the mutability of ancient material culture in the late eighteenth century. It entices us toward the unfamiliar. '*Æ*gypt' had long figured prominently in stories told about the ancient world, but it was the culture about which the least was known. Darwin, Fuseli and Blake mobilise this aura of mystery, unleashing the sublime potential of elemental energy, sexuality and ancient monumentality. As we will see, their collaborations continue to signal a transition from mythography (a critical engagement with ancient myth) to the active cultivation of a shared

[63] Kevin Pask, *The Fairy Way of Writing: Shakespeare to Tolkien* (John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 90.
[64] Rev. W. B. Stephens, "To The Author of the Poem on the Loves of the Plants," in *The Botanic Garden*, ix.

modern mythology, one wherein, to borrow a phrase from Blake, "more is meant than meets the eye."[65]

III. Goddesses, Gorgons and *The Temple of Nature*

Moving from Darwin's discursive poetry, which found thematic elaboration in *The Fertilization of Egypt,* this section takes as its prompt a broader, visual engagement with Darwinian themes. I bring the frontispiece to *The Temple of Nature: Or, The Origin of Society* (1803) into conversation with in a series of drawings that feature classically inspired femmes fatales. I argue that Fuseli conflates, confuses and reimagines literary and visual sources to challenge his viewers along the same lines as the plates fashioned for *The Botanic Garden*; it is only when we embrace the disruption of received ideas that we can truly appreciate the complexities of these enigmatic drawings.

Fuseli would revisit themes of esoteric knowledge and misrecognition in his plates for *The Temple of Nature,* a Darwinian epic that like *The Botanic Garden* relied on his mythical imagination and the publishing expertise of Joseph Johnson. Published posthumously, the poem returns to the philosophy of the works of Nature. It, too, contains copious notes on a wide range of natural processes which Darwin explains metaphorically in verse. Here, however, it is the Eleusinian mysteries that are chosen as the allegorical structure for the poem. This allowed Darwin to expand his ambit from the progressive course of Nature to the evolution of culture. He explains their origin in an early footnote:

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[65] William Blake, A *Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, Poetical and Historical Inventions, painted by William Blake, in Water Colours, Being the Ancient Method of Fresco Painting Restored. And Drawings, for Public Inspection, and for Sale by Private Contract* (London: Printed by D. N. Shury, 1809), 5. Blake is referring to ancient monuments containing "mythological and recondite meaning," encountered in his visions. These allegorical works, from Egypt and India, informed his *Nelson* and *Pitt* designs, exhibited in the apartment above his brother's Broad Street shop in 1809. See Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 193–200.

> The Eleusinian mysteries were invented in Egypt, and afterwards transferred into Greece along with most of the other early arts and religions of Europe. They seem to have consisted of scenical representations of the philosophy and religion in those times, which had previously been painted in hieroglyphic figures to perpetuate them before the discovery of letters; and are well explained in Dr. Warburton's divine legation of Moses; who believes with great probability, that Vergil in the sixth book of the Aeneid has described a part of these mysteries in his account of the Elysian fields.[66]

The Eleusinian mysteries became an important framework for theorising the hierarchal distribution of knowledge in the ancient world. The theory of double doctrine assumed that a philosophical canon was expounded to elite initiates of the "greater mysteries," while the masses, admitted only to the "lesser mysteries," were furnished with a dogma tailored to their unlettered nature.[67]

Recalling the ritual "machinery" of the poem, Fuseli initiates the reader/viewer into the secret creed of the higher mysteries via his frontispiece, engraved in stipple by Moses Haughton Jr. [Fig. 63]. Again, Fuseli chooses to visualise specific lines from the poem:

> PRIESTESS OF NATURE! while with pious awe
> Thy votary bends, the mystic veil withdraw;
> Charm after charm, succession bright, display,
> And give the GODDESS to adoring day![68]

He depicts a dramatic scene with three female figures. The ecstatic devotee seen from behind hails from the band of virgins who "round the altar throng."[69] Removing the veil with numinous flourish is the priestess Urania, Hierophant and Muse of Science—the reader/viewer's guide through the recesses of Darwin's allegorical temple. And between the folds of fabric stands the goddess of Nature, rigid and unmoving. Fuseli presumes that she is not a living woman but a cult

[66] Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature: Or, The Origin of Society: a poem, with philosophical notes* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1803), 12–13.
[67] Primer, "Erasmus Darwin's Temple of Nature," 67.
[68] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 15.
[69] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 14.

statue. This is a slight departure from the verse which brings the goddess to life, highlighting her radiance and nurturing attributes:

> Shrin'd in the midst majestic NATURE stands,
> Extends o'er earth and sea her hundred hands;
> Tower upon tower her beamy forehead crests,
> And births unnumber'd milk her hundred breasts.
> Drawn round her brows a lucid veil depends,
> O'er her fine waist the purfled woof descends;
> Her stately limbs the gather'd folds surround,
> And spread their golden selvage on the ground.[70]

Calling our attention to her hundred breasts and mural crown, this description aligns with the standard iconography of Diana of Ephesus.[71] But if Fuseli diverts from Darwin, he nonetheless borrows from the author's own models: Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (1st century BC) and Linnaeus's *Fauna Svecica* (1746). Both were published with illustrations of a many-breasted Mother Nature.[72] The frontispiece to *Fauna Svecica,* for example, depicts Artemis/Diana as an animated sculpture. She is part female form and part ornamental column, decorated with flora and fauna [Fig. 65].[73] Fuseli appears to have adapted his veil, the same strange, protruding feet at

[70] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 12.
[71] Martin Priestman argues that the towers cresting Nature's forehead described by Darwin may be a reference to Lucretius's earth-mother Cybele "who carries cities on her head," and who came to be associated with a range of fertility goddesses. Martin Priestman*, The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 156. Drawings held in the collection of the British Museum confirm that this iconography was also associated with Diana of Ephesus, repeated from the Roman era through to the eighteenth century. Both Nicolas Poussin and Giulio Romano, for example, depict the many-breasted Diana with a tower on her head (See 1992,0229.27 and 1952,0121.75 in the British Museum).
[72] Martin Priestman signals out the frontispiece to M. D. Marolles's translation of Lucretius, *Le Poëte Lucrece* (Paris, 1651), as an example of the goddess of Nature shown squirting milk from her breasts. It likewise contains personifications of the four elements, which reappear in Fuseli's frontispiece to Darwin's *The Economy of Vegetation*: *Flora Attired by the Elements*. Martin Priestman*, The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*, 154. The English translation of Book I of *De Rerum Natura* by John Evelyn features an adaption of Marolle's design [Fig. 64]. See Gavina Cherchi, "*Simulacra Lucretiana*: The Iconographic Tradition of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*," in Lucretius Poet and Philosopher: Background and Fortunes of *De Rerum Natura*, eds., Philip R. Hardie, Valentina Prosperi and Diego Zucca (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020)**,** 343. Another striking parallel between *The Botanic Garden* designs and these early modern images of Diana Multimammia can be found in the frontispiece to Linnaeus's *Fauna Svecica*. The shining star emerging from parted clouds at the top of the composition in *The Fertilization of Egypt* is strongly reminiscent of the one found in *Fauna Svecica.*
[73] For an iconographic reading of the frontispiece see Gunnar Broberg, "Natural History Frontispieces and Ecology," in *The Natural Sciences and the Arts: Aspects of the Interaction from the Renaissance to the 20th Century,* ed. Allen Ellenius (Uppsala, 1985), 94–97.

the base of the column and the goddess's small breasts (which are not "pendulous" or "heavy with milk," as was commonly depicted) from this image or one like it.[74] However, while both are fashioned in stone, his Diana is an abstraction, polished smooth with neither nipples nor pupils. Fuseli departs even further from *Fauna Svecica* to take up Darwin's challenge. He unites nature and culture by removing his goddess from a rocky landscape to position her within an austere classical structure, the plain columns of which can be discerned on either side of the platform. She is also sheltered between curtains and only partially revealed to the male and female viewers who crowd the dais at left. As a result, we, as reader/viewers, are among the few made privy to the secrets of Nature which Darwin bestows on those with sufficient patience to toggle between his expressive verse and pedantic footnotes.

But who exactly is she? I argue that Fuseli is intentionally ambivalent, borrowing the iconography of different ancient goddesses to fashion his own composite deity. However, even as he deviates from the standard iconography of any singular goddess, it is important to remember that such appropriations and iconographic mergers were common in the ancient world. Scholars, for example, have traced a connection between the unveiling of Diana/Artemis at Ephesus and the goddess of Nature, who as per Heraclitus's maxim "loves to hide."[75] This was an important allegory for Darwin, who set out to "reveal" the unseen processes of the world. The emphasis on unveiling likewise connects his goddess to an even older iconographic tradition where Nature assumes many divine personalities. One of Darwin's secondary sources on the Eleusinian mysteries, William Warburton, argued that all fertility goddesses of the ancient world

[74] Londa L. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 2004 [1993]), 59.
[75] Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006). For the French original see Pierre Hadot, *Le voile d'Isis: Essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de nature* (Paris, Gallimard, 2004).

derived from Isis, another veiled deity.[76] As Pierre Hadot has persuasively argued, she, too, "assume[d] multiple meanings" and personae" in the eighteenth century.[77] Fuseli is complicit in this mutability. His veiled Isis/Diana Multimammia/Goddess of Nature stands shrouded in a series of cascading mantles that disclose a cool and immovable vessel for nature's secrets, here exposed through the operations of Darwin's science. An early modern precedent for this specifically scientific theme was published in the 1650s. Athanasius Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* explicitly noted that Isis's veil was an emblem for the secrets of nature.[78] It followed that science unveiling Nature (or Isis) became a common allegorical scene for frontispieces to scientific treatises, from *Anatome Animalum* [Fig. 66] first published in 1681 to Johann Andreas von Segner's 1754 *Einleitung in die Naturlehre* [Fig. 67]. These are worth considering in detail as visual precedents for the frontispiece to the *Temple of Nature*.

The frontispiece to *Anatome Animalum,* by the Dutch illustrator and engraver Jan Luyken, openly shows us what lies under the veil. The latter, for *Einleitung in die Naturlehre* is less direct. It depicts Isis clutching her attribute, the sistrum, as she glides across a mountainous background.[79] She is veiled except for her right eye and cheek. One putto poses casually in contrapposto at left with his index finger pressed to closed lips in a gesture of guarded secrets. A second measures the goddess's footsteps with an enormous compass and a third attends to her person. The inscription on the pedestal "Qua Licet [in so far as allowed]" signals the prohibition of lifting her veil. Knowing this, we might interpret the action of the third putto, who begins to

[76] Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*, 156.
[77] Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 269.
[78] Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 237.
[79] Jan Assman argues that the putti are personifications of the natural sciences and that the image does not reference the veiled image of Sais, but rather the idea that Nature/Isis cannot be looked at directly, and "can only be studied a posteriori." Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 129. Christine Battersby challenges Assman's reading of the figure as Isis, but she misinterprets the instrument as a zither, associated with Venus. Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 97.

lift the hem, as either an act of reverence or an indiscretion. We are left to wonder whether he graciously offers to carry the excess fabric of her dress or attempts a cheeky glance under it. Such a move would be reminiscent of William Hogarth's later print of the same theme, *Boys Peeping at Nature* (1730) wherein this salacious intent is explicit [Fig. 68]. Hogarth transforms the curious putto into a peeping satyr, whose inspection confirms that the secrets of nature are not written on the goddess's face but lie underneath her draperies.

This playful rendering of Diana's exposure reflects a modification in the myth that has its own protracted history. Early Christian mythographers were eager to uncover the sexuality of pagan rites.[80] While Fuseli is less forthcoming in conflating these rites with the lurid spectacles derided by early Christian authors in his frontispiece, he nonetheless declines to foreclose the possibility that the secrets of nature are, in fact, sexual. Thus, we should pay special attention to the dramatic gesturing found in the image. The act of unveiling is akin to a religious ritual in which visual experience is paramount. Substantiating a link between clandestine knowledge and reproduction, three hands draw our eye to the goddess's chest: the left hand of the female devotee kneeling at lower right; Urania's, with one elegant finger extended; and another disembodied by the margin at lower left, mirroring her motion. Unexpectedly, the Baron d'Hancarville's eccentric semiotics may be helpful here insofar as he introduces Diana/Artemis

[80] See Asaph Ben-Tov, "The Eleusinian Mysteries in the Age of Reason," in *Knowledge and Profanation: Transgressing the Boundaries of Religion in Premodern Scholarship*, ed. Martin Mulsow and Asaph Ben-Tov (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 205. Darwin's argument concerning the debasement of monotheism at the hands of duplicitous priests was commonplace among comparative mythographers. In *Protrepticus* [*Exhortation to the Greeks*], the second-century Christian philosopher Clement of Alexandria, recapitulates events in the myth of Demeter and Persephone (the heart of the Eleusinian mysteries) with an emphasis on lewd disclosure. Citing the "shameful tale about Demeter," Clement recounts that while wandering through Eleusis looking for Persephone, the goddess came upon locals from the region seeking to comfort their forlorn guest. Baubo, an old woman, first offers Demeter wine but the goddess is too distraught to drink. Baubo then reveals her genitalia in a gesture of good humour. "Demeter is pleased at the sight, and … at last receives the draught [of wine], delighted with the spectacle! These are the secret mysteries of the Athenians!" Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, trans. G. W. Butterworth, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 41, 43.

of Ephesus and her many breasts as both "the sign of bounty or abundance," and "a monstrosity in terms of art."[81] Fuseli mediates between the figure and the sign, avoiding an ugly attempt to capture innumerable breasts.[82] This, however, does not detract from her otherworldly aura. Three breasts are sufficient to unsettle the viewer. As a sign, this trinity recalls the lactating mother, one who supports the life that she likewise brought into being through a sexual act. Such an account accords well with the core message of *The Temple.* As scholars have emphasised, the text "dramatizes the marriage of Cupid and Psyche and the triumph of sexual love"—what Darwin himself terms Nature's "chef d'oeuvre."[83] Fuseli enacts a careful balance between the vulgar and the philosophical while engaging viewers in a clever game that like the Eleusinian mysteries, turns on learning secrets and signs.

Fuseli would return to allegorical imagery inspired by Darwin on his own time. He experimented with the theme of veiled Isis in a pair of drawings he is thought to have completed between 1805 and 1810. *Two Soldiers flee from the Statue of Isis in Sais* [Fig. 69] and *Isis in the Shape of the Fates* [Fig. 70] do away with the surplus breasts altogether and draw instead on Kant's description of veiled Isis as sublime image: "Perhaps there has never been a more sublime utterance, or a thought more sublimely expressed, than the well-known inscription upon the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): 'I am all that is, and that was, and that shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from before my face.'"[84] The grave warning contained within this statement gained cultural credence toward the end of the eighteenth century. Both artists and writers exploited the sublime potential of learning the secrets of nature by exploring the terrible risks of

[81] Francis Haskell, "The Baron d'Hancarville: An Adventurer and Art Historian in Eighteenth-Century Europe," in *Oxford, China and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Edward Chaney and Neil Ritchie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 185.
[82] Preistman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 109.
[83] Dustin D. Stewart, *Futures of Enlightenment Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 185; Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 111.
[84] Immanuel Kant*, Critique of Judgment*, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1790]), 145.

seeking out that which should remain hidden. In both of his drawings, Fuseli registers this danger as he follows Plutarch's description of Isis closely, depicting the monumental goddess seated on a dais within the space of an apse. The first watercolour, *Two Soldiers flee from the Statue of Isis in Sais*, is highly finished. It depicts Isis holding her veil. She glares malevolently at a pair of soldiers hurriedly escaping at right. One has fled from our sight save for his shield and bare right foot. The other extends his limbs in a dramatic flight toward the edge of the picture plane, his left hand covering his eyes in a gesture of remorse, horror or blindness. That the goddess holds her attribute, the veil, aloft in her right hand suggests that the male figures have stolen a glance at her face. However, implicit in the composition is the possibility that the secrets of nature are, as in Hogarth's rendering, hidden between her legs. Isis's elevated position at the apex of a small staircase in conjunction with her wide parted knees hints that the trespassers unwittingly confronted the secret of life in her genitalia.

The second drawing, *Isis in the Shape of the Fates*, is compositionally similar but less finished. Here, too, the goddess is ensconced in a semicircular niche. However, in this version, the goddess is not herself. She has been transformed into the three Moirai (fates). Moreover, these fates are not the old crones often depicted in the modern tradition. Neither are they shown in three life stages, as classical accounts describe them. Rather, they are reminiscent of the fantastically coiffed women found in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish prints like that of Jan Muller after Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (1589) [Fig. 71]. Curiously, Fuseli conflates them with the Graeae, the mythical triad of sisters who enable Perseus to defeat Medusa in Greek mythology. The mistake must be intentional, for Fuseli surely knew the story well. He would treat Perseus's clever gambit to gather information from the Graeae in another series of works. We will turn to that thematic later in the section, but for now it is Isis, the central

figure, who holds their eye alongside the scissors of the fates.[85] If we adhere to the conventional iconography, the female figure beside her wielding the thread of life is Atropos. She pulls it taut in preparation for its bifurcation, squinting malevolently at the shameless gape of the male soldier, who turns for one last look. The cut will end his life, and deservedly so, since he was foolish enough to face the goddess, whom, Plutarch reminds us, no mortal has ever seen.[86] Aside from this disquieting shapeless danger, there is also the sense that nothing is what it seems. Adding to the confusion of confounded myths, Plutarch tells us that the statue believed to be Isis was in fact Athena.[87] This was true of many ancient gods and goddesses who were recast anew as they moved across cultures. Isis as Athena or Isis as Demeter were common syncretic deities. While the frontispiece to the *Temple of Nature* depicts the culmination of an initiation rite, Fuseli's other two drawings experiment with alternative possibilities. They alert us to dangers lurking under the veil.[88] *The Three Fates in the Shape of Isis* recall *nuda Veritas*, a popular Renaissance allegory. But Fuseli suspends any pleasure of observing Truth in her form as a coy female nude.[89] His accidental initiates may have seen naked truth, but they emerge from under the veil into sightlessness, not true vision. As these drawings demonstrate, seeing goddesses in the ancient world could induce epiphany or, unhappily, death.

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[85] The Graeae were known to share one eye and one tooth, while the Fates or Moirai (Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos), were held to carry thread, scissors, a spindle and a distaff.

[86] "I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered." Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," *Moralia*, 5:9, 25. Friedrich Schiller made the same connection between truth and death in his poem *Bild zu Sais* (1795) which also draws on Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris* to recall the tragic consequences of longing for the divine image. His poem recounts the tale of a young man who encounters the veiled statue at Sais in his pursuit of knowledge. Ignoring the high priestess's warning, the man enters the temple under the cover of darkness to peer under the veil. He is found in the temple the next morning "pale and senseless." Mute, the man falls into a deep melancholy and dies shortly after. Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 270.

[87] Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," 5:9, 23.

[88] Assman, *Moses the Egyptian*, 134. Johannes Graves has noted how for Fuseli, "the gaze itself seems to become a source of violence and horror." Johannes Graves, "Uncanny Images The "Night Sides" of the Visual Arts around 1800," in *Dark Romanticism: From Goya to Max Ernst*, ed. Felix Krämer (Ostfildern: Hatje-Cantz-Verlag, 2012), 33.

[89] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1939). 155, 159.

That the consequence of the soldiers' transgression is death brings to mind another classical myth that highlights the danger of looking at that which "*must not be seen.*"[90] Among the femmes fatales that populate Fuseli's oeuvre, we find several depictions of Medusa.[91] As in the familiar myth, a glance at the Gorgon and her serpentine strands would arrest viewers, transforming them into cold stone. She is one of the three monstrous siblings who were also sisters to the Graeae as described in Hesiod's *Theogony*. As we have seen, Fuseli combined the iconography of the Graeae with that of the Moirai (Fates). But complicating the identification of the figures further, the wings worn by Isis in her guise as the Graeae/Moirai, actually belong to the Gorgon, not the goddess.[92] This identification is reinforced by comparison to an additional pair of wash drawings made between 1800 and 1810 in which Fuseli repeats this sartorial motif. In the first drawing, *Beautiful Young Woman with Head Wings* [Fig. 72], a colossal female figure carries an unconscious woman over her shoulder. Here, a pair of wings are set into a mop of tight curls which frame another whimsical fashion: a braided bow made of hair. In the second wash

[90] Rabun Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 190. Taylor discusses further the Medusa myth and Medusan imagery.

[91] Fuseli depicted Medusa with wings in several drawings including those featuring his wife. See *Mrs Fuseli Seated in Front of the Fire, Behind Her a Relief Medallion with her Portrait as the Medusa* (1799) Gert Schiff, ed., *Henry Fuseli*, 1741-1825 (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1975), 130–131. The Greek inscription reads: "The head of fair-cheeked Medusa." Fuseli likewise gives Kriemhild the same Medusan headdress in *Kriemhild and Siegfried Surprised Together by Hagen* (c.1817). D. H. Weinglass, "The Elysium of Fancy": Aspects of Henry Fuseli's Erotic Art," in *Erotica and the Enlightenment* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 302.

[92] Taylor notes that no scholars have probed very deeply into this common iconographic element associated with Medusa. Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art*, 237. Interestingly Darwin provides a clue. In a footnote on page 22 of Part I, The Economy of Vegetation, he explains, "The Egyptian Medusa is represented on antient gems with wings on her head, snaky hair, and a beautiful countenance, which appears intensely thinking; and was supposed to represent divine wisdom. The Grecian Medusa, on Minerva's shield, as appears on other gems, has a countenance distorted with rage or pain, and is supposed to represent divine vengeance." Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part I*, 22. As for visual sources, Fuseli may have drawn on the Rondanini Medusa [Fig. 73], which his footnote to Herder's *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* proves: "that African forms may coalesce with Ideal Beauty is proved by every head of Medusa, but chiefly that of the palace Rondanini at Rome." Johann Gottfried Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill (London, 1800), 343. For a discussion of this footnote and Fuseli's authorship of it see Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 52–53. Fuseli likewise used the wings motif found on the Rondanini Medusa for a figure in *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches* (1794–96). Lawrence Feingold, "Fuseli, Another Nightmare: The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1982): 53.

drawing, *Young Woman with Wings* [Fig. 74], a near identical figure wearing a crinoline collar peers around a corner. She, too, dons Medusa's attribute, now enlarged and combined with the same embellished hair comb that features in the former. As if to further ornament these wash drawings, Fuseli has added Greek quotations.

Classical citations are a common feature of such drawings, but as scholars are apt to point out, they often prove inscrutable.[93] Of course, with Fuseli we should always entertain the possibility of intertextuality. Consider, for example, the Greek passage scrawled in the margins of the first drawing [Fig. 72]: "Restrain your fierce/fearful eye and panting rage for this is not the Gorgon's severed head."[94] The line is from Euripides's *Phoenissae*.[95] While the image contains its own bewildering fiction that resists easy contextualisation within the Greek drama, the winged headdress worn by the giantess cannot but belong to Medusa. Indeed, she is the same Gorgon that Euripides's character Jocasta deploys figuratively to mediate between her sons Eteocles and Polyneices. When she states, "this is not the Gorgon's severed head," she is commanding Eteocles to look into his brother's eyes, a sympathetic gesture that she stresses poses no risk. The viewer of the drawing, however, would do well to recoil as if from a severed head since Fuseli *does* present us with Medusa, albeit disguised in modern garb.[96] Here, the flaccid body of the unconscious captive reverses the usual fate of the witness. The victim is limp

[93] A watercolour, *The Incubus Leaving Two Sleeping Women* (1810), has been exemplified as one instance where the inscription proves difficult to interpret. As Susan Matthews notes, "Fuseli refuses to illustrate the lines from the *Iliad* in any straightforward sense." Susan Matthews, "'Hayley on his Toilette': Blake, Hayley and Homophobia," in *Queer Blake*, edited by Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 215.
[94] The original reads: σχάσον δὲ δεινὸν ὄμμα καὶ θυμοῦ πνοάς: οὐ γὰρ τὸ λαιμότμητον εἰσορᾷς κάρα Γοργόνος.
[95] Euripides, *The Phoenissae*, ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr., trans. E. P. Coleridge (New York: Random House, 1938), lines 454–457.
[96] Borrowing from Roland Barthes, Weinglass has similarly noted that Fuseli's accessories signal women in disguise: "exoticism and the other classical props that make up 'the spectrum of adornment… all aim at establishing the woman right from the start as an object in disguise.'" Weinglass, "The Elysium of Fancy," 309.

and female, not the usual male beholder "stiff with terror" or hard [erect] as stone.[97] The Freudian allusion is appropriate here, for this fashionable Medusa is a likely seductress.

In the second drawing, Fuseli positions the same woman within a threshold. Here, the Greek writing scrawled on the verso (but clearly visible above the young woman's head on the recto) translates to: "I do not speak, but I make it clear." It is an adapted version of a Heraclitan fragment: "The lord whose oracle is the one in Delphi neither says nor conceals but gives a sign."[98] The passage relates to the god Apollo who communicates in ciphers. Classicist Shaul Tor has called attention to the associated meanings of this phrase. Explaining how Apollo is neither explicit nor intentionally delusive, he argues that Heraclitus occupies the same elevated position as the god vis-à-vis his reader, and similarly avoids disclosing, "the 'hidden nature' or the 'unseen attunement' of things: 'nature likes to hide' (φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ)."[99] Heraclitus is intentionally obscure as he guides the reader in a roundabout way. In other words, "Heraclitus issues signs, we struggle with them."[100] The inscription on the drawing similarly challenges us to connect iconographic details to an essential theme: the temptation to look at that which should remain hidden. As we have seen, this holds true for both the Goddess of Nature and Medusa, whose unstable identity across different drawings poses a further interpretive trial. Fuseli thus engages in the same strategic manoeuvres that modern scholars ascribe to Heraclitus. He invites us toward "creative reflection."[101] In turn, what has been said of the Heraclitan fragments holds

[97] Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 18:273–274.
[98] Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. T. M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), B93. The original reads: "ἄναξ οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει."
[99] Shaul Tor, "Heraclitus on Apollo's Signs and his Own: Contemplating oracles and philosophical inquiry," in *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, ed. Esther Eidinow, Julia Kindt, Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 101.
[100] Tor, "Heraclitus on Apollo's Signs," 109.
[101] Tor, "Heraclitus on Apollo's Signs," 109.

true for such drawings: they "condition us to engage with them—and with the phenomenal world around us—not superficially or at face value but by reading and rereading, with a careful view to different possible directions and with an ear for nuance and detail."[102]

Finally, the central action in both drawings is the active glare of a modern Medusa. With her attention fixed on something we cannot see, she once again *pretends* to invite pleasure in looking. However, the viewer cannot help but notice that this woman has the power to look back. Her mischievous assurance foils the male gaze. Returning full circle, we might venture that veiled Isis in *Two Soldiers flee from the Statue of Isis in Sais* and *The Three Fates in the Shape of Isis*, becomes the Gorgon via her attribute. Wearing the wings of Medusa, brandishing the eye of the Graeae and wielding the scissors of the Moirai, the goddess could be any one or all of these mythic figures. In any case, she engages the viewer through a dangerous dialect between seeing and knowing. In all of the drawings discussed, meeting Medusa's face or her true femininity translates to the male viewer's demise.

It is worth stressing that the theme of "optical revelation," had other, less macabre associations in period discourse.[103] Translating Winckelmann's German in 1765, Fuseli described the intimate knowledge required to appreciate the Greek arts using an ophthalmic analogy:

> There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled; I mean, by imitating the ancients. And what we are told of *Homer*, that whoever understands him well, admires him, we find no less true in matters concerning the antient, especially the Greek arts. But then we must be as familiar with them as with a friend, to find Laocoon as inimitable as *Homer*. By such intimacy our judgement will be that of *Nicomachus*: *Take these eyes*, replied he to some paltry critic, censuring the Helen of Zeuxis, *Take my eyes, and she will appear a goddess*. With such eyes *Michel Angelo*, *Raphael*, and *Poussin*, considered the performances of the antients. They imbibed taste at its source.[104]

[102] Tor, "Heraclitus on Apollo's Signs," 111.
[103] Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art*, 112.
[104] Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, 3.

Here, the old adage of seeing through someone else's eyes is reimagined as trading ocular organs with the ancients—a trope among classicists. But as noted at the outset of this chapter, Fuseli was selective in his adoption of Winckelmannian wisdom. In keeping with the hidden associative pathways and sinister subplots we have pursued thus far, his own pictorial interpretation of the alienable eye registers less assurance. His version unfolds as a drama: *Perseus Returning the Eye of the Graeae* (c.1790–1800) [Fig. 75]. In this pen and wash drawing, an actual eyeball is redeemed for intelligence. Enclosed in the shadows, the Greek hero carefully replaces the stolen eye in the hand of one of the Graeae, whose collective but temporary blindness is made visible in the arrangement of figures. The young woman in profile covers her face in a mournful gesture that obscures her presumably vacant orbits from view. In a tangle of limbs and hair, the central sibling holds the visually disabled entourage together while the third leans out, reaching to take possession of the fragile orb. Their slender bodies and cascading locks suggest that Fuseli adapts his Graeae from various sources including Hesiod's *Theogony* and Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* wherein two or three sisters are described as beautiful cheeked and sharing a single tooth and eye. Ransoming the latter, Perseus brokers an exchange for knowledge concerning the location of the Stygian nymph's caves where he can find the tools that he needs to defeat Medusa: the Helm of Hades [a cap of invisibility], the Talaria of Mercury [winged sandals] and a kibisis [pouch]. In an earlier drawing, *Perseus and the Graeae* (1771) [Fig. 76], Fuseli visualises the moment when Perseus first commits the theft. Depicted as an old man, he unscrupulously assaults the eldest sibling, wrenching her chin aside as she attempts to wake her sister in desperation for the eye through which she might recognise her assailant. This eye is not borrowed in a bid for understanding but is rather forcefully acquired for its base exchange value. Together, these visual records contrast sharply with the poetic musing of figures like Gibbon or

Winckelmann, for whom the borrowed eye is an emblem of amiable acquaintance or intimate friendship. Of course, these accounts are not equivalent, but the comparison invites us to give thought to changing attitudes toward historical consciousness in the late eighteenth century. When Darwin, Fuseli and Blake set out to grapple with ancient allegories, they understood that interpreting the semiotic language of the ancients required an educated viewer versed in the worldview of the maker.[105] However, as Andrei Pop points out, this condition constituted a hermeneutic bind: "Understanding allegory is the precondition for reclaiming the past: but we cannot understand ancient allegory until we have reclaimed the past."[106] Such a paradox forced artists to rethink conventional models of cultural progress. Winckelmann's imperatives to collate emblems turned out to be a dead end, while Enlightenment mythographers' attempts to unravel the mysteries of the ancient world remained conjectural. Thus, if moderns wanted a semiotic program, it became increasingly clear that they needed to invent their own. In the words of one scholar, Blake proposed to accomplish just this: to "'burn away the apparent surfaces' of received allegories and replace them with a revivified version of ancient poetry."[107] The poet/artist would turn inward to see through his "imaginative eye" the *true* originals of the ancients.[108] "The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an endeavour to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age" so declared Blake.[109] Fuseli likewise envisioned the possibility of a golden age remade, but only by the violent, virile power of individual imagination. As this section has argued, Fuseli was less interested in being faithful to his sources

[105] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 144.
[106] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 144.
[107] Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 160.
[108] Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*, 229.
[109] William Blake, "A Vision of the Last Judgment," in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed., David E. Erdman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), 555.

than in producing works of art that arrested viewers, turning them inward to find meaning using their own associative networks and generative faculties.

IV. Sex Dreams

In 1799, spurning his patron's wish to see all "Fancy" omitted from his work, Blake theorised the power of imagination in life and art:

> To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination, & I feel Flatter'd when I am told so. What is it sets Homer, Vergil & Milton in so high a rank of Art? Why is the Bible more Entertaining & Instructive than any other book? Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination, which is Spiritual Sensation, & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason? Such is True Painting, and such was alone valued by the Greeks & the best modern Artists.[110]

True painting like epic poetry, Blake insisted, moved the viewer by way of the imagination. But *what* exactly one saw in the mind's eye when reading Homer, Vergil or Milton depended on his nature. "As a man is So he Sees," declared Blake in the same letter to Reverend Dr. John Trusler.[111] The imaginative eye of the wise man or the poet, for example, would see more of reality in everything than the fool.[112] The former "throws his entire imagination behind his perception," a mode that differs from that of the latter who, "cautiously tries to prune away different characteristics from that imagination [to] isolate one."[113] The fool sees vulgar allegory, but the poet sees "infinite variety."[114] Consequently, Blake addressed a reader/viewer willing to assume the role of the poet, if only momentarily. Neither Blake nor Fuseli would tolerate lazy viewers. "That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care," so wrote Blake;

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[110] Letter from William Blake to Dr. Trusler dated August 23rd, 1799 (E 676/K 793). Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 702.
[111] Letter from William Blake to Dr. Trusler dated August 23rd, 1799.
[112] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974 [1947]), 21.
[113] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 21.
[114] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 21.

"The wisest of the Ancients considerd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act."[115] If Blake takes up a complex philosophical question, he arrives at a simple answer. Imagination is not only integral to the creation of fanciful images but also to the interpretation of them. While scholars have described Blake as a mythmaker, challenging the reader/viewers of his illuminated books to create meaning, this mode of engagement is also crucial to understanding the images that he produced in collaboration with Fuseli. This section considers a particularly challenging one—*Allegory of a Dream of Love* [hereafter *Falsa ad Coelum*] (c. 1790) [Fig. 77].[116]

Falsa ad Coelum registers a shared interest in dreams and the multivalence of ancient signs while recalling the sensual mood of the opening Canto of Darwin's *The Economy of Vegetation*, describing "seductive simpers" whispered through parted lips and "hovering Cupids [who] aim their shafts, unseen."[117] This singular print, now housed in the British Museum, depicts a nude, unconscious woman. Partially reclined, her arms drape listless over plush cushions. A pair of armed cherubs make their escape at left while a third lingers, poised to loose his arrow between the woman's parted legs. There, a butterfly perches with spread wings, casting a deep shadow on her partially concealed labia. Insulating the strange tableau from the waking world glimpsed through the window at far left, a curtain hangs across the room. A male herm stands erect, encased within its folds, pressing his right index finger to closed lips. Drawn across gleaming white skin, the eye follows the extended arm of the sleeper toward a strange, composite creature. This elephantine chimera points a muscular arm and serpentine trunk at an inscription

[115] Letter from William Blake to Dr. Trusler dated August 23rd, 1799.
[116] There is only one impression of this plate. Robert N. Essick discusses its attribution to Blake (after Fuseli) as well as the possibility that Fuseli designed and engraved the image himself. See Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 175. John Beer, *William Blake: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 113.
[117] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, *Part I*, 2.

printed in capital letters on the floor: "Falsa ad coelum [sic] mittunt insomnia manes." What are we to make of this complex composition, rich in learned allusion and undisguised eroticism?

Our first clue is the Vergilian quotation, a line from the sixth book of the *Aeneid* which concludes the following passage:

> Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
> cornea, qua ueris facilis datur exitus umbris,
> altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
> sed falsa ad Coelum mittunt insomnia Manes.
> his ibi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam
> prosequitur dictis portaque emittit eburna,
>
> [Two Gates the silent House of Sleep adorn;
> Of polish'd Iv'ry this, that of transparent Horn.
> True Visions through transparent Horn arise,
> Through polish'd Iv'ry pass deluding Lyes].[118]

The verse explains an architectural feature peculiar to the underworld: the gates of sleep. These dual passages, modelled on a Homeric precedent, ferried spirits and dreams between worlds. The ivory gate was that through which *manes* [the immortal souls that inhabit the underworld] sent *falsa insomnia* [false dreams] to the living. The other, constructed of horn, was the gate through which the *umbrae* [shades; dead souls] transmitted truths. The line from Vergil was highly controversial in the period.[119] The main problem was a glaring contradiction in the text. Aeneas traverses the worlds of the living and the dead via the gate of false dreams but bearing prophetic truth.[120] According to Edward Gibbon, line 896 was profoundly troubling. "Virgil [had] explain[ed] away his hero's descent into an idle dream."[121] He elaborates that "By six unlucky

[118] Fuseli would have read the original Latin, but I quote here from Dryden's 1697 English translation. John Dryden, "Notes and Observations on Vergil's Works in English," in *The Works of John Dryden, Volume VI: Poems, The Works of Vergil in English 1697*, eds. William Frost and Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 825.
[119] Matthews, *Blake Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness*, 51. The line is still of interest to scholars. See, for example, R. J. Tarrant, "Aeneas and the Gates of Sleep," *Classical Philology* 77, no. 1 (1982): 51–55.
[120] Urania Molyviati-Toptsis, "Sed Falsa ad Coelum Mittunt Insomnia Manes (Aeneid 6.896)," *The American Journal of Philology* 116, no. 4 (1995): 642.
[121] Edward Gibbon, *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid* [1770] (London: 1794), 54.

lines, Virgil destroy[ed] the beautiful system, which [had] cost him eight hundred to raise."[122] More recently, however, scholars have embraced this ending. No longer an act of literary vandalism, the line has been reinscribed as "a tantalizing enigma… a succulent bit of candy to savor for those who delight in riddles."[123] I argue that Fuseli and Blake were also drawn to such interpretive possibilities, misrecognitions and false leads. The etching performs a similar role as the ponderous line it quotes. As a visual conundrum, it invites viewers to exercise their imaginations and engage with active, open minds.

The question, then, is not how to interpret the image, but which path to follow first? Perhaps the most enticing is the one that leads deeper into the *Aeneid*. Exploring the adverse effects of desire, *Falsa ad Coelum* recalls an episode in the epic when Dido suffers *insomnia* [restless dreams] as a side effect of her intense yearning for her lover Aeneas. The troubled sleeping figure in the engraving embodies the same emotional exhaustion that Dido experiences in the narrative. She lies exposed and uncomfortable on the bed with her head straining at the neck and limbs hanging languidly. In addition to the erotic implications of her fatigued form, which Fuseli and Blake have laid unscrupulously bare to the viewer, the heart emblem at her waist and the carefully aimed phallic arrow all point to an erotic affliction of the sleeping mind.[124] This visual clue is strengthened by a literary quirk: the repetition of the word insomnia, which appears only twice in the *Aeneid*. Vergil uses it for the first time in an exchange between Dido and Anna concerning nightmares: "*Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent* (IV9) [Anna, my sister, what dreams frighten *me*]."[125] The second time is in the passage that Fuseli and

[122] Gibbon, *Critical Observations*, 54.
[123] Lee Fratantuono, "A Brief Reflection on the Gates of Sleep," *Latomus* 66, no. 3 (2007): 628.
[124] Marina Warner, "Invented Plots: The Enchanted Puppets and Fairy Doubles of Henry Fuseli," in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*, ed. Martin Myrone (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 27.
[125] Fratantuono, "A Brief Reflection on the Gates of Sleep," 633.

Blake chose to replicate on the floor: "sed falsa ad Coelum mittunt insomnia Manes [through which the spirits of the dead send false dreams to the upper world (the living)]." The word *insomnia* thus leads from the inscription back through the *Aeneid* to Dido's troubled sleep—her erotic dreams. This reoccurrence is striking because the word itself was uncommon.[126] As Agnes Kirsopp Michels explains, it was sometimes used as a synonym for *somnium* (dreams). However, it also has a meaning related to oneirocriticism (the interpretation of dreams). She writes,

> It is a type of dream which is unworthy of the trouble of interpretation, as it provides nothing of divination (*quia nihil divinationis adportant*). It comes to a man in sleep when he has been worried by *cura animi corporisvi sive fortunae* [cares of the mind, body or fortune]. Such dreams disturb the sleeper and vanish with sleep — *una cum somno avolant et pariter evanescunt*. An insomnium leaves behind it no helpfulness or meaning — *nullam sui utilitatem vel significationem relinquit*.[127]

This is exactly the kind of dream that Dido experiences—one caused by corporeal concerns.[128] In the light of day, she wakes to the revelation that her nightmare was but a hollow fantasy, the product of the same burning passion that later leads her to rave around the city like a frenzied Bacchant. The repetition of the word *insomnia* and the thematic resonance between the engraving and the dreaming episode described in the *Aeneid* is highly suggestive. Such a dialogue would have required a close reading of the original, but this is well within the realm of possibility. After all, Fuseli advanced his classical literacy and command of Vergil in praise of his earlier picture *Dido on the Funeral Pyre*.

Complementing the eroticism of the Dido picture and supporting my claim that *Falsa ad Coelum* explores the adverse effects of a specifically sexual love on mind and body, the preparatory oil drawing for the final Academy painting gives us a view toward the erotic origins

[126] Agnes Kirsopp Michels, "The Insomnium of Aeneas," *The Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1981): 144.
[127] Michels, "The Insomnium of Aeneas," 144.
[128] Some scholars have interpreted the dream as a seduction dream. See Nita Krevans, "Ilia's Dream: Ennius, Vergil, and the Mythology of Seduction," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 269.

of Dido's tragic suicide [Fig. 78]. Here, as in the drawing for *The Fertilization of Egypt*, Fuseli exploits his medium by creating a seductive discourse between recto and verso. On one side, Dido succumbs to the torment of spurned love. On the other, we find a pair of bodies engaged in sexual intercourse [Fig. 79]. Their torsos are given in full detail, but their limbs fade into lines and negative space. Of course, the relationship between recto and verso could be adventitious, a pragmatic use of quality paper that should not be thoughtlessly wasted.[129] The other, more enticing possibility, is that Fuseli nurtured a rapport between opposing sides of the same sheet as we have already seen him doing. Read this way, the secondary image functions as an underpainting of sorts. However, instead of giving material support to the scene, enriching it via layers of paint, the chalk drawing adds narrative depth.[130] Held up to the light, we can visually penetrate the sheet and enter into Dido's mind to see the reason *behind* her anguish. Together, the finished painting and its preparatory drawing stage the psychological consequences of repressed desire. Dido is driven from reason to madness by her erotic longing for Aeneas, which Fuseli renders visible on the reverse. As "double-sided imagery," the relationship is between cause and effect.[131]

Falsa ad Coelum emerges from this analysis as but one manifestation of a much broader interest in the power of sexual desire and the dream state. In fact, similar arguments have been made of Fuseli's most popular work, *The Nightmare* [Fig. 80]. It also contains the ghostly presence of a lover painfully out of reach. In 1782, this infamous Academy showpiece launched Fuseli into the limelight. It depicts a female reverie troubled by the lustful attention of an

[129] Shira Brisman, "Image/Vessel/Waste," *Grey Room* (2020): 70.
[130] For an instance of how period artists used underpainting to enhance their pictures see Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Jean-Etienne Liotard's Envelopes of Self" in *Cultures of Forgery: Making Nations, Making Selves*, ed. Judith Ryan and Alfred Thomas (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 137.
[131] Brisman, "Image/Vessel/Waste," 71.

incubus, who either causes or is drawn to her nocturnal tribulation.[132] Slivers of white paint highlight the twisting ears and elongated fingers of the mythological creature, thought to roam moonlit skies looking to sexually assault women in their sleep. Grotesque in appearance, the fiend sits menacingly upon the woman's abdomen, restricting her breath and confronting the viewer with wide, unsettling eyes. The experience is powerful enough to bend her delicate frame into a dramatic arc. She swoons across the bed, wholly given to our voyeuristic gaze. The viewer's sense of intrusion into the private world of this hapless woman is mirrored within the picture: a horse, a literal rendering of a night 'mare', infiltrates the bedroom from behind a curtain. Its hind quarters are visible in silhouette behind the fabric framing the scene. That the artist's contemporaries were unsure what to make of the picture is consistent with our own perplexity.[133] The painting continues to confound. Period critics and contemporary scholars have offered countless literary and "libertine" readings.[134]

The reading most pertinent to our discussion here suggests that the portrait on the back of the canvas depicts Anna Landolt [Fig. 81], with whom Fuseli became enamored while in Zürich in 1779.[135] The argument is a compelling one. Fuseli wrote to Lavater of his own erotic dreams involving Anna:

> Last night I had her in bed with me—tossed my bedclothes huggermugger—wound my hot and tight-clasped hands about her—fused her body and soul together with my own—poured into her my spirit, breath and strength. Anyone who touches her now commits adultery and incest! She is mine, and I am hers. And have her I will . . ."[136]

[132] Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 96.
[133] Frayling, "Fuseli's *The Nightmare*," 11–13.
[134] I am referencing Bromley's turn of phrase quoted earlier. In response to this painting, he accused Fuseli of being among the "libertines of painting" in his *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts* (1793).
[135] Eudo C. Mason, *The Mind of Henry Fuseli* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 149–56; Frederick Antal, *Fuseli Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), 92–93; Peter Tomory, *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 92–93; Nicholas Powell, *The Nightmare* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 60–63.
[136] Quoted in Powell, *The Nightmare*, 60.

Unfortunately for Fuseli, Anna declined his proposal. Thus, the painting may have marked a turning point in his personal life as well as his career. But if the work is about desire, it is unclear whose it concerns. It could belong to Fuseli, manifested visually as the incubus radically disturbing the female dream.[137] It could also belong to the dreamer—a modern day Dido tortured by love. But, as I suggested at the beginning of this section, there is much to be gained from resisting the impulse to locate a singular, definitive meaning. Parallel with *Falsa ad Coelum*, the work invites manifold interpretations and offers no easy answers.[138] Both works summon us to explore less familiar regions of art: those which follow from desire, dreaming and madness.[139]

This 'fanciful' imagery was not appreciated by all period viewers. Blake, for one, was called upon by an unsympathetic patron to defend his visionary art. Despite accusations to the contrary, he maintained that he painted only from his own, unmediated experience: "You certainly mistake, when you say that the visions of fancy are not to be found in this world. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination."[140] According to Blake, the problem lay not with him, but with the dulled senses of his unimaginative patron Reverend Trusler. Trusler was evidently none too pleased to receive this criticism since he dismissed the letter as "Blake dimmed by superstition." Fuseli approached the matter differently. He maintained that the imagination was its own fertile dreamworld, and that invention was the painter's prerogative as much as the poet's. Visual art need not *always* draw from literature.

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[137] This reading is offered by Powell, *The Nightmare*, 60.
[138] Martin Priestman has convincingly argued that at least for Darwin, the painting gives concrete form to the physiological effects of dreaming, as detailed in Darwin's footnote. Martin Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye,'" 97–98. See also John F. Moffit, "A Pictorial Counterpart to "Gothick" Literature: Fuseli's 'The Nightmare,'" *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 35, no. 1 (2002): 173–196.
[139] For more on Fuseli's interest in dreams and madness see Warner, "Invented Plots: The Enchanted Puppets and Fairy Doubles of Henry Fuseli," 27.
[140] Letter from William Blake to Dr Trusler, dated August 1799. Add MS 36498, British Library. https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/letters-from-william-blake-to-dr-trusler-august-1799

Fuseli wondered rhetorically whether it be within the artist's province or not, to find or to combine a subject from himself, without having recourse to tradition or the stores of history and poetry?"[141] Read through the ideas of his colleague, we can appreciate the extent to which Fuseli pursues a new, unbridled art of the imagination. This theory of art is perhaps seen most clearly when contrasted against that which Fuseli (Ensis) set out in the art criticism with which this chapter began. Whereas *Dido on the Funeral Pyre* performed equivalency, offering a 'more perfect' translation of Vergil than Reynolds (and by extension Dryden), *Falsa ad Coelum* rivals Vergil, borrowing his heroine and lyric to craft a new myth. The image draws on a rich variety of sources—literary, visual and material—to create something novel.

We can explore this idea further through a closer look at the puzzling assembly of incongruous elements found in the image. The etching, for one, is distinctly pantheist. It leads us from Vergil into discussions ongoing in comparative religion. Take, for example, the winged insect (most likely a butterfly) perched on the female figure's leg. The emblematic potential of the butterfly was much discussed in the eighteenth century which allows for a wide range of possibilities.[142] William Warburton, the Baron d'Hancarville, Knight, Darwin and others noted that the ancients chose the butterfly as a sign for the goddess Psyche and by extension the human soul. Darwin, for one, discussed the insect in his iconographic reading of the Portland Vase, which he argued represented part of the Eleusinian mysteries first practiced in ancient Egypt and later throughout the ancient world. He writes,

> The Psyche of the Aegyptians was one of their most favourite emblems, and represented the soul, or a future life; it was originally no other than the Aurelia, or butterfly, but in after times was represented by a lovely female child with the beautiful wings of that insect. The aurelia, after its first stage as an eruca or caterpillar, lies for a season in a

[141] Henry Fuseli, "Third Lecture. Invention. Part I," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 1:89.
[142] In Swiss German, the word *Toggeli* has several meanings, including night butterfly and incubus, the sinister creature who induces nightmares. Schiff, *Henry Fuseli*, 1741–1825, 107.

> manner dead, and is inclosed in a sort of coffin, in this state of darkness, it remains all the winter, but at the return of spring it burst its bonds and comes out with new life, and in the most beautiful attire. The Aegyptians thought this a very proper picture of the soul of man, and of the immortality to which it aspired. But as this was all owing to divine Love, of which EROS was an emblem, we find this person frequently introduced as a concomitant of the soul in general or Psyche. EROS, or divine Love, is for the same reason a proper attendant on the manes or soul after death, and much contributes to tell the story, that is, to shew that a soul or manes is designed by the descending figure.[143]

The passage is from a longer discussion of the soul (manes) and its ancient iconography. Blake, too, was evidently familiar with the association since he would later borrow elements from the Cupid and Psyche myth, including the butterfly emblem, to fashion his own Psyche-inspired emanation *Vala*.[144] But while Blake may have first encountered the story in William Adlington's popular translation of Apuleius, like Darwin, he was engaging with a range of sources and adapting them freely to suit his own purposes.[145] If we consider visual precedents as well, we find that Psyche was frequently depicted as or with a butterfly and often shown "suffering at the hands of Love, or Cupid" on Hellenistic gems [Fig. 82].[146] In the English translation of Montfaucon's *antiquité expliquée*, the following explanation is given for such cruel treatments: "Psyche upon her Knees … has her Hands tied behind her back; a certain Mark of the Slavery a Soul is brought to, that suffers it self to be subdued by its Passions."[147] In the print, the deliberate violence with which the Cupid aims his arrow (in conjunction with the butterfly) suggests that the female figure is, like Psyche, a soul tortured by profane love. Of course, there are yet further possibilities for the butterfly if we consider Fuseli's pervasive use of the insect. As Gert Schiff

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[143] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, Additional Notes to Part I, 57.
[144] Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [1969]), 182-183.
[145] Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 182. Apuleius, *The xi. Bookes of the Golden Asse, Conteininge the Metamorphosie of Lucius Apuleius, enterlaced with sondrie pleasaunt and delectable Tales, with an excellent Narration of the Mariage of Cupide and Psiches, set out in the iiij. v. and vj. Bookes*, trans. William Adlington (London: Henry Wykes, 1566).
[146] Irene H. Chayes, "The Presence of Cupid and Psyche," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, eds. David Erdman and John E. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 221.
[147] Bernard Montfaucon, *Antiquity explained, and represented in sculptures, translated by David Humphreys* (London; Printed by J. Tonson and J. Watts, 1721), 118. Chayes suggests that Blake may have encountered this work through his role as a professional engraver. Chayes, "The Presence of Cupid and Psyche," 221.

has argued, it became a "dream symbol" for the artist, one closely associated with the incubus through its shared linguistic root with the sex demon; *toggeli* meaning both incubus and butterfly in Swiss German.[148] Replacing one dream symbol for another, *Falsa ad Coelum* seems to be intentionally promiscuous. It cultivates relationships with a wide range of texts and images.

Another example is the herm of Horus/Harpocrates.[149] Horus the child was the god of truth and the rising sun in ancient Egypt. His gesture—finger pressed against lips—originally signified youth but was misinterpreted by the Greeks and Romans for whom it became a sign of silence and secrecy. Both readings are appropriate here. The herm could be Horus, emblematic of the truth that dawn brings, or Harpocrates, a syncretic god who warns us against divulging the private, erotic affair we bear witness to. The latter interpretation may be strengthened by returning to Darwin. The print was made around the same time that Blake was engraving the Portland Vase for *The Botanic Garden*. In the discursive note contained therein, which discloses the iconographic secrets of the famous glass vessel, Darwin assumes the role of mythographer by comparing the silencing gesture enacted by the priestess delineated on the bottom of the vase to that of Harpocrates pointing to his lips as found on examples of ancient Egyptian art. This, Darwin connects back to his broader argument that the vase represents the Eleusinian mysteries, for which "secrecy was the foundation."[150] Strange as all this sounds, it offers a framework for thinking through this collaborative image. Ambivalent, Horus/Harpocrates registers a vibrant commerce between mythological traditions.

Endorsing further the multivalence of Horus/Harpocrates is the elephantine creature in the foreground, a possible reference to the Indian god Ganesha. This inclusion suggests that

[148] Gert Schiff, *Henry Fuseli, 1741-1825* (London: Tate Gallery Publications 1975), 107.
[149] Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality, and Bourgeois Politeness*, 52.
[150] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, Additional Notes to Part I, 58.

Blake and/or Fuseli was/were familiar with the work of syncretic mythographers, who began publishing scholarship on Hinduism in the late eighteenth century.[151] It has been suggested that the chimera signifies wisdom following from the Hindu tradition, but if we concede that the theme of the engraving is misrecognition, he may turn out to be a visual word game of the kind enacted in *The Nightmare*. The prominent mythographer Sir William Jones traced connections between Indian and Classical spiritual traditions in his essay "On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India" which Fuseli may have had possession of as early as 1789.[152] Jones compared Ganesha to the Roman god Janus, the spirit of doorways and thresholds. Returning to the gates of sleep, the line that precedes "Falsa ad Coelum mittunt insomnia manes" in Vergil reads "Altera candeti perfecta nitens Elephanto [the other a gleaming white ivory]." Crucially, the words for elephant and ivory share a root.[153] Existing at a nexus between cultural traditions, Ganesha's ivory tusks and ties to Janus lead us to suspect that he might simply personify the ivory gate.[154] These multivalent deities seem to confirm an awareness that meaning is culturally specific.[155] Fuseli and Blake lead us in multiple directions at once. The result of these associational acrobatics is not to confuse us but to force a deliberation; we must turn from tedious prescription to embrace infinite variety. Read as a pictorialisation of a scene from the *Aeneid,* an allegory for the impassioned soul (Psyche) or a commentary on transculturation, the print activates the mind.

[151] See David Weir, *Brahma in the West: William Blake and the Oriental renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 39.
[152] David Weir suggests Fuseli may have been one of Johnson's reviewers for Sir William Jones's *Asiatick Reseaches*, and that Blake too became aware of recent scholarship on Hinduism through his connection to Fuseli. See Weir, *Brahma in the* West, 39.
[153] Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake*, 176.
[154] The gate materials of ivory and horn have long been suspected of being wordplays. Richard Matthew Jones has noted that the word for ivory may be "a play on the Greek word 'to deceive' and the Greek word for horn being a play on the Greek word 'to fulfill.'" Richard Matthew Jones, *The Dream Poet* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), 38.
[155] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 1–18.

Finally, we need to be attentive to the erotics of the printing process—etching—used to execute *Falsa ad Coelum*. In a remarkable letter to his friend and patron George Cumberland, Blake envisioned preparation for the act of etching this way:

> As to laying on the Wax it is as follows: Take a cake of Virgins Wax (I don't know what animal produces it) & stroke it regularly over the surface of a warm Plate. (the Plate must be warm enough to melt the Wax as it passes over), then immediately draw a feather over it & you will get an even surface which when cold will receive any impression minutely. Note: The danger is in not covering the Plate *All over*. … The pressure necessary to roll off the lines is the same as when you print, or not quite so great.[156]

The eroticism of Blake's language is undeniable. Tickled with a feather, the warmed plate would be rubbed and primed to receive its image. The etcher would then cut into the waxy ground with a needle to expose the metal plate beneath, bodying forth human or other forms then bitten into the copper through the submersion of the plate in a bath of aqua fortis (nitric acid). Subsequent to the acid bath, the plate was stripped of its protective waxy ground and cleaned—only to have its hollow veins filled with ink.[157] The final step involved the meeting of inked plate and dampened paper, rolled through the press to generate the image under pressure. As Barbara Stafford has argued of Blake's process: it signified "the artist's ability to … imbue with life, whatever he conceived."[158]

Made by matrices heated, handled, penetrated and eventually pressed together on the bed of the rolling press, etching's erotics are hard to overlook. This is particularly true for a print such as *Falsa ad Coelum* which revels in the erotic potential of imagination run wild. We might likewise consider the interaction between the male printmaker, whose penetrative forms are

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[156] Letter from William Blake to George Cumberland, dated December 6th, 1795. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 700.
[157] Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press,1993 [1991]), 55. Tristanne J. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (London: Palgrave MacMillan 2002), 32–33.
[158] Stafford, *Body Criticism*, 55.

transferred to the passive, feminised body of the paper by his active labour.[159] *Falsa ad Coelum* may have been singular, but printmaking offered reproductive possibility; the plate could be printed many times. Something might also be said about the erotics of collaboration—the pairing of two fertile minds. *Falsa ad Coelum* contains no inscription detailing the division of labour between designer, engraver and printer. Scholars have pondered whether Fuseli may have etched it, or he and Blake working together.[160] Another one-off print in the collection of the British Museum, *Timon and Alcibiade* (1790) [Fig. 83] enhances the intrigue around their collaborative practice. Formal analysis of the etched lines of this Shakespearean scene based on *Timon of Athens* has led scholars to propose it as a companion piece to *Falsa ad Coelum*.[161] Recalling the phased process of *The Botanic Garden* designs, it may be that Fuseli and Blake worked jointly on the concept with the former suggesting basic elements and the latter adding to and adapting the composition at will.[162] An extant preparatory drawing by Fuseli, also in the collection of the British Museum, suggests as much. But certainly, the proposition that Fuseli may have dirtied his hands in the printshop whilst rubbing shoulders with Blake, is plausible. Fuseli dabbled in printmaking sometime between 1780 and 1790 under the auspices of painter/engraver Robert Pollard, who published one of the painter's few etchings, *Sleeping woman with a Cupid* (1780–1790) [Fig. 85]. This work coincidentally recalls *Falsa ad Coelum* in its depiction of a sleeping female figure, draped in the same liquescent posture. She, too, is the victim of Eros and his

[159] As Matthew C. Hunter explains, this logic was based on an Aristotelian theory of generation, recapitulated in Enlightenments texts such as Darwin's *Zoonomia* (1796). Matthew C. Hunter, *Painting with Fire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 129.
[160] It is the similarity between the graphic style of these works that has led scholars to attribute *Falsa ad Coelum* to Blake. See Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake*, 173–175.
[161] Essick notes that the work is "freely etched with very little, if any engraving." Robert Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake. A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 173. This print is inscribed published by W Blake Poland St. July 28: 1790.
[162] There are two known preparatory drawings for this engraving, both by Fuseli. One is in the British Museum (no. 1862,1108.142) and the other in the Aukland Art Gallery, New Zealand [Fig. 84].

invisible arrow after having fallen into a dream while reading; her book lies overturned on the ground below her hand. In this version, Fuseli opts for a pair of moths in sexual union instead of a butterfly, while Harpocrates gesturing for silence has been replaced with a column inscribed with the Greek word for "hush/silence."[163] Knowing that Fuseli was trialling the thematic in etching around the same time supports the possibility that he may have had an active role in etching *Falsa ad Caelum* and/or *Timon and Alcibiade*. Could the artists have made the pair in a moment of studio experimentation, each drawing on the expertise of the other? It is possible since Fuseli lived just a short walk from Blake's residence on Poland Street.[164] And while Fuseli may have been a capable etcher/engraver in his own right as well as a mentor to Blake, there was much he could have and surely did learn from his colleague. Certainly, he admired Blake's powers of invention. Recalling a familiar phrase, Fuseli affirmed that "Blake was damn good to steal from."[165]

V. On the Ocean of Business

Turning from the intimate, experimental interaction at Poland Street back to the collaborative juncture that was Johnson's publishing house, this section contextualises the production of *The Botanic Garden* within the commercial milieu of the 1790s. As will be argued, the marketplace was not an impassive space to be easily circumnavigated. Rather, as Blake conceptualised it, the marketplace was as unpredictable and perilous as the ocean—an apt simile for British commerce with its expanding and violent imperial reach. Here, I read the professional alliance that realised *The Botanic Garden* through an economic lens. It reveals collaboration to

[163] Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*, 92.
[164] Fuseli's *The Apparition appears to Dion wielding a broom* (1768) is an early example of the artist's etched work. See D. H. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*, 11.
[165] For more on the exchange of ideas between Fuseli and Blake see Hall, *Blake and Fuseli*; John Beer, *Romantic Influences*, 32–33.

be less a favorable synergy than a capitalist innovation forced upon poet (Darwin), painter (Fuseli), engraver (Blake) and printer (Johnson).

Fuseli offers an ideal starting point for thinking about the relationship between commerce and art. Not only had he been shipwrecked on the same "ocean of business" that would haunt Blake, soliciting in vain for the barge that would carry him to golden shores, but he also theorised its corrosive effects on British art.[166] One familiar story stresses his paradoxical relationship with the Royal Academy. Professor of Painting from 1799 until 1805 and Keeper from 1804 until his death in 1825, Fuseli was an immovable fixture in its academic infrastructure. In fact, when Henry Tresham resigned in 1810, the painter would become the first Academician to hold dual positions. He remained Keeper while reassuming the Professorship of Painting, a novel provision that demanded changes to the Academy's statutes. This honour was awarded to shore up a pedagogical deficit: Tresham refused to lecture, while Fuseli was lauded as a gifted theoretician, someone with the power to "insp[ire] young minds with high and grand views."[167] However, as the story goes, even as he occupied this privileged position, he was also a voice of dissent.[168] He cultivated his image as an "*enfant terrible*," maligning the institution from within: academies, he later stated, were but "symptoms of art in distress."[169] While efforts had been made to divest the school from the corrupting rule of commerce, Fuseli boldly declared its failure to redress the precarious state of modern British art.[170] He did so in a lecture entitled *The*

[166] In a letter to his patron William Roscoe, dated June 15th, 1794, Fuseli mused on the prospects for his Milton Gallery: "I have dreamt of a golden land but Solicit in vain for the barge that is to carry me to its shore." Fuseli, *The Collected English Letters*, 119.
[167] *Life of Benjamin Robert Haydon, Historical Painter, from his Autobiography and Journals*, ed. Tom Taylor (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), 1:30.
[168] William Pressly, *The Artist as Original Genius: Shakespeare's "fine Frenzy" in Late-eighteenth-century British Art* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 95; Petra Maisak, "Henry Fuseli—Shakespeare's Painter, in *The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery*, eds. Walter Pape and Frederick Burwick (Essen, Bottrop: Peter Pomp, 1996), 58.
[169] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, I:545. Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 166.
[170] Luisa Calè, *Fuseli's Milton Gallery: Turning Readers into Spectators* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 20. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, 279–283.

Present State of the Art and the Causes which check its Progress, delivered for the first time in 1820.[171] Therein he ruminated gloomily on the prospects for the future when compared to the sheer productivity of the past:

> Florence, Bologna, Venice, each singly taken, produced in the course of the sixteenth century alone, more great historic pictures than all Britain taken together, from its earliest attempts to its present efforts. What are we to conclude from this? that the soil from which Shakespeare and Milton sprang, is unfit to rear the Genius of Poetic Art? or find the cause of this seeming impotence in that general change of habits, customs, pursuits, and amusements, which for near a century has stamped the national character of Europe with apathy or discountenance of the genuine principles of Art?[172]

The final question is rhetorical. The cause of artistic decline, here framed as a lack of virility, or "impotence," was a want of patrons that valued the highest form of artistic expression: historical or 'poetical' painting.[173] The source of disillusionment that colours this Academy lecture, delivered first in the concluding series but published as its dramatic final installment, was, at least in part, a consequence of his own failed ambition to unite art and commerce with the Milton Gallery.

The push to reconcile the seemingly opposed realms of art and commerce was rooted in civic humanist thought. Stubbornly, the idea that visual art should function to improve the social and economic condition of the state persisted well into (and beyond) the late eighteenth century.[174] Fuseli, however, occupied an unusual position in this cultural debate. He reversed its priorities. According to the painter/professor, the question should not be what could art do for the British public, but rather how might the public be mobilised to support high art? One promising

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[171] This was thefirst time that Fuseli delivered his twelfth lecture. Gisela Bungarten, "Zur Datierung der einzelnen Vorlesungtexte," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741-1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 2:32.
[172] Henry Fuseli, "Twelfth Lecture. On the Present State of the Art, and the Causes which check its Progress," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 1:276.
[173] Calè, *Fuseli's Milton Gallery*, 19.
[174] Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe 1700–1830* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27.

model, which Fuseli would borrow, was established in the 1780s under the auspices of print sellers John Boydell and Thomas Macklin. Together, these entrepreneurs reimagined the cultural and commercial possibilities of reproductive engraving to spectacular success. Boydell opened his famous Shakespeare Gallery in 1786, while Macklin converted his printshop into the Gallery of Poets in 1788. These spaces exhibited ambitious oil paintings to paying guests, who were likewise enticed to buy prints after the works on display. Important to the cultural politics of this scheme was that profit could be had while maintaining a convincing image of liberality since the enterprise generated an audience for erudite, poetical paintings by homegrown, British artists.[175] It was an exemplary application of Bernard Mandeville's private vices engendering public benefits, a salient economic theory in a British context since the nation was increasingly viewed as a commercial society.[176] The Shakespeare Gallery's initial popularity suggested to many, including Fuseli, that art and commerce were not incompatible after all. Rather, they might flourish together.

This proposition opposed the ideological position of the Royal Academy. The institution paid lip service to maintaining a safe distance from the private interests that ruled commerce even as it could do little to correct an imbalance between portraits (which were thought to serve only individual wants) and historical paintings (which were thought to address and elevate the public) at its exhibitions.[177] The literary galleries offered a promising middle path—an innovative foundation on which to build a school of painting. Modelled on the Shakespeare and Poet's Galleries with which he had been involved as a painter, Fuseli schemed to establish his own literary gallery in 1790. His gallery, based on the poetry of John Milton, was devised to

[175] Calè, *Fuseli's Milton Gallery*, 53.
[176] See *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, eds. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).
[177] Calè, *Fuseli's Milton Gallery*, 19. Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 259.

achieve the same dual goals as its models—a means to promote British literature in a "new, narrative form of high art" while providing a space to sell paintings, prints and an illustrated book.[178] This was shrewd business according to Fuseli who would admit that success in fine art could be had in only two ways: "paint[ing] for the king… or meditat[ing] a scheme of your own."[179] Since Benjamin West had monopolised the former, he turned to the latter to see if he could "lay, hatch and crack an egg" for himself too.[180] This scheme was no small undertaking, but Fuseli stressed the necessity for bold action. Amidst competition in London, market forces dictated that the painter needed to also assume the role of the printer. Fuseli had learned firsthand that engravings of paintings could generate far more money than originals. The publisher J. R. Smith had made a whopping £500 pounds on a print of Fuseli's *The Nightmare,* compared to the meagre £20 that the artist earned.[181] It is in this economic climate that we should contextualise the Milton Gallery plan.[182] It would foil a division of labour that saw print sellers take an unfair share of industry profits. It would also grant Fuseli more control over the quality and reception of his work since he proposed to execute the engravings himself.[183] As early as 1786, he was

[178] Calè, *Fuseli's Milton Gallery*, 6.
[179] Letter from Henry Fuseli to William Roscoe, dated August 17th, 1790. Henry Fuseli, *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, ed. David H. Weinglass (New York: Kraus International, 1982), 61.
[180] He went on to describe the logistics of his plan, which he called the "rude outlines of [the] scheme" including having no further commissions for a period of at least three years and assembling a group of men to subscribe £20 annually, "to be repaid either by small pictures, or drawings or the profits of the Exhibition, should it succeed…" adding "of which there can be no great doubt." Fuseli, *Letters*, 61.
[181] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 1:64. For more on the print see David H. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*, no. 67 and Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares*, 49–51.
[182] D. H. Weinglass has further compared the payments received by painters for their originals with those received by engravers for their plates. While not as astonishing as the difference for *The Nightmare*, his examples nonetheless underscore a disparity. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*, xxvi.
[183] Fuseli vents his frustration in a letter to Roscoe dated September 14th, 1796, in which he underlines the publisher's prerogatives. Fuseli writes, "I find that my picture almost immediately after its delivery was put into the hands of a Young Man, an Engraver, one Mr. Thomson, Contrary to what Mr. Wilson flattered me to expect, viz. that it would be put into the hands of Mr. Bromley—but he may be a Man of talents, and if he is not, I Care not, for as Your friend Politian Says, the Length of the Shadow makes no alteration in the hig[h]th of the Man. Nor will I Say any thing about the Credit they *force* me to give them. They had no right to take the Liberties with me which they took or take with people whom they Continually employ—at least they should have prepared me for it, when they made the bargain; but let it pass; I must endeavour to help myself as well as I Can." Letter from Henry Fuseli to

training in different reproductive techniques: "If You lose the "far leccato" [artificial exactness] of the Engraver, You gain the hand of the master: and I exercise myself by preparatory Essays in all three [techniques: *Acqua Tinta*, *fortis* or *tallow*]. All, the best Engraver Can do, is, to mar Your work and empty Your pocket."[184] However, in spite of his diligent efforts to pinch pennies and banish middlemen, the venture was not as lucrative as Fuseli first imagined. The fact that he could not attract the required number of paying visitors, nor sell sufficient catalogues to offset the cost of his first capitalist venture fuelled a growing suspicion that art and commerce might be unhappy bedfellows after all. Still, Fuseli refused to give up, and looked for other ways to earn more than his painting practice allowed for. In 1803, he personally hired Moses Haughton to be his engraver, thus becoming his own publisher of sorts. But even this arrangement was unsatisfactory. As David Weinglass concludes, "he was never able to make the sale of prints after his own work a meaningful source of income."[185]

Darwin engaged in similar marketplace tactics. He would pursue the same growing desire for fashionable pictures that had inspired Fuseli to launch his Milton Gallery. In fact, Darwin likened *The Botanic Garden* to a literary picture gallery not unlike those of Macklin and Boydell. In addition to declaring himself a flower painter in one of the three interludes which feature in *Loves*, Darwin routinely stressed the visuality of his poetry by invoking *ut pictura poesis*.[186] But while Darwin compares *The Botanic Garden* to a polite picture room, he elsewhere describes its

William Roscoe, dated Wednesday, September 14th, 1796, London. Fuseli, *The Collected Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 160–161.

[184] Letter from Henry Fuseli, London, to William Roscoe, Liverpool, dated Wednesday, September 14th, 1796, London. Fuseli, *The Collected* English *Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 162. See also Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*, xviii.

[185] Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli*, xxi.

[186] Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 215. See Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part II*, 47.

kinship with the sales techniques of lowbrow street vendors. In the second interlude, structured as a conversation between the author and his bookseller, the latter observes:

> THE monsters of your Botanic Garden are as surprising as the bulls with brazen feet, and the fire-breathing dragons, which guarded the Hesperian fruit; yet are they not disgusting, nor mischievous: and in the manner you have chained them together in your exhibition, they succeed each other amusingly enough, like prints of the London Cries, wrapped upon rollers, with a glass before them. In this at least they resemble the monsters in Ovid's Metamorphoses.[187]

Darwin's monsters are shown to be nonthreatening in their bound format, chained together in an exhibition for the reader/viewer's amusement. In their harmlessness, they are comparable to the crude engravings mounted on rollers, which were peddled on the streets of London as novelties for children.[188] As Alan Bewell has argued of this double doctrine, *The Botanic Garden* was intentionally mercurial.[189] Darwin courted different audiences with his lush verse, "novel" pictures and copious scientific notes. The notes were particularly rich, comprising both long footnotes that often overshadowed the verse on the page and a lengthy section of additional notes appended to both *The Economy of Vegetation* and *The Loves of the Plants*. These tempted a learned, leisured class while the engravings were thought to seduce an upper middling sort of reader drawn to novel entertainments like gardening and collecting prints.[190] In cultivating this hybrid market, Darwin aspired to achieve the same pervasive entrepreneurial success as his Luner Society colleagues: the industrialists Josiah Wedgwood and Matthew Boulton. If Fuseli was to become a printer of sorts, so, too would Darwin mirror the roles of his colleagues and collaborators. In response to economic pressures, the poet became a visual artist.

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[187] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part II*, 89.
[188] Alan Bewel, *Natures in Translation: Romanticism and Colonial History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 66–67.
[189] Bewel, "Erasmus Darwin's Cosmopolitan Nature," 67.
[190] Bewel, "Erasmus Darwin's Cosmopolitan Nature," 65.

He did so not only via his lyrical "paintings" (effusive poetry) but also in his recruitment of engraved imagery, a popular form of merchandising.[191] His own dismissive analogy aside, the illustrations which featured in *The Botanic Garden* were not the cheap prints that circulated on the mass market. Rather, they were highly polished engravings produced via the professional pairing of Fuseli and Blake. *The Botanic Garden* boasted "the daring pencil of Fuseli," praised for his unique powers of invention. "[Fuseli] transports us beyond the boundaries of nature," so declares Darwin in the text, "and ravishes us with the charm of the most interesting novelty."[192] Crucially, the phrase recalls the same criticism *against* Fuseli that we encountered earlier, when the painter was accused of breaking academic rules. Darwin's use of the word novelty is in itself intriguing. As Bewell has suggested, "whereas most of Darwin's contemporaries viewed "novelty" as a rudimentary and fleeting aspect of the appreciation of art in comparison with the classicist emphasis on "truth" and "endurance," Darwin made it central to his aesthetics."[193] He thwarts the tenets of conventional art theory and criticism to embrace the new commercial ideals of the eighteenth century: novelty, fashion, luxury and amusement. *The Botanic Garden* is inconsistent because Darwin was less concerned with establishing its noble identity as a work of art than in ensuring it became a desirable commodity.

If Darwin was the most fiscally successful, Blake was the least so. Fuseli may have taken up engraving and etching on occasion, but Blake assumed these roles more than he would have liked. He worked variously as a printer, a print seller, a tutor, a poet and a painter, but spent most of his career as a commercial engraver.[194] Blake was no salesman and struggled to secure the

[191] James Raven, *The Business of Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 251–252.
[192] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, Part II*, 54.
[193] Bewel, "Erasmus Darwin's Cosmopolitan Nature," 55.
[194] For more on his various employments see G. E. Bentley, *William Blake in the Desolate Market* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

patronage he needed to support himself as a painter/poet. Of course, this was no easy feat in London, where even commercial engraving contracts sometimes eluded him. In 1804, Blake captured the wily mercantile atmosphere of the metropolis in a letter to his patron William Hayley: "Engravers, painters, statuaries, printers, poets, we are not in a field of battle, but in a city of assassinations."[195] One had to be clever and a little underhanded to thrive in a world where "every calumny and falsehood utter'd against another of the same trade is thought fair play."[196] It is important to remember that Blake's experience on the "ocean of business" was far more precarious than that of Fuseli, who maintained position(s) at the Royal Academy.[197] And the book trade in particular—Blake's bread and butter—was decidedly disadvantageous to the journeyman. As Joseph Byrne has shown, it operated according to the unrelenting mechanics of "rationalisation" in which the division of labour was deleterious to financial security and free creativity; each worker had his small role in a larger operation which ultimately lined the pockets of the publishers.[198] Blake nonetheless found ways to resist the rigid hierarchies that structured the industry. He increased his agency, for example, by becoming the designer, engraver and likely printer of the illustrations for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797).[199] This must have offered Blake some respite since, as he put it, "to Engrave after another Painter is infinitely more

[195] Letter from William Blake to William Hayley, dated May 28th, 1804. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 751.
[196] Letter from William Blake to William Hayley, dated May 28th, 1804. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 751.
[197] Letter from William Blake to George Cumberland, dated August 26th, 1799. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 704.
[198] Joseph Byrne, "William Blake's Illustrations to Night Thoughts: Resistance to Rationalisation in the Late Eighteenth-Century Book Trade," in *Book Illustration in the Long Eighteenth Century: Reconfiguring the Visual Periphery of the Text,* eds., Christina Ionescu and Renata Schellenberg (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011), 120–122. For more on Blake and the division of labour see Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, 99. For more on Blake's work for Young see Geoffrey Keynes, "Blake's Illustrations to Young's 'Night Thoughts,'" in *Blake Studies. Notes on his Life and Works*, *in seventeen chapters* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis. 1949), 56–66.
[199] Byrne, "William Blake's Illustrations," 122.

laborious than to Engrave ones own Inventions."[200] *Night Thoughts*, however, met with the same cool disinterest as the Milton Gallery. Both were among the commercial ventures that, like *The Botanic Garden*, rushed to capitalise on the demand for illustrated books that followed from the literary galleries and their associated publications.[201] However, of the three, only *The Botanic Garden* sold well. And as the industry dictated, the rewards were not evenly distributed among contributors. Darwin is said to have earned "ten shillings a line" for *Loves* and upwards of a £1000 for *Economy*, an "immense price" according to his biographer Anna Seward.[202] Blake's renumeration was modest in comparison. He received just £26 for each of his engravings.[203] Being attentive to these disparities and the professional choices they gave rise to allows us to see *The Botanic Garden* anew. The book is the material setting not only for innovative ideas and forms, but also for the division of labour that structured the publishing industry. While I have argued that the engravings are equal in terms of their artistic and intellectual import, the same cannot be said of the labour that brought them into being. As such, we might ponder whether the collaboration behind *The Botanic Garden* resonates with the virile ingenuity promised in *The Fertilization of Egypt* or the tempestuous struggle envisioned in *Zeus Battling Typhon*. Seen alongside the other 'monstrous progeny' animated by market conditions of capitalist modernity, the latter seems the most appropriate analogy.

VI. Eros Commodified / Prometheus Bound

[200] Letter from William Blake to Revd Dr Trusler, dated August 23rd, 1799. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 703.
[201] Byrne, "William Blake's Illustrations," 119.
[202] Christina C. Hankin, ed. *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck* (London: Longman and Roberts, 1860), 207; Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804), 167. Bewell, *Natures in Translation*, 65.
[203] Bentley, *Blake and the Desolate Market*, 22.

This final section considers a series of enigmatic drawings that I argue operate as allegories for these modern cultural forces. The want of support for high art from the British public was a side effect of compounding cultural pressures: the expansion of modern, globalised commerce and a growing emphasis placed on the individual, someone who had "come to place their private interests above the public interest now invisible to them."[204] This was a common assumption in civic humanist discourse. Adam Smith had noted that "among the inconveniences arising from a commercial spirit" was its contracting effects on the "minds of men" which it "rendered incapable of elevation"[205] Worse still, " heroic spirit is almost utterly extinguished."[206] As John Barrell has argued, this line of thinking implicated both class and gender; "the corruption of the citizen or the state [was aligned with] effeminacy."[207] Fuseli, for one, would render this sentiment as bourgeois domesticity:

> The ambition, activity, and spirit of public life is shrunk to the minute detail of domestic arrangements, everything that surrounds us tends to show us in private, is become snug, less, narrow, pretty, insignificant ... and the greatest praise [of art] is to furnish the most innocent amusement for those nations to whom luxury is become as necessary as existence.[208]

Put another way: the modern age of luxury, "when compared with former ages, has but little occasion for great works, and that is the reason why so few are produced."[209] Fuseli may not have been able to evade the "present torrent of affectation and insipidity," that flooded cultural life, but he could perhaps mitigate its effects on the future.[210] This idea is confirmed by John

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[204] Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting,* 281.
[205] Adam Smith, "Lecture on the Influence of Commerce on Manners," in *Reputation: Studies in the Voluntary Elicitation of Good Conduct*, ed. Daniel B Klein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997 [1763]), 20.
[206] Smith, "Lecture on the Influence of Commerce on Manners," 20.
[207] John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 64. See also Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750–1810* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).
[208] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 3:48.
[209] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 3:48.
[210] Henry Fuseli "First Lecture. Ancient Art," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741-1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 1:276.

Barrell: "Fuseli knows himself to be the victim of history rather than its critic, who sees himself as inescapably part of the corruption he attacks, and which no modern can escape."[211] Revised for emphasis: Fuseli knows himself to be the victim of history *and* its critic. We can explore this proposition by examining his oeuvre, for the same determinism that permeates the lectures first germinates and then resurfaces in a series of drawings completed between 1770 and 1810. Brought into conversation with his lectures, they disclose the ways in which ancient eroticism emerged as a critical instrument to decry a corrupting alliance between commerce and culture.

The Cupid Seller [Fig. 86], a black and red chalk drawing made prior to Fuseli's professional debut in London, is an ideal early starting point for tracing this idea in Fuseli's graphic work. The drawing was made after an ancient Roman fresco that Fuseli may have encountered in the original at Stabiae, south of Pompeii, around 1775 [Fig. 87].[212] It was discovered among other wall paintings at the Villa di Arianna in the mid eighteenth century and inspired several adaptions including the French academician Joseph-Marie Vien's *La marchande d'amours*, exhibited at the Paris salon in 1763 [Fig. 88]. Vien made several compositional changes to appeal to contemporary sensibilities, adapting the setting and tone of the fresco to create a charming vignette of polite sociability.[213] Set in a fashionable classical interior, Vien transforms the crude merchant into a young, modestly dressed woman and replaces the cage with a woven basket. A pair of docile cupids rest therein while another is offered for sale, held

[211] Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting,* 260.
[212] Victoria C. Gardner Coates, Jon L. Seydl and Kenneth Lapatin, eds., *The Last Days of Pompeii: Decadence, Apocalypse, Resurrection* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012), 90. Michele George interprets the original Roman scene as an idealised and genteel portrayal of the transaction. Michele George, *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 171.
[213] Martin Schieder, "Sorti de son genre": Genre Painting and Boundary Crossing at the End of the Ancien Régime," in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 65. Thomas W. Gaehtgens and and Russell Stockman, "Love Fleeing Slavery": A Sketch in the Princeton University Art Museum," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 65 (2006): 13–14. George, *Roman Slavery*, 171.

carefully between thumb and forefinger. Comedically, the mischievous cupid makes an obscene gesture with his arms. While this lewd pictorial device was somewhat imprudent, Vien was nonetheless thought to have ushered in a new classical mode.[214] Art critics praised his ability to construct genre scenes with a classicising austerity and restraint, qualities perceived to be absent from the airy, lighthearted and eroticised chronicles of amorous affairs with which his contemporaries' solicited their patrons.[215] But this was the same moralising rhetoric that Fuseli held to be antagonistic to the progress of art. Vien's *marchande d'amours* thus provides a valuable counterpoint to Fuseli's drawing; his static figures and emphasis on modish accoutrements contrast with the implicit cruelty of the transaction that seems to interest Fuseli. The latter recasts his merchant as a shrouded crone who appears to threaten her client with a captive cherub, hanging torpidly from delicate wings held fast in her clenched fist. The offer reads as an affront, and the young woman withdraws uneasily. These pictorial transformations are telling. The drawing responds to the pallid, academic neoclassicism of Vien to offer a darker interpretation of the allegory, one where love is not a noble pleasure, but a grim business that probes into the very ethics of consumption.[216] Compared to Vien, whose delinquent cupid delivers a potent *bras d'honneur* to his prospective buyer, Fuseli renders his commodified Eros sadly limp.[217] The cupid who had once been an emblem of creative power, now stands in for the

[214] Gaehtgens and Stockman, "Love Fleeing Slavery," 13–14.
[215] Schieder, "Sorti de son genre," 63.
[216] Gardner, *The Last Days*, 94. For more on Fuseli's perverse adaption of the original see Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 6.
[217] Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, eds. *Diderot Salons. Volume I (1759, 1761, 1763)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 1:210. The *bras d'honneur* is considered an indiscretion (and a signification of the sexual pleasure he promises) by Diderot who nonetheless praises the painting as a better allegory for love than the insipid visions of Carle van Loo. He writes, « Voilà une allégorie qui a du sens, et non pas cet insipide *Exercice des Amours* de Vanloo. C'est une petite ode tout à fait anacréontique. C'est dommage que cette composition soit un peu déparée par un geste indécent de ce petit Amour papillon que l'esclave tient par les ailes; il a la main droite appuyée au pli de son bras gauche qui, en se relevant, indique d'une manière très-significative la mesure du plaisir qu'il promet. » See also Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art*, 49. The philosopher in Plato's *Phaedrus*, referencing Eros, quotes from the Homeric apocrypha: All men refer to him as love-on-the-wing / But the gods simply call him Pteros

"impotent decline of the eighteenth century," which reaches its lowest point in French neoclassicism.[218] According to Richard Payne Knight, this was the same humiliation endured by Bacchus. Once the symbol of "the general Creative Power of the great Active Principle of the Universe," the god was eventually consigned to answer "no better purpose than holding up his rubicund snout to frighten the birds and thieves."[219]

A dangerous aura likewise radiates from the veiled woman, who reappears in several other works by Fuseli including *The Mandrake: A Charm* (1785) [Fig. 89]. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1785, this painting depicts the shrouded woman crouching willfully over the ground, her fingers digging into the soil. A scythe lies gleaming in the foreground, ready to sever a young mandrake root from its hiding place. What the witch will do with the mandrake she forcefully extracts from its earthy haven is unnervingly uncertain, but we might infer her intentions from a similar scene imagined by Blake. On Plate I of *For Children, the Gates of Paradise* [Fig. 90], a brawny young woman is shown harvesting mandrake roots, pulling them from beneath a willow tree by their bulbous heads. Here, the mandrakes emerge as fully formed human children. Blake implies that while less amiable than cupids, mandrakes were no less effective as fertility aids.[220] In fact, the witch reappears in a spectrum of fertility rites illustrated by Fuseli.[221] But it is perhaps the profiteering species found in *The Cupid Seller* that is most redolent of the witches described in the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* [*Hammer of the Witches*]

["Winged Eros"] / since he needs / His wings to grow before he flies. Quoted in Erich Segal, *The Death of Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 87.

[218] Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 166. As phrased by Fuseli's once travelling companion John Armstrong in the 1770s. See John Armstrong, "The Influence of Climate Upon Genius" in *Miscellanies* (London: J. T. Smith, 1770), 2:236.

[219] Knight, *Discourse*, 176.

[220] Tomory, *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli*, 123–124. For more on Fuseli's sources see Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares*, 132–133.

[221] For example, see Fusel's preparatory drawing for *The Witch and the Mandrake*, c. 1812, graphite indications over red chalk, on fine waxed paper. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Here, she appears as an earth spirit, enticing a mandrake with lactating breasts.

(1487).[222] These mythical women harvested phalluses from living men and reared them in birds' nests, a fantastical practice that also relied on an Eros/avian similitude.[223] Our witch is not only the purveyor of sexual stimulants if we follow the logic offered in the text: "any witch who collects penises must also of necessity be a castrating witch as well."[224] Building on this *Kastrationsangst*, the female exclusivity of the transaction in *The Cupid Seller* adds to its perversity. The image discloses a cultural anxiety around female consumption, an unease that Fuseli exploits in his drawings of fashionable women.

In addition to those drawn from folklore, Fuseli explored classical fertility rites. In a pen and wash drawing, *Couple on an Altar before a Herm to Priapus* (c.1770-8) [Fig. 91], he brings the ethos of the ancient world into focus while calling attention to the cultural distance between ancients and moderns.[225] The pair of figures is a mass of muscular limbs. However, while their flexed bodies are difficult to visually disentangle, the image articulates a clear difference between the rituals practiced by men and women. The male figure presides over the encounter, vigorously gripping the herm by his erect penis while the woman shows her devotion through the more passive act of wearing a phallic amulet.[226] Knight would later propose a similar division

[222] *Malleus Maleficarum*, "The Hammer of Witches" was first published in 1487, republished in thirteen editions by 1520 and sixteen more between 1574 and 1669. Moira Smith, "The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor: Penis Theft in the 'Malleus Maleficarum,'" *Journal of Folklore Research* 39, no. 1 (2002): 85.
[223] Tomory, *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli*, 124. John F. Moffitt makes an argument for Fuseli's familiarity with the *Malleus Maleficarum* and other witch literature. Moffitt, "A Pictorial Counterpart to "Gothick," 173–196. John F. Moffitt, "*Malleus Maleficarum*: A Literary Context for Fuseli's *Nightmare*," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 115 (1990): 241–8. See also Martin Myrone, ed., "Witches and Apparitions," in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 123–145. Smith, "The Flying Phallus," 101. Smith discusses a late nineteenth-century postcard which adapts the composition of *The Cupid Seller* to make this connection between winged Eros and phallic birds.
[224] Smith, "The Flying Phallus," 102.
[225] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 45.
[226] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 45.

between active (male) and passive (female) forms of power in ancient theology.[227] But if, as Peter Otto has shown, an iconography positing "men as conduits of divine power and women as the material body (the passive powers) waiting to receive divine influx," was common enough, other parallels between antiquarian scholarship and such drawings make the connection irresistible.[228] Take, for example, the phallic amulets described in the *Discourse*. These, which were believed to protect the wearer against the evil eye, were worn as an ornament of dress by "the Women and Children of the lower class, at Naples, and in its neighbourhood."[229] In two watercolours made between 1799 and 1810, Fuseli reimagines these phallic accessories in a new social context. The first drawing, *Figure of a Courtesan* [Fig. 92], features two elaborately dressed women, or the same woman shown from contrasting angles and in slightly different outfits. Adding dramatic flair to the look of the figure in the foreground are a pair of ostrich plumes sprouting from a mop of bouncy, tight curls, a black ribbon adorning her elongated neck and a pair of elaborate chandelier earrings. But most striking is the band she sports on her left arm, decorated with a phallus in the shape of a pointed arrow. The phallic charm transforms the ensemble into an exalted expression of neoclassical fashion. She is wearing a *robe à la grecque*, a style popular in the 1790s.[230] This translucent muslin garment was usually white, high-waisted and worn with little underneath. While it exposed the female body, clinging and flowing with its movement, Fuseli pushes the fashion to an extreme. His signature décolletage discloses not only the upper chest but the breasts as well, signifying her status as a courtesan. In the second drawing

[227] Anne Bermingham, "Elegant females and gentleman connoisseurs. The commerce in culture and self-image in eighteenth-century England" in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* ed. Anne Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York: 1995), 506.
[228] Peter Otto makes similar arguments regarding Blake, Knight and phallic imagery, See Peter Otto, "A Pompous High Priest: Urizen's Ancient Phallic Religion in *The Four Zoas*," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2001): 4–22.
[229] Knight, *Discourse*, 4.
[230] Amelia Rauser, *The Age of Undress: Art, Fashion, and the Classical Ideal in the 1790s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 7.

[Fig. 93], a young woman with a whimsical hairstyle verging on the vegetal is shown peering coyly at the viewer, wearing black bracelets and belt with a linear pattern of penises. The phallic adornment here, as in the first drawing, resembles in its simplicity those described by Knight as well as actual artifacts in the collection of the British Museum. For example, a Roman charm ring wrought in gold similarly features a schematic penis in relief [Fig. 94] and would have been familiar (at least as a type) to period collectors.[231]

Fuseli may have drawn his inspiration from similar artifacts traded on the London antiquities market, or even directly from the *Discourse* which had been circulating outside of inner Dilettanti circles since 1794. In perhaps one of the most disingenuous passages in the book, Knight explains the practice of donning priapic emblems:

> The great characteristic attribute was represented by the Organ of Generation in that state of tension and rigidity which is necessary to the due performance of its functions. Many small images of this kind have been found among the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, attached to the bracelets, which the chaste and pious matrons of antiquity wore round their necks and arms. In these, the organ of generation appears alone, or only accompanied with the Wings of Incubation, in order to show that the devout wearer devoted herself wholly and solely to procreation, the great end for which she was ordained. So expressive a symbol, being constantly in her view, must keep her attention fixed on its natural object, and continually remind her of the gratitude she owed the Creator, for having taken her into his service, made her a partaker of his most valuable blessings, and employed her as the passive instrument in the exertion of his most beneficial power.[232]

Although the women in Fuseli's drawings flaunt phallic insignia, they are no more "pious matrons" than the female votaries described in the *Discourse*. Rather, I would venture that these dashing, modern women are better interpreted as elite consumers promenading as maenads—women who flout devotion to a higher power and commit themselves to fashion. Fuseli uses a

[231] It was acquired for the Museum from Sir William Hamilton in 1772. Although it is possible that Fuseli saw this particular example, he likely drew inspiration from similar artifacts excavated at Herculaneum and Pompeii throughout the second half of the eighteenth century.
[232] Knight, *Discourse*, 46–47.

sartorial vernacular embedded in contemporary luxury debates to cast these women as emblems of corrupt modernity.[233]

As in *The Cupid Seller,* sex is divorced from the sacred and replaced with a commercial transaction. These women may not be witches in the same sense, but in their conspicuous consumption they are no less culturally subversive. Fuseli condensed this idea into an aphorism: "In an age of luxury women have taste, decide and dictate; for in an age of luxury woman aspires to the functions of man, and man slides into the offices of woman. The epoch of eunuchs was ever the epoch of viragoes."[234] This slippery analogy resonates with another summary statement on the rise of consumerism in the eighteenth century. In 1767, the author and economist Nathaniel Forster wrote along similar lines about class:

> In England the several ranks of men slide into each other almost imperceptibly… Hence arises a strong emulation in all the several stations and conditions to vie with each other; and a perpetual restless ambition in each of the inferior ranks to raise themselves to the level of those immediately above them. In such a state as this fashion must have uncontrolled sway.[235]

According to such accounts, the competitive consumption of luxuries across the social spectrum threatened to confuse the social order by upsetting established class and gender hierarchies.[236] As Dror Wahrman put it, "The rage for social emulation through consumer goods, itself "the

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[233] As Jennifer M. Jones has argued, "more than other commodities, clothing became the problematic emblem of modernity," one with important cultural associations with ancien régime France. Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), xvii. One voice in this debate belonged to Mary Wollstonecraft, a radical thinker in Fuseli's circle who equated women's "immoderate fondness for dress" with barbarity, or "want of cultivation of mind." Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1875 [1792]), 311. Fuseli likewise explored associations between gender, morality and fashion early in his life in a collection of drawings known as a *Narrenbuch*, or a "Book of Fools." See Camilla Smith, "Artist as Educator? Assessing the Pedagogic Role of Folly in the Early Work of the Anglo-Swiss Artist Henry Fuseli (1741–1825)," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 46 (2010): 578.

[234] Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 3:114.

[235] Nathaniel Forster, *An Enquiry into the Present High Price of Provisions* (London: Printed for J. Fletcher and Co., 1767), 41.

[236] See also Neil McKendrick, "The Consumer Revolution," in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, eds. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 9–33.

offspring of fashion [which] spreads from the capital into provinces," was apparently threatening to undermine—even annihilate—familiar categories of distinction and identity."[237] While the lived realities of social change caused by the consumer revolution were likely less dramatic than period criticism suggests, Wahrman argues that such alarmism nonetheless signals a growing anxiety experienced as a collective.[238] This framing is especially pertinent to Fuseli, who reimagines these changes through visual and literary acts of confusion, seduction and violence. The age of luxury—dubbed the "consumer society" in the age of Thatcher—was one of "unfortunate reverse" in which men, proverbially castrated, were rendered wholly impotent in the face of female desire.[239] More pressing, perhaps for Fuseli, was that these transformations shaped not only society, but the visual arts as well. In one of his earliest publications, *Remarks on the Writings and Conduct of J.J. Rousseau* (1767), Fuseli envisioned the arts and sciences grafted on luxuriant whim as the "palliatives for the diseases they engender; or if you want a prettier simile, that of resembling rosy harlots, who by coaxing and magic embraces give momentary springs and elasticity to those limbs which their abyss of pleasures sucked into languishment and impotence."[240] The consequence of momentary bliss was a long period of exhaustion or powerlessness. This was the ethos of the long eighteenth century.

The final pair of drawings to be considered explore this cultural impotency through a visual language of sexual violence. In the first, *Hephaestus, Bia and Crato Securing Prometheus on Mount Caucasus* (1800–1810) [Fig. 95], Fuseli returns to his earlier commercial collaboration with Blake: *The Fertilization of Egypt*, printed in 1791. Here, Anubis is seen from behind

[237] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 204.
[238] Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 205.
[239] William Roscoe, *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Failures* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1793), 5.
[240] Henry Fuseli, *Remarks on the Writings and Conduct of J.J. Rousseau* (London: T. Cadell, 1767), 10.

worshipping the dog star. But if the engraving marks his brawny physique and virile power, what are we to make of the later drawing which borrows the same commanding posture for an image concerned with constraint?[241] It depicts Prometheus bound. Prometheus was a recurrent theme (if not a trope) among expatriate artists working in Rome during the late eighteenth century.[242] In Aeschylus's tragedy (adapted from Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*), Prometheus gives fire stolen from the tyrant Zeus to humanity in an act of defiance that results in his imprisonment but facilitates enlightenment. As deliverer of the celestial flame by way of rebellion—another metonymy for creativity—Prometheus was a potent emblem for radicals and revolutionaries of all stripes.[243] Fuseli visualises the opening scene of the drama: Hephaestus, god of metal and fire, arrives in Scythia to punish the disobedient Titan. Together with his accomplices, Bia and Crato, personifications of force and strength respectively, Hephaestus will begrudgingly nail the troublemaker down. Equivalent to Anubis, he raises his hands above his head, ready to unleash a brutal blow. Meanwhile, Crato and Bia play more passive roles. Crato restrains the captive's right arm while Bia crouches tenderly over his splayed body to position the stake at the centre of his chest. In this iteration of the *rückenfigur* (a turned figure), Fuseli increases the erotic tension even further. Seen from behind, the absent phallus of the assailant is replaced with a procession of phallic signs that draw the eye upward from Prometheus's exposed genitals to the spike, succeeded by the clenched buttocks of the god. The eye ultimately rests on Hephaestus's rock hammer, poised to realise the final penetrative act.

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[241] The stance is adapted from Andrea del Sarto's *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist*, which Fuseli copied in 1777 (Schiff 693). Fuseli also experimented with the pose in a series of works featuring male nudes seen from behind including Schiff 631, 632, 633, 889. The figure reappears again as the miniscule Bottom in *Titinia and Bottom* (1790).

[242] For more on Prometheus and confinement as themes through which artists explored nascent ideas about artistic genius see Martin Myrone, "Perverse Classicism," in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 53–71.

[243] Myrone, "Perverse Classicism," 53.

The drawing is faithful to Aeschylus. But moving with the chapter's emphasis on infidelity and transformation, I argue that Fuseli reimagines this final penetrative act in the pen and ink wash drawing *Three Women and a Recumbent Man* (1809) [Fig. 96]. The drawing depicts three muscular women eagerly engaged in various sexual acts with an anonymous male figure, his face obscured between thighs. The nudity of the women is fantastically counterbalanced against their highly elaborate hair comprising twisting braids, tight curls, combs, pins and cascading ribbons. Here, as elsewhere, the Greek inscription seems only loosely tied to the representation: "May Love thus come to my foes!"[244] The line is from Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and references the mass murder of the lustful men of Argos who schemed to capture and make brides of their unwilling female cousins. Under the cover of night, the maidens slay their prospective husbands to avenge attempted rape. While ambiguous, the drawing confirms what the inscription only hints at: that the 'love' Prometheus wishes upon his enemies is fatal.[245] Scholars of erotica have often questioned whether such learned quotations function only as "veil[s] of pretension" to disguise the bald pornographic intent of the author.[246] I side with Martin Myrone in maintaining that we gain much more if we concede that works of art can arouse both mind and body. As for the mind, the Promethean paratext scribbled on the bottom of *Three Women and a Recumbent Man* invites us to contextualise the image within Promethean imagery more broadly. In fact, I argue that the drawing, which was executed around the same time as *Bia, Crato and Hephaestus Securing Prometheus*, reimagines the demise of the humanist Titan in explicitly modernist terms. These women are, I argue, Crato, Bia and Haphaestus, albeit

[244] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 180.
[245] Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, 180.
[246] Myrone, *Gothic Nightmare*, 38; Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1; Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares*, 38.

transformed through the lens of sadomasochistic fantasy into contemporary women, the ultimate vision of modernity and the fullest expression of its perceived feminine excess.[247]

First, *Three Women and a Recumbent Man* unsettles genre. In keeping with period convention, Fuseli sets the action in a "sparsely furnished" bedchamber, but one "opulent in materials."[248] However, instead of the "soft amusement" that usually occurs in these spaces, Fuseli experiments with gendered violence. Sexual violence was a common feature of erotic writing and representation, but its gendered dynamics were usually reversed.[249] Here, the male figure is—like Prometheus—confined. But more unsettling than the male figure's lack of agency is the obscurity of the action that takes place buried in the rightmost female figure's pubic hair. He may be performing oral sex, but other visual clues suggest that he is actually being smothered between the legs of his overzealous sexual partner. The dramatic arch of his back indicates a last, desperate gasp for air, while his listless legs foreshadow the outcome of the struggle. Increasing the claustrophobic feeling of the small interior is the unnatural scale of the women; their Michelangelesque bodies fill the room to the point of rupture. The left arm of the female figure at right extends to the very edge of the picture plane, threatening to invade our space. Finally, voluminous curtains enhance both the theatricality and the sense of enclosure that permeate the scene. As viewers, we can almost feel the oppressive weight of flesh and velvet. As a remake of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, Fuseli embraces the aside, placing the death scene in full view. Such a reading assumes a viewer versed in classical tragedy and predisposed to the sensuous doom and gloom of the Gothic. It also invites associations with other ambiguous visual experiments like *Three Courtesans Operating on the Face of a Bound Man*. As I have argued

[247] For more on sadomasochism and Fuseli see Smith, "Between Fantasy and Angst," 420–447.
[248] Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century*, 166.
[249] Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century*, 175.

elsewhere, these drawings operate according to the sexual sublime, combining the pleasure of looking at sexually arousing imagery with the anxiety of possible danger. Fuseli masterfully manipulates ambiguity to create images that vibrate when experienced, creating an oscillation between attraction and revulsion. It is presumed that the limited viewership of *Three Women and a Recumbent Man,* being familiar with this erotic oeuvre, would arrive at the worst possible conclusion: the one that luridly combines sex and death.[250]

Reversal is also fundamental to the powerful sublimity of these images. The passive force becomes the active and vice versa. *Three Women and a Recumbent Man* upsets conventional gender roles by positioning women on top. It likewise registers the transgression of aesthetic categories as theorised by Edmund Burke. According to one scholar, "Burke's aesthetic categories [of the sublime and the beautiful] hinge upon a presumed opposition between the masculine and the feminine that, in turn, generates the distinction between terror, power, sublimity and self-preservation on the one hand and pleasure, affection, beauty, and society on the other."[251] Crucially, Fuseli's women are not the catalytic agents of the beautiful they should be. Instead, they partake of "an alternative tradition," within Enlightenment aesthetics, one described by Alex Potts. This tradition inverts Burke's gendered aesthetic categories and "makes the feminine the locus of the incomprehensible, the incommensurable, something that threatens to invade and break the bounds of a securely centred rational subjectivity, a negative shadow or

[250] It is likely that Fuseli's intended audience for these erotic drawings was small. A conversation between John Flaxman and Benjamin Robert Haydon recorded in the latter's diary suggests that the drawings were not circulated publicly, only coming to light following the artist's death. Haydon writes: "Poor Fuzeli," said he, "is gone, Sir." "Yes, Sir." 'Ah, Mr. Haydon, he was a Man of Genius, but, I fear, of no principle." "Yes, Sir." "He has left, I understand, behind him, some drawings shockingly indelicate." "Has he, Sir?" "Yes, Mr. Haydon. *Poor Wretch*," said Flaxman. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, Willard Bissell Pope ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960–63) 3:120. Theodor Von Holst and Thomas Griffiths Wainewright have been advanced as likely candidates for this inner circle. See Smith, "Between Fantasy and Angst," 421.
[251] Barbara Clare Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995), 49.

supplement to Burke's and Kant's masculine sublime."[252] It is perhaps redundant to note that this aesthetic reversal is not a feminist statement, but a pessimistic "Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers," to borrow a phrase from Blake.[253]

Reading the male figure as Prometheus summons us to speculate on the forces that administer his subjugation. Fuseli substitutes personifications of strength and force for those of effeminate excess and luxuriant demand, understood to govern the free market economy. That Fuseli would render the attractions of the marketplace in such gendered terms is consistent with civic humanist discourse in which "virile virtue, as Shaftesbury termed it, was effeminated as much by submission to 'female charms' as by the rage to acquire and spend."[254] Read thus, the drawing is a fatalistic commentary on the future of the Promethean artist, who faces oppression if not complete obliteration under the weight of modernity, here reimagined as attractive female consumers. This reading, however, requires one small revision, for the author occupies antithetical positions. As I proposed earlier, Fuseli knows himself to be the victim of history *and* its critic. He is the critic insofar as he confronts the viewer with a brutal truth. But as to how Fuseli is also the victim, the drawing leads us amiss. It invites us to read the bound figure of Prometheus *as* Fuseli, tormented by the same modernity he sets out to critique. But I would argue that Fuseli is the victim insofar as he, via the image, indulges in the pleasure of modern culture—its sensuous, alluring excess. After all, it is a culture from which John Barrell reminds us "no modern can escape."[255]

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[252] Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 115.
[253] Letter from William Blake to Thomas Butts, dated July 6th, 1803. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 730.
[254] Barrell, "The Dangerous Goddess," 65.
[255] Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, 260.

Fuseli, like Knight and other agents discussed throughout this dissertation, mobilised ancient eroticism to confront modernity in radical ways. But if he engaged with ideas emerging from antiquarian scholarship, the artist explored the dark side of ancient eroticism—its sublime contours. In the drawings discussed, generation was equated with original invention but bound with Prometheus and peddled with Eros. These drawings offer critical commentary on cultural erosion under the aegis of commerce, which hollowed out (neo)classicism by placing undue emphasis on surface over substance and transforming "programs of thought [philosophy] into material possessions."[256] These erotic drawings thus provide crucial insight into an evolving theory of art. If the turn from terminal decline toward a "gradual recovery" was possible, it was nonetheless painfully out of reach. Indeed, as Fuseli put it himself: "to expect a system of Art built on grandeur, without a total revolution would only be less presumptuous than insane."[257] The cultural climate would not support such a twist. Instead, as this chapter has demonstrated, real working conditions produced metamorphoses of a different kind. Painters, poets and engravers assumed new roles to compete in a marketplace that Blake described as ruthless and Fuseli compared to domestic confinement (a particularly apt metaphor considering his engraver, Moses Haughton, would later share his home). While the collaborative labour behind *The Botanic Garden* produced extraordinary results, it is perhaps best conceptualised less as a "happy copulation," than an uncomfortable ménage-à-trois.

[256] Viccy Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 196.
[257] Henry Fuseli "First Lecture. Ancient Art," in *J. H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005), 1:273.

CONCLUSION

Returning to London by way of Lugano in September of 1778, Fuseli expressed a superlative conceit in a drawing sent to his fellow émigré James Northcote (1746–1831).[1] In *Caricature of the Artist Leaving Italy* (1778) [Fig. 97], Fuseli casts himself in the guise of the Barberini Faun. In so dominating the composition with his ideal, classical body, the drawing invites us to wonder whether the aspiring painter believed Sir Joshua Reynolds, the President of the Royal Academy, when advised him that he might become the greatest painter of the age if he could only spend a few years in Italy. Having completed his aesthetic education in Rome, Fuseli looms large over the European art world he seeks to enter. Each nation in the schematic map has been redrawn according to its cultural merit. Fuseli empties his bowels into a chamber pot labelled Switzerland. His homeland is, in other words, is the least suitable locale for the production of high art. France fairs no better. It serves as a culvert into which the pot's feces drain. England is plagued with a different sort of problem. Divided up between the figural vermin with whom Fuseli must compete when he arrives in London, there is little space remaining. Neatly labelled, the mice are the celebrated portraitists Ozias Humphry and George Romney. The third rodent—rather plump compared to the others—is Benjamin West, the court painter and Academy darling. "Take head of the mice," so Fuseli warns Northcote in his letter.[2]

Italy is the only nation to emerge favourably from this derisive assessment of the European art world. Fuseli gazes longingly at the Mediterranean nation which occupies an exalted position at upper left. As if to embody his desire to return there, a phallus flees skyward

[1] David H. Weinglass, ed. *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* (New York: Kraus International, 1982), 18.
[2] Fuseli, *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 18.

on downy wings.[3] The emblem would have been recognisable to Northcote as a *fascinus*, an ancient artifact which entered the British imaginary via archeological discovery and print culture beginning in the mid eighteenth century (one features in the *Discourse*). In antiquity, such phallic charms were believed to protect against the evil eye. In fact, according to Hamilton's infamous letter to Sir Joseph Banks, these amulets were still worn by lower class women living in Naples. With these relationships in mind, the avian eros signifies a desire to return to the cultural mores of the past, or at least to a place where the erotic persisted more robustly into modernity than in northern Europe.[4]

The drawing visualizes a relationship between the ancients' cultural ethos and their ideal art, an interdependence which Fuseli gave poetic voice to in an "Ode on Art" which he sent to Northcote in the same letter. It is worth quoting at length since it readily informs the drawing which it accompanied:

> Among the mobs that every northern wind
> Blows into your palaces, oh Rome, […]
> The mob of Germans, Britons, French,
> The mob of Polish and of Muscovites.
>
> The Vermin of art – thus I spent a day
> Wandering with trembling foot among your temples,
> And cursed in furor insensate
> The academies of London and of France.
>
> Contempt, disgust, hope with nocturnal
> Despair wresting – these drove me into solitude,
> To stretch out on my couch rumpled by
> Tossings of agony, and painfully wringing my hands
>
> I exclaimed: 'Is this the way to immortality?
> Did you create, Prime Mover, this, my exalted spirit,
> The sympathies of this, my soul,

[3] Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750–1810* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 190.
[4] The erotic possibilities afforded by travel to Italy are explored in Kevin Salatino, "Sex and the Eternal City: The Grand Tour as Erotic Pilgrimage," *Journal of the Association of Western Art History* 27 (2007): 212–252.

But to count muscles and to mix pigments?

Did Angnolo unlock the gates of heaven
And bid the gods stride among men
In order now to arbitrate the quarrel
Of French and Britons about nature and style?[5]

The poem confirms what the drawing argues visually—that the European art world needed to be reformed. Rome was overcrowded while artists in Paris and London lived by the restrictive rules and quotidian tedium of their academies, counting muscles and mixing pigments in an effort to imitate their betters. This was the paradox of modern pedagogy. Artists lost sight of that which they set out to recreate, substituting the means for the ends as Fuseli put it in the introduction to his published lectures. The verse also suggests a reading for the avian eros. Fuseli frames his query concerning the path to immortality to a primordial "Prime Mover." His exalted spirit—his soul—takes flight, fleeing from the reality of the present toward an ideal past, or at least its material remains. In fact, the upward gaze of the artist toward the phallus resonates with the same quotation that Fuseli chose as his epitaph, inscribed by Baily on his bust for Sir Thomas Lawrence. With eyes cast toward the celestial realm, Fuseli lifts his (erotic) vision above the things that actually exist. Eros, here rendered in his vulgar form, stands in for something much greater: a vision of ideal beauty, if only half remembered.

But if the drawing delivered to Romney asserts an assurance that Fuseli sails to Britain on the winds of change, or that Eros has the power to redeem European art, a second drawing executed around the same time invites doubt. This chalk and wash drawing is often taken as a conceptual self portrait of the painter coming to terms with remnants of the past, grandiose in

[5] Henry Fuseli, *Samtliche Gedichte,* ed. Martin Birchcr and Karl S. Guthkc (Zürich, 1973), 67–68. Quoted in A.M. Atkins, "'Both Turk and Jew': Notes on the Poetry of Henry Fuseli, with Some Translations," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1983): 209–10; Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 168.

scale and spirit.[6] Its title, *Artist in Despair Before the Grandeur of Antique Ruins* [Fig. 98], is modern, conventional and unequivocal.[7] It depicts a lone male figure in a gesture of mourning. One hand holds a heavy head and the other drapes listless over the bridge of an immense, sculpted foot. That ponderous appendage is intact except for an uneven edge at the talus. Situated above, a similarly disembodied hand points upward. Compared to *Caricature of the Artist Leaving Italy*, this drawing discloses a similar professional desire to challenge rivals. Only this one exposes a vulnerability. As Martin Myrone has described the paradox of Fuseli's personae, "the self-proclaimed artistic giant, walking among pygmies [or mice] and driven furious by inspiration was also Fuseli the five-foot-nothing would-be poet and would-be painter."[8] Fuseli reveals the dark side of his ambition, unable to reconcile the legacy of a bygone golden age with his own potential to reanimate latent genius. The pair of drawings thus envision different futures for modern art. Fuseli imagines himself as both a "dwarf and a giant."[9] Intriguingly, this is the same diametrical opposition that he later ascribed to Reynolds and Raphael, scoffing, then in hindsight, at the possibility that moderns could achieve the same "historic grandeur" of the ancients.[10]

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[6] See for example, David Irwin, *English Neoclassical Art: Studies in Inspiration and Taste* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1966), 47; Suzanne Glover Lindsay, "Emblematic Aspects of Fuseli's Artist in Despair," *Art Bulletin* 68, no. 3 (1986): 483–484; Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28–39.
28–39. Martin Myrone, "Perverse Classicism," in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 55. Myrone emphasises that this reading is purely speculative.
[7] The title was applied to the work in the 1960s by Gert Schiff.
[8] Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 169.
[9] John Timbs, *Anecdote Biography* (London: Richard Bentley, 1860), 225.
[10] As one anecdotal account has it, Sir Thomas Lawrence fortuitously spurred Fuseli into a rage by comparing the historic grandeur of Reynolds to that of Raphael. Storming out of the room while "muttering something about a tempest in a pint-pot," Fuseli would only return once Lawrence had begged reconciliation. Timbs, *Anecdote Biography*, 225.

Cultivating an erudite discourse around Priapus, Knight, Fuseli and members of their circles mobilised ancient Eros and his potent virility to transform modernity. But as the nineteenth century wore on, their "inspired madness" was liable to be misconstrued. When Knight set himself up in Stonebrook Cottage to live a humble existence modelled on that of an ancient Greek philosopher, for example, his neighbors took him to be under the influence of supernatural forces. "I hear that some pious matrons of the Wilberforcian sect have concluded me to be possest of the Devil," so wrote Knight to his confidante Lord Aberdeen. "… And were not the antient Rite of Exorcism held by them to be Popish Heathenism and abominable, I might perhaps stand a chance of having some salt water thrown in my face the next time I apprehend them."[11] Chasing the good life as in the days of the Greeks and the Romans, was considered odd behavior to say the least. When the revival of antiquity did become mainstream, it was neither in the form of patronage for heroic art as Fuseli hoped, nor as the cultural ethos that Knight wished for. Instead, it was in the form of Wedgwood pottery, popular prints and fashionable garments. This indiscriminate adoption of antique forms resonates once more with the idea of double doctrine: divine truth diluted into easily consumed fodder for the masses. As Knight and later William Blake would argue, when corrupted via devious priests, devotees lost sight of the philosophy behind their sacred signs.[12] Initiates to the "Greater Mysteries," may have learned

[11] Letter from Richard Payne Knight to Lord Aberdeen, dated September 3rd, 1812. Aberdeen Papers, British Library, 43230 fol. 72.

[12] Writing along the same lines as Richard Payne Knight in 1793, Blake observed the following: "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive. And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity; Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began Priesthood. Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales. And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things. Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast." This appears on plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. David Erdman, ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 40. Blake was likewise drawing on ideas put forth in popular comparative mythology including Volney's *The Ruins* (1791) and works by John Toland. Weir, *Brahma in the West*, 49–50.

better, but even a modern cult of Priapus could not bring about an "immediate restoration of art."[13] Perhaps, mused Fuseli, all that one could hope for was a "gradual recovery."[14]

If the interventions considered throughout this dissertation did not achieve their goals, they are nonetheless important to our understanding of early modern culture. In Chapter One, I explored the erotic antiquarianism practiced by Knight and his coterie of Dilettanti. Knight proposed new, embodied methods to recover the past, the results of which he imagined had the power to transform the present. Chapter Two followed the Eros that enamored antiquarians from the private world of collectors like Sir William Hamilton and Charles Townley into the British Museum. There, curators trained in modern curatorial practices grappled with this obscene deity and his erotically charged entourage. Illegible, erotic antiquities cherished by antiquarian elites were overshadowed by incoming bequests in keeping with public ethos and new institutional obligations. Chapter Three argued that Eros not only figured prominently in antiquarian culture but became a potent critical instrument for practicing artists. However, as expressed in the work of Henry Fuseli and William Blake, ancient Eros could not withstand the pressures of modernity. Born of the Enlightenment, their vision of art and Eros failed to meet the demands of the nineteenth century. The speed and force of change occasioned by Britain's expanding imperial power and the assent of industrial capitalism radically transformed British culture. These seismic events saw the true meaning of Priapus lost to history, once again.

[13] Henry Fuseli, *J. H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting: Das Modell der Antike und die modern Nachahmung*, ed. Gisela Bungarten (Berlin: Verlag, 2005 [1830]), 1:276.
[14] Fuseli, *J. H. Füsslis (1741–1825) Lectures on Painting*, 1:276.

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