

THERE IS NO SUCH THING
AS SKY

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ABSTRACT

Representations of drapery in painting were fundamental to the development of a Western artistic tradition in the 16th Century. Bodies and textiles converged in a display of decadence and sensuality. This imagery travelled across Europe with the advent of new maritime nations. By the 17th Century, patronage of the Italian and Flemish arts had gripped England, and the portraiture of Anthony Van Dyck developed a perceived Anglo-European identity that would have a lasting impact. This study seeks to address the compounding influences of Italian painting on the Flemish artists that built their legacy in England.

This was also an era marked by an unprecedented spread of new forms of literature. By the 18th Century, access to pornographic works critical of the political establishment resulted in heavy censorship. Erotic literature has since become superfluous, one of the most widely distributed styles of writing. However, due to its explicit nature, and widespread cheap publications, erotica is generally considered to be of lesser merit to other literary models.

Writing about painting often falls into description, in an attempt to talk about the evasive qualities of pleasure. Erotica is typified by its description of bodily sensations. My argument is that these two methods are not so dissimilar. Practices of painting and erotic fictions often unravel in similar attempts to grapple with desire. The following text is designed to challenge commonplace methods of theoretical art writing, by conflating erotic fiction with 'scholarship', encouraging the reader to consider how we attribute value to these opposing forms.

PREFACE

An object of desire can never be something known or possessed.¹ Desire is an enemy that forces itself upon us in its absence, taking one step further away as we descend in its direction, loosening our grip of what we consider to be certain. Truancy is desire's elemental form and as such we are subject to its disappearance. Seeking, wanting, longing, yearning; these activities are at the mercy of desire's evasive characteristics, as compounded efforts to grasp something whilst quantifying and reducing everything that stands in the way of this trajectory through perception to judgement.² This is where a paradox is enacted, one that destabilises the lover. The object of affection itself has a hand in the expropriation of that which the lover rightfully determines to be theirs.³ This is illustrated in one contradictory fact; that the language of loving is a system of control, but the language of love is about loss.⁴

Bodies and draperies in dialogue have been the cornerstones of Western artistic traditions since the Italian Renaissance.⁵ Evolving with the advent of new nation-states, and new economic principles, art and science over a 300+ year period were inextricably linked to the influence and ideological aims of the powerful and wealthy, the seismic political structures established to ensure cultural domination, and the conflicts that ensued. The surviving artworks are a source of fascination for many reasons; they are documents of turbulent, periodical shifts in identity and iconography, which established the lens through which we understand the world today. The sensual appeal of painting is often neglected in favour of these discourses, but when considered together, something different begins to surface, where two opposing bodies of knowledge reach outwards to find validation on equal ground. The vocabulary of desire, tending towards the explicit and elemental, begins to take on theoretical authority, whilst a thirst for knowledge becomes laden with erotic connotations,⁶ undressing the scholarly body in pangs of gratification.

The following text is presented as a challenge to preordained methods of writing about painting, by utilising an erotic mode as a provocation to critique value judgements in literature, and examine the migratory systems of belief inherent in the history of Western art. Through conflicting modes of address, this writing seeks to orientate the reader in a fragmented space of fictions jutting up against academia, activating them back and forth between historical scholarship, anecdote, poetic interventions, and smut, all the while illustrating a sense of travelling influence, through a period of significant geo-political upheaval.

¹ See Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, p.65.

² *ibid*, p.27.

³ *ibid*, p.33.

⁴ "The revealed world is itself a matrix of distance and desire... our language is a web or net to recover and translate this dialogue of forms." (See Peter Gizzi *Correspondences of the Book*, p. 179-86).

⁵ See Paul Hills, *Veiled Presence*, p.7.

⁶ "A mood for knowledge is emitted by the spark that leaps in the lover's soul. He feels on the verge of grasping something not grasped before." (See *Eros the Bittersweet*, p.66).

Erotics play out on the edges of things. The lover finds themselves at a border attempting to dissolve the edge that separates them from the object of their affection. It is in the boundaries of bodies and the spaces separating them where the pull of desire is truly felt on a sensory level.⁷ The figures of affection in 16-17th Century art can generally be defined by a collapse in the delineation of skin and textiles, of clothes billowing and flaring around bodies, multiplying in autonomous folds that coalesce to reveal the body with a sensuous appeal superior to nudity.⁸

I have spent much of this time thinking about what we gain from concentrated bouts of looking and not what we lose. Paying attention to something always involves deficit. It is a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, where the brain is eliminative and not generative.⁹ Nowadays it's hard to think of the world in any terms other than work. This study was launched with a singular question in mind; what can be found in depriving oneself of the whole? A fragmentary perspectival shift, of dwelling in details and loose threads, feels closer to embracing a culture in which people flicker in and out of being many different things.¹⁰ I think we are done with the idea that meaning is fixed, and I prefer to look at oneself in terms of the habits with which one takes actions.¹¹

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⁷ "Desires (are) the senseless urges of the body which (man) mistook for passion and which he deemed 'unreasonable' because he found he could not 'reason' that is, not reckon with them" (See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.320-1).

⁸ "In every instance folds of clothing acquire an autonomy and a fullness that are not simply decorative effects. They convey the intensity of a spiritual force exerted on the body." (See Deleuze, *The Fold*, p.122).

⁹ Jonathan Crary examines the advent of attention as a new object within the modernisation of subjectivity, of industrious bodies defined by their ability to work and be worked. Early-modern science in enlightenment Europe sought to conflate the inquisitive nature of human perception with diligence, where the vitality of sensation became something that could be harnessed and stabilised to comply with the new cultural logic of capitalism; "What is important to institutional power... is simply that perception function in a way that insures a subject is productive, manageable, and predictable... (as) a means by which a perceiver becomes open to control and annexation by external agencies." (See *Suspension of Perception*, p.4-5).

¹⁰ "Coherence, such as it is, gels round moods, whose own coherences are evanescent and of unknown principle." (See John Wilkinson, *Imperfect Pitch*, p.154-71).

¹¹ "I believe there is a time for analysis, and a time to live without it. Just as I think there is a time for passionate living, and a time for recording and interpreting." (See *The Journals of Anais Nin*, p.20).

INTRODUCTION

The man that invented the Kaleidoscope went blind staring at the sun. So did others. I can't think of a better example of someone wanting to understand something so much. It's the stuff of poetry. I never read what they had to say about the whole ordeal. I'd prefer not to know. Memory and separation are all everyone seems to write about. Memories tend to fall into two categories; beginning and end. The space between remains a blur of sensations, in sickness and in health. It's difficult to write when life isn't full of passion. When life isn't full of passion, recollection of that in-between is all we have to work with.

Now envision your ideal childhood, the one where you died in your sleep and awoke in a meadow of knee-high yarns that tickled your thighs, a yellow sun receding in the distance, and the word that was once abundance is now used in place of intention. You fuck up the participles in search of a different picture, or some other sensory equivalence. It's dark now, and translation is punishable by death.

Communicating a sense of Europe is the only strict instruction here. Abide by this and something reasonable might glimmer through. *Are we there yet?* you ask and it's a good question. After all, when you name something you take the fear out of it. We all know the sun doesn't set anymore, and clarity hasn't been considered a luxury for decades. But what would have been is still a matter of contention, the time before essence was stopped in its tracks. *Was it said with the force it takes to crush a human skull? Was it said without concession or sympathy?* We still like to behave as if words could be anything other than authority. As if words could be anything other than honesty. We are all seeking our fortunes.

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*This is an era before upholstery and all are subject to air.*¹² We had shared glances sometime before, but shyness had overwhelmed me and I cowered, directing my eyes to my feet. I hurried my way through the crowd and down a cascading corridor,¹³ but I couldn't get away from the thought of her, and little time passed before we found ourselves in the same room again. She was adorned in a thin, crisp white textile gently resting around her figure, finely pleated with shadows cascading to her feet in drips of molten wax. The colour of her hair changed in the light from sharp blonde into a mellow peach with shades of hazel and tints of incandescent orange. It was as if she had purposefully paired her curling locks with the golden hems of her gown, fine trims running vertiginously from her chest to her feet, forcing my eye to lower itself down the centre of her abdomen where the two edges of the garment met.¹⁴

I froze and felt the entire weight of my body collect in my stomach. While I agonised over how to navigate the wall of bodies separating us, she stood patiently, allowing strangers to lecherously dart their eyes all over her. Fixing her sight on mine, she turned slightly and gently placed a velvet robe of red wine over her shoulders; a thick coat of furs cascading to her waist, resting in bundles of burgundy that swilled over her wrists. She advanced in my direction, and the ruffles of her gown billowed as she travelled, catching her skin and revealing her navel through the translucent sheath.¹⁵ The drapes loosely brushed at her ankles as her limbs disappeared into a plethora of creases. A light breeze flowed directly around her as she passed between the shapes that segregated us, tenderly caressing each onlooker with aromas of silk in the parachutes of a dandelion.

Before I knew it she was by my side, taking my hand in hers and guiding me through the crowd to a staircase at the far end of the gallery.¹⁶ We ascended one level to a dressing room adjoining a larger gangway and shut the door behind us. The room was dark and quiet, of maroons, mahoganies and the muffled hum of chatter nearby, punctuated with vibrations of music downstairs, drumming its way through the ceiling. The clamour of partygoers coalesced into an orchestra of reverberations, throbbing out of the thick, burnt orange carpet and into the legs of the wooden furniture dotted about the enclave. The chairs, dressers, and desks resonated with this extraneous energy, pulsing a dull buzz into the air.¹⁷

As I orientated myself, she glided to the other side of the room and perched on a cushioned mantle. Facing in my direction, she turned her neck and examined herself in a mirror to her side. I

¹² Paul Hills, in his book about drapery in Renaissance art, noted that before the 17th Century, curtains were most commonly used as space dividers, usually of intimate spaces such as around a bed. Curtains would not have been associated windows, or other contemporary uses. As such, textile furnishings in 15th Century Europe would have been responsive to "the passage of people or to the impress of bodies; they registered the passing event, the small accommodations of place to persons and persons to place." See *Veiled Presence*, p.27.

¹³ Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* is in Room 10/14 off the Eastern corridor of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Apparently the word *galleria* comes from this place.

¹⁴ Sandro Botticelli painted *Venus and Mars* around 1485, probably to commemorate a marriage, however the couple depicted remains a mystery. Some scholars believe that Venus was modelled on Simonetta Vespucci, a noblewoman from Genoa, but she had died some years earlier of a tumour in her pituitary gland. See Paolo Pozzilli, Luca Vollero, Anna Maria Colao, *Venus by Botticelli and Her Pituitary Adenoma in Endocrine Practice, Vol. 25, No. 10*, pp. 1067-1073.

¹⁵ Giorgio Vasari's 1568 account *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, documents Titian's career as he rose to prominence. The "very kind and well-bred" Titian (p.508), didn't travel much, sparing some trips in his early years to take on commissions from wealthy political figures in the Papal States and Holy Roman Empire. From 1551 onwards, Titian remained in Venice, and enthusiasm for his work had dwindled with the appearance of Veronese and Tintoretto, the new stars of the Venetian school. However, his popularity amongst the Catholic kings never faded. Over the remaining 20 years of his life, he mostly worked on paintings for Philip II of Spain, including *The Rape of Europa*, c.1560-1562. (See Francesco Valcanover's essay in Susanna Biadene's (ed.) monograph *Titian*, p.22-23).

¹⁶ The National Gallery in London has colour coded rooms to designate what time and place you are in. One of my childhood bedrooms was the same teal green colour as the wallpaper in Room 9 of the Italian Renaissance, the one with Titian's *Diana* paintings, and the unfinished *Manchester Madonna* by Michelangelo. Downstairs was an old dining room with the same blood red walls and dark wood veneers as the galleries adjacent to the central hall, connecting 18th Century Italy with the Dutch Golden age at one end, and Turner, Stubbs and Constable at the other. I didn't like that room.

¹⁷ Rooms 52-58 at the Victoria and Albert Museum have a permanent exhibit dedicated to British design between 1500-1760. It's filled with drab old furniture, worn out from years of touch, often placed on perfectly cut squares of carpet that would have been popular in past times. Similar exhibits can be seen in most National Trust houses.

caught her left eye, reflected in the glass,¹⁸ carefully following me as I shifted about the space. Her red velveteen coat had dropped from her left shoulder and had collected in a bale at her seat.¹⁹ She allowed herself to fall out of her clothes, pretending to object by slowly placing her left hand on her sternum, loosely catching the tumbling linen with her palm, as it slumped down her chest revealing her breast.²⁰

All of a sudden she was stood in front of me. She wet her lips and pushed them out so to catch the light and emphasise their delicate pink gloss. She raised her hands to her hair, sweeping glistening ringlets over her shoulders, before slowly tipping her dress from each shoulder with her thumbs, letting out a faint gasp as the fabric spilled to the floor in one clean drop. She calmly stepped out of the tangles that lay at her feet and tilted her body slightly in my direction, inviting me to kiss it. I pressed my lips to her collar bone, and she rocked her head back as I ran them up her neck. I gripped her back, pulling her body into mine as we locked our lips together, hastening our impulses with urgency as the flood of hunger in our bodies brimmed and poured over, dripping down the inside of her legs.

She rested her chin on my left shoulder, as we fucked against a writing desk. The intonation of her breath swirled like a cloth around the back of my head, coaxing the hairs of my nape out of their swollen follicles into loose tufts of lint. Her soft skin grew resistant to my touch from the film of sticky sweat encasing our bodies, and as my grip on her ribs began to slide, the flesh resting on top of her bones ruffled up against the palm of my hand and was displaced into the hollow under her arm. She stumbled slightly and my shoulders tensed as I propped her up, pressing our foreheads together. I swung both my arms around her back, gripping the scruff of her neck, and in a final thrust of my pelvis, the weight of her skeleton left her body as she tumbled into my forearms in an unbound heap of folds. We gathered ourselves and some towels, wiping the silky residual glazes of our collaboration from each others torsos.

She lay on the mattress in the centre of the room, and quickly arranged the cushions under her right arm, propping herself up, and twisting her spine a few degrees anti-clockwise so her right breast was in profile. She dipped her cheek towards her shoulder, drawing out the length of her neck, and rustled locks of flax through the gap under her chin. Her left arm emerged from behind, resting under the round of her belly and, dropping her hand between her thighs, she curled her fingers upwards into her vulva, stroking with a light touch. She tucked her right leg under her left, arching her body into a perfect crescent. Her left heel pressed itself into the cotton rippling underneath her and at once appeared to be the only source of gravity in her otherwise weightless body. The sheets swirled in delicate curves up to the glow of her skin and disappeared under her figure, vanishing into the gap between flesh and cloth.²¹

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¹⁸ Titian and his workshop created multiple versions of *Venus with a Mirror*. It is believed that he kept the original in his house. After his death, it was sold alongside the rest of his estate to Christoforo Barbarigo. For 200 years, travellers in Venice would flock to the Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza on the Canal Grande to see the extensive collection of paintings Titian left behind after he died, including Anthony Van Dyck in 1623. The Barbarigo collection was sold to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia in 1850, before being passed on to the newly refurbished Hermitage Museum. In 1931, as part of Joseph Stalin's first 5-year centralised economic plans for the Soviet Union, *Venus with a Mirror* was secretly sold to American banker and industrialist Andrew Mellon, who donated it to the US government in 1937. It is now held in the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. (See Jaynie Anderson's article in *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.144, No.1196, p.671- 679).

¹⁹ Leopold von Sacher-Masoch wrote extensively about Titian's c.1555 painting *Venus with a Mirror* in his 1870 novella *Venus in Furs*; "The furs of the despot in which Titian's fair model wrapped herself, probably more for fear of a cold than out of modesty, have become a symbol of the tyranny and cruelty that constitute woman's essence and her beauty."

²⁰ In around 1608, Peter Paul Rubens painted *The Toilet of Venus*, a copy of a now lost version of Titian's *Venus with Mirror*. (See appendix p. 17).

²¹ According to Vasari, After a brief period studying under Bellini, Titian became a pupil of Giorgione, an Italian artist known for "continuously (taking) delight in affairs of the heart" (p.299 of *The Lives*). When Giorgione died of the plague in 1510, he left his work *The Sleeping Venus* unfinished, which was subsequently completed by Titian (see Tersio Pignatti's essay *Giorgione and Titian*, p.68-9). In 1534, Titian finished the compositionally similar *Venus of Urbino*. This painting served as inspiration for countless works made over the following centuries by artists including Annibale Carracci, Artemisia Gentileschi, Francisco de Goya, and most notably Édouard Manet's *Olympia* from 1863. (See appendix p. 17).

This is one of many times when indulgence was a political issue. The sun was setting over Blackfriars on this mid-summer's eve, and the ripples of the Thames sparkled with harsh glints, stabbing at the eyes of onlookers curious enough to stare directly at the tide.²² The room heated up as a ray cut through a split in the green curtains, spreading its glare across the wooden floor in long ribbons. Henrietta stood nervously at one end of the room, as still as possible, with Anthony positioned at his easel on the other side.²³ Approaching her twenty-fourth year, it was the first time the young Queen had sat for Anthony,²⁴ and she had never felt less confident. She was wearing an enormous gown of silvery-blue silks, with sleeves ballooning at her shoulders down to spiky lace cuffs at the crop on her forearm. An ill-fitting corset, bound together at her chest with a carnation pink ribbon, separated her small frame from her limbs which were lost to the weighty ruffles abutting her torso. She felt ridiculous, like a mannequin dressed by someone looking to humiliate her. Anthony could see this in her eyes, as he replaced a pair of degraded pink roses she had plucked wilted petals from, carefully resting her hand on top of them.

Anthony was growing frustrated as the light began to wane. He paced up and down the room, examining the Queen from different angles, expelling sighs of irate bemusement, whilst hastily scratching lines into the sheets of his pocket book.²⁵ This did little to comfort Henrietta, who had begun to tremble with Anthony's increasing dissatisfaction. Anthony noted the Queen's discomfort and resolved to calm his temper. The hostility behind his eyes shifted into a warmth that eased Henrietta's nerves, and she submitted to the artist, allowing him to adjust her pose. She turned to clay as he took her left hand and placed it on her thigh, carefully tucking a swathe of fabric between her index and middle fingers, before tousling the sateen drapes at her waist, encouraging them to catch the light in a most splendid manner.²⁶ Henrietta gasped as he undid the scarlet bow preserving her dignity, exposing her belly to the painter, before loosely refastening the lace, creating a casual opening at her bodice which would take little force to tear open.²⁷ He paused in contemplation momentarily before raising his hand, gently pressing his thumb to her

²² Anthony Van Dyck moved to London in 1632 at the appointment of King Charles I. As court portraitist, he was housed in a flat overlooking the river at Blackfriars, and had unlimited access to the mostly disused Eltham Palace as a country residence. (See William Gaunt's *A Concise History of English Painting*, p.34).

²³ The son of a wealthy silk merchant, Van Dyck studied under his friend and mentor Rubens, before leaving Antwerp and spending the years 1621-27 in Italy, where he was exposed to the masters of the Venetian School. He returned to the Spanish Netherlands for a brief spell before his resettlement in England, where he remained up to his death in 1641. (See John Rupert Martin and Gail Feigenbaum's 1979 volume *Van Dyck as Religious Artist*).

²⁴ Over the course of a decade, Van Dyck made over 30 paintings of Queen Henrietta Maria (see William Gaunt's *Court Painting in England*, p.81-109). The first is believed to have been painted in 1632, recorded in letters from 8th August by Charles I, authorising a payment of £20 to Van Dyck for 'One of our royall Consort' (See bibliography p.15 for Royal Collection Trust article).

²⁵ Michael Jaffé notes that much of the content found in Van Dyck's 'second' notebook, held at The British Museum, would have been available to him from the prints collected in Rubens' studio, including Mantegna's *Bacchanals*, engravings of Peter Bruegel, and woodcuts from Hans Holbein. It was Titian, however, that left an indelible impression on Van Dyck. During his Italian period, he copied paintings by Correggio, Guercino, Orazio Gentileschi amongst others, but is believed to have made over 200 copies of works by Titian. Van Dyck brought these influences to England, developing a style of portraiture that was subsequently emulated by court painters for the next 150 years. Here, it is worth noting the provenance of Van Dyck's sketchbooks, which ended up in the possession of Peter Lely, the chief portrait artist to Charles I after Van Dyck's death. (See *The Second Sketch Book by Van Dyck* in *The Burlington Magazine Vol. 101, No. 678/679*, p.316-321, and catalogue entries on The British Museum website, bibliography p.15).

²⁶ "A sweet disorder in the dress | Kindles in clothes a wantonness: | A lawn about the shoulders thrown | Into a fine distraction" Robert Herrick, *Delight in Disorder*. (See *The Hesperides & Noble Numbers: Vol. 1 and 2*, p.176-7). With the Protestant Reformation, celibacy was unseated as a moral ideal in favour of a Christianised pagan ethic of moderation. Cavalier poetry of the 17th Century sought to expand the boundaries of permissible sexual practice, exploring the role of inhibitions in both producing and regulating pleasure. Works by Robert Herrick often represented females' modesty as a strategy of enhancing her worth as an object of male desire. (See Joshua Scodel, *The Pleasures of Restraint: The Mean of Coyness in Cavalier Poetry*, p. 239-242).

²⁷ "Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear | That th'eyes of busy fools may be stopped there." John Donne, *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed*. Donne most likely wrote this poem in his early twenties, when Elizabeth I was Queen and Petrarchan poetry (Italian sonnet) was popular in the English Court. Donne's *Elegies* flaunt the speaker's sexuality as he describes his escapades. For Donne, *eros* was the driving force of life, and spirituality was not segregated from sexual desire. (See Achsah Guibbory, *Erotic Poetry*, p. 133-5).

chin and, applying a slight pressure, forced Henrietta's petite figure into a tense, upright posture. His hand glided across to her ear, lightly pulling at her lobe to dislodge the pendant pearl earrings she was wearing from behind her curling brown hair. Henrietta's stomach filled with an aching desire. She hadn't been touched by a man in so long. Charles had been away for weeks, working on a highly secretive project with the Archbishop of Canterbury,²⁸ and whenever he was back in the palace his thoughts were elsewhere. These days he hardly gave Henrietta even the slightest glance, let alone a look of burning lust.

All of a sudden the door swung open and in stormed Lucy, the Queen's closest friend, and lady of her bedchamber. She was a gregarious woman, highly outspoken and flirtatious, embroiled in scandals at the palace surrounding her affair with the Earl of Strafford.

"Darling," she wailed, "I hope I'm not intruding, I'm just so frightfully bored."

Henrietta said nothing, her cheeks blushing with a heat she had only felt in the early moons spent with her husband. Anthony had reclined back in his seat and silently observed the two women from afar. Lucy filled the room with noise as she stomped to the far end and helped herself to a bottle of red wine. After taking a generous gulp, she offered the bottle to the Queen, who abstained, before turning to Anthony, fluttering her eyelids. He sat stoically, a slight grin protruding from under his thick moustache, before reaching his hand out in request for the jug. Lucy walked over and sat her buttocks firmly on his lap, flinging her right arm over his shoulder and spilling a few drops of wine on the floor as she did so. She perused the paintings spread haphazardly about the room with paltry attention,²⁹ before addressing the thick air of hush consuming the space.

"I hope you weren't fucking in my absence," she exclaimed, "such a thing so terribly exciting would be considered treasonous."

Henrietta's feigned embarrassment as she coyly looked at the floor.³⁰ Anthony chuckled, but said nothing.

"My dear Anthony, I plea you take no offence for I must speak candidly. I must question how a man can be so noble as to resist temptations which present themselves so opportunely at his feet? Being alone for so many hours with such a fair young creature, one can only imagine all those delicate parts denied unto the eye!"³¹

Anthony remained silent, shyly glancing at the Queen.

"Lucy!" the Queen exclaimed, "hold your tongue, for Anthony is a professional, and would never conceive of such ill-mannered thoughts!"

²⁸ In 1633, Charles I and the Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud initiated a series of religious reforms, restricting non-conformist preachers, and reissuing the *Declaration of Sports*, a list of recreations permitted on Sundays and other holy days. (See Richard Cust's *Charles I: A Political Life*, p.133–147).

²⁹ Van Dyck's owned a number of paintings by Titian, which he kept in his studio. Rubens was also a patron of the Italian arts. His early training was largely influenced by Marcantonio Raimondi's print reproductions of works by Raphael and, like his younger apprentice, he too spent a similar period in Italy twenty years earlier, studying Titian, Tintoretto and the contemporary Caravaggio. (See p.59 of Kristin Lohse Belkin's book *Rubens*, and p.240 of Frans Baudouin's monograph of the same name). In the early 1600s, Rubens stayed in Mantua at the court of Italian Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga. Following a visit to Rome, he convinced the Duke that he should buy Caravaggio's *The Death of the Virgin* (1606). Gonzaga also sent Rubens on diplomatic trips to the court of Philip III, where he studied Raphael and Titian works held by the Spanish royal household. On his return to Antwerp he assisted in the acquisition of Caravaggio's *The Madonna of the Rosary* (1607) for the city's St. Pauls Church. (For a timeline, See p.vi of Kerry Downes *Rubens*).

³⁰ "When you have netted your youthful novice, let him, at first, imagine he's the only one to enjoy your favours." (See Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, Book III, p.173). In Ovid, Cavalier poets found a Roman erotic tradition of celebrating female coyness. Much of Ovid's poetry argued that forbidden things bring greater pleasure, and that a female's worth is increased by the difficulties faced in attaining her. In Cavalier literature, this was translated into a contempt for women as embodiments of excess, and a sense that male fantasy is always superior to female reality. (See *The Pleasures of Restraint*, p. 255).

³¹ "I was undoing all she wore | and had she walked but one turn more | Eve in her first state had not been | more naked or more plainly seen." John Suckling often wrote of court ladies as the ethereal embodiment of spiritual ideals, and of women as spectacle and he a spectator. His poem, *Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking in Hampton Court Garden*, was written as a dialogue between Suckling and fellow Cavalier poet Thomas Carew, with Lucy Hay as the subject. (See Carol Rumens in *The Guardian*). Van Dyck is also mentioned in Suckling's poem *The Last Remains*, where he alludes to an affair between the artist and 'Mistress T.'; "there are in that, *certain je ne scay quoys*, which none but those that have studied it, can discover, and Sir Anthony shall hold his hand till Mr. H comes to Town." (See Thomas Clayton's essay in *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 23, No. 1/2, p.108-9).

"I beg to differ," Lucy chortled, as she placed her hand between Anthony's legs, feeling the prelude to hardness bulge up against his inner thigh. She ran her hands across Anthony's belt, unclasping the buckle and plunging her hand into his crotch. Anthony remained still, unperturbed, fixing his gaze on Henrietta.

"Your Majesty, may I request Anthony spare me a lesson in the fine arts? The king insists on this man's genius, and I wish to judge for myself how masterful he truly is."

Henrietta felt a blockage in her windpipe as if she were about to choke with jealousy. Anthony allowed Lucy to remove his penis from his breeches, and aided by a palmful of spit, she massaged the appendage as it filled with blood and grew turgid in her hand. Lucy knelt to one side of Anthony and waved for Henrietta to approach. The Queen nervously walked over and joined her favourite on the floor.

"Good," Lucy calmly whispered, "now show us how you care for the King of England."

Henrietta hesitated before slowly taking Anthony's cock from Lucy's hand, relaxing as she watched her fingers stroke up and down the contours of the rigid organ. A pearl of moisture had surfaced at the tip and the Queen carefully lent forward, licking it away with the point of her tongue. She pressed her lips around the top, and slid her tongue down the underside of the swollen member towards the base. She returned her tongue to her mouth, sticky with saliva, before sinking the head into her face, dipping and pulling her skull up and down in gentle oscillations. Anthony held onto his breathe, exhaling a deep, warming moan curdled with elation. Lucy pulled the Queen's hair back, brushing ringlets over her shoulder, and with a nurturing touch wiped away loose strings smeared into the web of sweat exuding from her forehead. Henrietta, with her mouth full of pulsating flesh, let out a faint squeak, as Lucy ran her hand under her dress, between the Queen's legs from behind, and caressed the damp cloth that separated their skin. Pulling the sheath to one side, she ran her index finger between the hot silky lips of Henrietta's vulva, tickling the tender crevices of her downy rut,³² before plunging three digits deep inside her. Stimulating the pliant flesh, she curled her fingers against the coarse inner wall of the Queen's cunt, running them back down to the ingress, and cleaving her in half. Heated with ecstasy, Henrietta voraciously thrust Anthony's cock to the back of her throat, gagging as his hardness pressed up against the soft of her gullet, prompting her eyes to wet with tears. Anthony tensed and gripped the arms of his throne, rocking his head back and adjusting to meet her motion. Enthralled by the pleasure she was inducing, Henrietta hastened her manoeuvres, pinioning Anthony's plump thighs to his chair, drawing in swift lengths with an urgency to bring the artisan to completion. She felt his legs quiver and she knew that the moment had come. She held him there in further restraint, fastened her lips around the bulbous head of his shaft with the grip of a vice, and cradled it with her tongue. Anthony exhaled a tortured groan as he filled the Queen's gorge with spurts of hot syrup. Beaded threads streamed from the corners of her mouth as she drained his cock, and rapturously swallowed mouthfuls of honey.³³ All the while, Lucy rubbed the Queen's clitoris with increasing ferocity, circling clockwise and gliding her fingers without resistance over the bulb, caressing the wet silken gloss emanating from the valley of Henrietta's gushing heat. She sobbed as bolts of electric pleasure zapped through her body, and the jaws of her sex pulsed with an intensity she had never felt before.

Anthony, ravished by the virile Henrietta, withdrew and slumped in his chair, turning pale.³⁴ Henrietta, with an immaculate radiance and still connected to Anthony by a crystalline rope of spit, leisurely massaged the warm streams of their consummation oozing down her cheeks. Lucy, stunned by the Queen's debauchery, gathered herself and prepared some fresh linens.

* * *

³² See Alexander Trocchi, *Helen and Desire*, p.13

³³ "In both Scriptural and classical proverbial lore, honey symbolises the moral dangers of unrestraint...Herrick uses the common Renaissance figure of honey as sexual pleasure in order to support a hedonistic dictum about erotic joys" (See *The Pleasures of Restraint*, p263-4).

³⁴ "And ravish'd thus, it came to pass" Robert Herrick, *Upon Julia's Fall*, (See *The Hesperides*, p.139).

EPILOGUE

It seems a long time ago now since we bathed in the recess of our yearning, in the dense smog where life was meant to begin. The curtains were drawn, and everything we owned had been laid out before us as a matter of fact. In this interval we went to the beach, the woods, the carpark, and other such places where skin was compromised and everything underfoot was at the mercy of sprites. We took pleasure in exhausting our resources, and when the filaments sustaining us could no longer make light of our situation, we held on until the last moment to leave in search of water.

Such a swell of contentment could only last in the pause between frames. When our eyes were closed again, our pockets had been emptied, and the shepherd was ushering us off his land. We took the bus back to a city we left unfinished, concluding our foray into nomadism. At this point in time, urgency had taken on a different meaning. Touch and non-touch were the only avenues of expression left to be reckoned with. I asked you to remind me you were still there, to remind me of the very notion of presence. I was looking for respite in being just one of many types of containers.

This was before the war, but after the collapse. You hesitated when the things we once cared about resurfaced, in the moments before I vanished into anachronism. Only a kleptomaniac has use for such relentlessly tormenting affairs of the past. It's the reason we no longer darn our clothes or drink cod liver oil in the morning. When good, bad and other such value judgments have for the better part dissipated, proximity is felt with greater tenacity than before; laughter sounds like mouths full of blood, the architecture fights back, and calories take on an evil character. These are but a few ways the body reacts to a cessation of critical faculties.³⁵

A lot of things really aren't about enjoyment. When they are it's wise to position oneself upstream and sip from the same runoff known to travellers as proclivity. Pleasure is about flirting with time, and to live with surety is the task of a life-time.³⁶ We rarely make records of our own miracles because we are too busy trying to do away with embarrassment. And we cannot seem to replace the symbols we are familiar with; the influence of a few good men, the notion of prescriptive evil, and other things eternal or constitutionally pragmatic. There is always another way to look at something. Only now can this be recalled, with uncharacteristic lucidity, after a century of sleep.

The English language is very spatial and the English identity is based on one of obsessive land ownership. *Are you also trying to build a prison?* I don't think so, but there is no better feeling than getting the thing everyone told you you should want. And what choice do we have when exchange is conflated with morality. Welcome to the traumatised world of inherited beliefs.

* * *

³⁵ See Tabitha Lasley, *Sea States*, p. 51

³⁶ Anne Carson said something similar about boredom. See *Plainwater* p.29.

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