

A London Fantasy

by Sharon Kivland

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It was Friday and I had been in Senate House Library all morning, embedded or inscribed into the Palaeography and Manuscripts Room, where one is obliged to think about reading and deciphering, about dates and origins as much as style and customs. For the palaeographer, philological knowledge of what is written when, where, and how enables the detection of forged documents, the identification of what is authentic, of its time, in its time. I had stood for a while in the area devoted to books about books, looking up and across from one gallery to the other in a perfectly square room whose antique furnishings belied the view into a more modern, sparsely furnished room beyond.

I walked down to the London Review bookshop, thinking about the image of books compared with the reading of them, and about an installation by Daniel Silver's work that I had yet to see, imagining what I would see as though I knew already what I would experience, a stupid thought. On the corner – I think, of Bury Street – there is a shop selling antiquities. I paused to take a hasty photograph, which seemed to include my own reflection. While walking I was thinking of other walks: pursuing an archaeological metaphor, one might say, deploying excavation, reconstruction, and decipherment (for one buries what one wishes to forget). There is one walk that I *might* devise, starting at Victoria Station, where Freud arrived on 6 June 1938, then travelling, as he remarked, under the protection of Athene, and following a route that imagines the city as a 'psychical entity with a similarly long, rich past, in which nothing that ever took shape has passed away', before eventually arriving at the Freud Museum in Maresfield Gardens, which contains both his remarkable collection of antiquities and his library. And there is the other walk I had made all summer—in writing, that is—following Freud's analysis of Wilhelm Jensen's novella *Gradiva*. Therein Freud examines the mental processes of the characters, through application of the psychoanalytic method, as though it was a case history. Sometimes he seems to forget they are fictitious, even as he draws the reader's attention to this.

Gradiva is the story of a young archeologist who buries his desires, but of course what is repressed always returns and one night he dreams of Pompeii; it is the time of the eruption of Vesuvius, and he sees his *Gradiva* there, the dream image of a woman depicted in a plaster-cast *bas-relief*, with a particular gait that fascinates him,

for which he searches in the streets. He is possessed by her '*lente festinans*'. The woman in his dream lies down as if to sleep, stretched along a broad step. She dies (it is a moment for which Jacques Derrida says all historians wish: to witness the coincidence of the event with the archiving of that event). She is like a beautiful statue and a veil of ashes covers her face and soon buries her. In 1907, Freud published his essay on *Gradya* and delusions and dreams. It is also a ghost story, unstable and distorted, its happy ending uncertain even when resolved.



In 1907 Freud wrote a postcard, dated 24 September, from Rome to his wife, Martha. He had received a card from Martha, in which she expressed her pleasure at his gift of a small cabinet, and he advised that a small mirror frame should also be arriving soon. He invited her to think of his joy in encountering—or re-encountering—after a long solitude, a beloved face. It was, however, as he remarked, a rather one-sided recognition, for the face to which he was referring was that of the *bas-relief* of the *Gradya*, a figure stepping lightly, high up on a wall in the Vatican. I continued walking, past the British Museum, taking the small back streets up to Grafton Way, to the site of a former cinema, an empty carved-out ground. I thought of the film of *Gradya* by Raymonde Carasco, a short work of steps and rhythm and stone, shot by Bruno Nuytten.

At *Dig* I was surprised to encounter a familiar beloved face, a figure standing alone to the left of the photograph below, and whose little original I think I have held in my hand. He (can one say he?) was taken out of the case in which he is housed in the Freud Museum, and tenderly passed to me. Perhaps it was simply someone like him, but visual memory-traces are the most difficult to disavow and the facts of memory tend to emerge rather slowly. I was delighted, despite or perhaps because of the strangeness of the meeting and the uncertainty of the recognition, by the sense of life in the face of death.



Sharon Kivland is an artist and writer. In a series of books and related works she has followed Sigmund Freud on holiday. Freud on Holiday volume IV. A Cavernous Defile. Part I is published in autumn 2013 by Cube Art Editions, Athens.