

**THREE LEAVES IN COLOUR**  
A Wander in the Footsteps of Virginia Maskell



A.V. Andersen

## II Time is like a Dream



Malcount Bay on the Celtic Sea: *The Reclining Lady* gives us the cold shoulder like a marooned mermaid.

While her early movies were largely made on the set of Shepperton Studios, *Suspect* (1960) was partly filmed on location in Virginia's actual living sphere in South Kensington (so that she could walk to work and avoid daring drives – better this way, as we will learn later) where noble terraced houses contrasted with sinister mews and a narrow walled lane lay picturesquely between. Even if *Suspect* is rather a B-movie in Black Series style, it is blessed with a *Hammer* cast and seasoned with Virginia's fresh talent. She starred in the main role as a scientist who sacrificially cared for her crippled companion (spoiler alert: they won't share a happy ending!). The lane where their last farewell took place is largely unchanged. Therefore you won't be surprised that when I followed Virginia's tracks one early morning, I suddenly believed to hear her footsteps echoing from the pavement; and I was intrigued by the stunning prospect of catching a glimpse of her wandering spectre – to quickly realize it was just a lonely street-sweeper who came out of the fog and stumbled over dustbin lids. It was a pretty disillusioning experience, I have to say (and you'll find that I don't lie since I took a few snaps of this desecrating moment). Look what we learned: reality and fantasy are not always congruent.



We have already learned from Virginia's narrations to the press that after graduating from drama school in 1955, she initially earned her living with minor roles on small stages throughout the country and technical studio support such as sorting film recordings; and she had to supplement her small income by serving Moloko Plus and Vellocet in the Corova Coffee Bar on the southern edge of Kensington Gardens at One Palace Gate – a simple but not disgracing work for a pretty girl; and even if we can imagine a long queue of green pretenders hanging around in the door, we know for sure that she resisted every temptation and proudly wore her cross around her swan neck until the day of an unforeseeable encounter with a highly charismatic personality beyond the northern edge of the park.



Since Young Ginny had been once instructed in Wain Hall Convent she was pretty firmly in the Catholic faith. And thus she should have been warned by her guardian angel not to cross the park to the opposite side where the Living Byron lodged just at the end of the Broad Walk, who was said to catch innocent girls and suck them out like Polidori's *Vampire*. But that poor angel was probably busy enough saving her almost every year from awkward situations on the threshold of death. In this regard, I dare to quote an old saying as a preview of Virginia's life: *Those whom the gods love they test*. Like Pandora, she was blessed with unique gifts from a cornucopia of nature; with outstanding beauty, manifold talents, both an alert sense and a high degree of sensibility. But unfortunately she didn't have the nerves or the strength or the will or all of the above to maintain her happiness permanently. And she will be the one who has to endure all the suffering when the ominous contents enclosed in her box are released carelessly by misleading mentors and callous companions to scatter them before her feet and to seed misfortune on her further life path.

Virginia's very first TV role in early '57 in one episode of *Robin Hood Adventures* was an embedded stage play of rather five minutes. She portrayed Eve posing like a living statue in unworldly transfiguration. When Mephisto was about to seduce her she was dressed in a radiant white gown; but as soon as she had tasted the forbidden fruit (highly effective under a thunder), she found herself wrapped in rags and lost in passionate grief. And as small as the role was, the impression was lasting. It was like a preview of all her acting trademarks, from gesture to verbal and facial expressions, from the very beginning as if they were already finished – which did not come from out of nowhere. Indeed, she was largely experienced in portraying biblical figures through plays on the well-renowned school stage of her convent. According to this upbringing and probably her own nature, her performance was absolutely credible and seemed to come from the bottom of her heart. All the more so given the fact that she had once *lived more on knees than on feet*, she had been eager to *become a nun or a nurse* for so many years of her youth, as she will emphasize again and again. But because she was not originally determined to become an actress, this very doubt would become one of her strongest inner conflicts – yet who will ever know what she really felt under so many masques?



But far beyond just superficial beauty and her noble posture, there was Virginia's angelic voice which the captivated audience was now blessed to hear for the very first time, when she responded on Mephisto's proposal – *Only the forbidden fruit has virtue. You shall know all about good and evil!* – with a gentle breath (*Hauch* sounds more appropriate in German): *Hhouw? Is this the truth?* And after tasting the tempting apple, Eve proclaims, still dressed in her pretty white gown: *The sweetness to my thirsty tongue is dear, now I can see both good and evil clear!* Then follows the coup de theatre. Eve appears from a cloud amidst thunder and lightning, suddenly dressed in rags; and she calls out passionately: *Oh Adam, forgive my fault – and yet my trust in God is from this hour: he will liberate us by his power!* (Oh my dear lil Eve. You sounded unworldly and so clearly in best Stratford English that the greatest of all British bards would certainly have kissed your toes; and even the Fritz could follow to become your devoted narrator. Who wouldn't have wanted to be your Adam? You were the living paradise! I too fell in love with first your voice, which enchanted like Orfeo's lyre and comforted even those who were condemned to the Hades – but one day no bard's ayre will save you from the darkness. Like Cecilia's organ was destroyed by a couple of brutes, your voice would be silenced in life and beyond!)

And it was indeed her adorable voice and her very talent to use it effectively, which pushed Virginia on the course (or curse) of an actress – and thus the tragedy of her life. She stated in an early article: *Among the most important things I learned, was voice production and what NOT to do with the hands.* Particularly her verbal abilities, even if certainly originating from her very own fervour, had been technically accomplished by her education both in the drama class of her Essex convent (until 1953) and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (*RADA*) in Bloomsbury (for which she had received a scholarship on recommendation of her convent teachers in regard to her acclaimed appearances early on the school stage as a charismatic very young actress – and they are well remembered until today).

However, while there are hardly any recordings of her stage works, thanks to this first appearance (recently unearthed and published by our friend Rod on his Tube channells) we have now a small impression of Virginia’s captivating presence and an overview of all her outstanding talents (respectively her holistic personality), elocution, expression und habitus, to be enchanted (not to say bewitched) at first sight. And if insignificant worms like me without any understanding of art were simply overwhelmed, *hhoww* would it even have touched a mature playwright, who thought he had seen all stages of the passion? He must have been intrigued (not to say *obsessed*) in the twinkling of an eye, eager to find the key to lure the most out of her to the highest heights and deepest depths. And once having tasted the infamous fruit of unbridled passion, she too would enjoy it – and why shouldn’t she? Our life time is limited and too precious to worry about what any moralists consider appropriate! As far as mentors are concerned, it’s worth mentioning that Virginia’s TV debut would also spin one of these threads of destiny over her entire life. She worked first with Don (yeah, one of those guys with a mischievous Balbo), who would direct many of her films, both for telly and the big screen, and juggle her talents about whole a further decade. And it’s him who will arrange her very last TV role in the *Prisoner’s* first episode to her visual (albeit probably not mental) best and to our delight – with a lasting impact, since her all too short cameo is certainly that key moment for many enthusiasts to become familiar with our ill-fated protagonist. Over and beyond, Don will also be the one (in the course of a chance encounter on the other side of the ocean long after her dismissal) who would bring Rod on her tracks in order to ignite a new culture of remembrance and tear her from oblivion.



Apart from her angelic voice, Virginia’s most effective personal tools were her magical eyes. There is a secret (some people said a fatal look) in them. Mostly described as *hazel*, they actually change their colour mysteriously from a forlorn, deep black to a radiant, hopeful green (and vice-versa). Virginia had a slight squint – her right eye is focused (supposedly expressing the mind) whereas the left one (reflecting the soul) flees from us (and perhaps from herself) as if looking into infinity, if not even to redemption. (Forgive your devoted narrator for speaking like an aesthete in Wilde’s footsteps and for perhaps reading too much in these your pearls – remember *The Tempest*? – but confronted with their radiance, I was encouraged to continue this story whenever I suffered a blockade. Your portrait on my windowsill (like Dorian’s never growing old) was something like essential – to feel your eyes amusedly twinkle when my lines are fair, but strike me like lightning for naughty indiscretions.) Well, let’s stay objective: Virginia was gifted with exceptional facial features to express in a second such a spectrum of emotions as her fellows could not in a minute, due to how she wrinkled her eyebrows and her high-frequency eye movements. And this aspect would one day acquire a special (not to say fatal) significance – to quote from one of her poems: *Only the eyes articulate / when often the word is blind.* Given all her natural advantages, our bold protagonist was destined to join the actor’s premier league. But neither acted she happily to acquire appropriate films nor was she inclined to dance at the fair.

Virginia was portrayed by colleagues, companions and the press as pleasant, gentle and shy – but woe, there may be exceptions: a kind of *ruthlessness* when she is driven by passion; and sometimes we can see a jealous look in her that *could kill you*. (But what the heck? We all are ambivalent and there are no heroes and no angels in the world!) Anyway, given her often fragile appearance, who wouldn't have been inclined to instantly hug the little lost sparrow that often looked as if it had just fallen from the nest?! Concerning her entanglement in her paradox profession, let me quote her *Doctor* colleague Leslie, who would mention her very pleasantly in his memories:

*She was a lovely girl, beautiful, intelligent and a super actress. But I always felt there was something delicate about her and I wondered how she would survive in the hard world of the film.*

And indeed, these doubts were consistent with her own statements as if she was eager to scatter hints in order to withdraw herself from the public eye and the spotlight (but she never dared to take the final step of tearing her webs of pain). She had never wished to be a movie actress to become a chess piece of the bosses, to act under the oppressive conditions on a film set and even less live according to the expectations of a public art and advertising icon. She wanted to become a *big theatre star* to express spontaneously her emotions on stage and fade out the annoying circumstances outside. Throughout her short life, she felt like a Prisoneress of her profession and sleepwalked through many wrong movies.



Our debutante was smiled at (if not even mocked) for being too restrained to cope with the professional challenges, rather naive, if not even *fey* (the nasty F-word that made her angry, since she knew it was true), an odd stranger alongside the system, not eager at all to get neither big roles nor much space in the illustrated sheets. Early notes around the *Island* premiere read accordingly: *The shy girl that doesn't want to be an actress. A rising star with an independent view of fame* – What the heck: The girl had her own mind? That seemed like a small sensation back then! Well, she was surely not the only actress in conflicts with the constraints of the studio system and its fat bosses (of whom she felt to be enslaved, if not to be their *whore*, as she would soon pronounce) – but her aversion went far deeper and her inner conflict: Virginia loved acting, yes, she even needed it urgently in order to liberate her feelings which *sometimes changed between misery and ecstasy within ten minutes* (to quote her future companion regarding her explosives for which she was allegedly famous; and given several incidents which we have to talk about later, this depiction is credible); but she hated the glittering circumstances at the Vanity Fair (most of her colleagues were keen on it), being exposed as a public object, urged to play or even live according to the images and clichés that others had painted of her and always fulfill their expectations (like once those of her mothers who had obliged her to become a good girl in a

religious institute in order to bridle her inner tomboy and to spoil her appetite of life; but I apologize for the fact that I am often tempted to lose myself in psychological stereotypes). And therefore we will hardly find her strutting down the red carpet at a social event, but walking on bare soles along Kensington High or riding bareback at the edge of nowhere. And we will learn about her regular bouts of post-work depression, how she was burned out by every single day of filming and would fall bedward when she came home (with the urgent need of a strong hold that the people close to her were not inclined to give; rather, they sucked her dry until the last drop) – hard to bear this turmoil for long without dramatic consequences (and indeed, when we hear about her obscure car crash during the filming of *Doctor in Love*, we can assume that this mishap was also causally linked to her emotional pressure on that nearly fatal winter morning; and further incidents would largely follow the same plot). She complained again and again about her alienation from showbiz, as if she wanted to force reactions (given her weakness in making decisions or necessary cuts herself; and we will later see her similarly trying to have her private problems solved by demanding delicate unveilings of a person close to her):

*It's so depressing, that I sometimes (?) think I'm in the wrong business. It's hard to conform.*

*I love acting, but I also want to be alive. Publicity is like a Prison (a future keyword for Pat?).*

*If you're not careful, you begin to live according to everyone's idea of how you ought to live.*

An outstanding, touching obituary will later get to the point:

*Virginia Maskell didn't really want to become a film star. She was the curious case of a girl (!) to fight against success where other (girls) fought furiously for it. She had talent and beauty, without that resolute urge to succeed which is a necessary part of star quality, or the willingness, to accept it.*

Talent versus will and nature – this could be her tragic leitmotif, at least on the professional level.



Hugh, another screenwriter whose pen will contribute significantly to the tragedy of Virginia's very last movie and, moreover, later demonstrates some knowledge about her *life and death*, summarizes her (professional) conflict in one iconic sentence (regarding *another star who has passed away*): *The lovely and gentle Virginia Maskell, who was torn between either becoming an actress or a nun.* This was her real misery since she had followed the more or less wise advices of her teacherous nuns who had praised away their favourite daughter, given her outstanding vocal capabilities, to continue her studies in the actor's school instead of joining their convent; and she would never be happy with this half-hearted decision that others had made, just like everything else in her life. And thus she would only be able, instead of praising the holy virgin and caring for the less fortunate (or coming out of her corsets by riding steeds over Ossian's cliffs and hugging tree trunks in the wilderness) to articulate her feelings only artificially. She

wore an iron masque for the rest of her life – after her free will was controlled, her feelings entombed and her nature bridled by suffering from the whimsical upbringing in that spiritual orphanage.

But what she feared the most was the exposure of her privacy (so that your devoted narrator has to apologize for his indiscretions; but enforced speechlessness must be overcome, by hook or by crook)! She stated early and always again: *I will NOT discuss my personal life. This is the way I'm going to begin. Then if ever I got to the top, people cannot say I was glad of publicity when I started.* She would never get to the top (apart from ascending a mound at the end of her life) but into the valley of silence and tears. Later we will read in another long obituary, full of sympathy and grief: *Virginia Maskell was a girl cocooned in shyness. A personal question frightened her more than a pistol shot* – and there will be many pistols in her life that need to be mentioned, sometimes put to cowards' heads, but finally, she would be the one between a couple of ominous opponents who is hit by the bullet. Virginia was eager to hide her private life from the very beginning, surely due to her genuine shyness and disturbing childhood experiences. But, but... She will soon be urged to be discreet in order to conceal frivolous aspects of Cabal and Love behind the glittering curtain, given the fact that she herself would soon meet her Mephisto and learn *all about good and evil!*

Oh, what a balancing act she had to fulfill all through her (seemingly) radiant years, and how she will be torn between her incompatible opposites (and ignorant opponents): a collision of burning passion, addiction for convention and longing for permanence, ignited by a couple of questionable confidants who were eager to determine her life. And therefore it was destined to explode one day in a big bang!

Virginia's second colour movie was *DOCTOR IN LOVE*, filmed largely on set of the Pinewood Studios around the turn of the year 1959/60 while her ark of life was bobbing through a wild tempest of love and despair with a couple of lightning strikes immediately before and during the final stages of filming which therefore almost couldn't begin (due to domestic quarrels in her hearty partnership which even led to a clinic stay) and almost ended fatally (with an accident on her way to the studios). Thus it's a little miracle that the audience didn't notice much of her misery (apart from minor press articles about *the delay of the film release due to the accident of Mrs. Maskell* sparingly with details – well, those were the quiet days before the internet proudly announced indiscretions in real time). And especially her private entanglements remained her best kept secret as far as the public was concerned; yet they would be carried on the Pinewood backstage in the aftermath of her car accident, probably to the amazement of at least some of her colleagues. But I always risk losing myself in half-boiled previews without having revealed the tragicomic events that were lurking behind the glittering curtain. So let's first visit the shining set before we illuminate the sinister backstage.



Virginia played among a well-known cast, such as James Robertson, specialized in grumbling patriarchs, and two blonde beauties, Carole and Liz. The latter was often seen in comedies and said to be a sympathetic person. A lesser-known fact is that particularly Carole and Virginia, regardless their different vitae and appearance, shared some memories together. They were brought up in and around Chelmsford, albeit in very different spheres (one as a well-protected girl, the other was a runaway), and both strove for a career in showbiz at an early age – which should end in decay, disillusion and a final catastrophe under strikingly similar circumstances, oh my! Anyway, we may assume that at this time of their heyday they had a lot to talk about and perhaps became friends (even if admittedly there is a lack of evidence for this. But we may shed light on this episode at an appropriate point later) – regardless of their icy stares they gave each other frequently on screen (although they didn't even play the antagonists; and perhaps I just tend to blow up screenshots until my eyes hurt and always rack my brains over private entanglements beyond the stage that simply don't exist).

The actual doctor in love was played by Michael, albeit not in my perception, as to me he is more of a random guy with the charisma of half an empty cup; and in fact he was just ersatz coffee for his more popular fellow Dirk who usually (and increasingly reluctantly) played the main role of the series.

But above all there was our esteemed Leslie who was both a gent and a scoundrel, in private and on screen. I really like this guy especially because of his compassionate narrations about Virginia regarding both her professional doubts and intimate aspects of her private life. One day he visited Virginia at home and found her in an indoor dovecote feeding birds by hand (a delightful scene from his biography *Hello!*) but at the same time in an *awkward situation* (probably related to her strange entanglement in a *complicated ménage-à-trois*), as he revealed in his and Liz' joint commentary to the *Rank Collection Doctor* edition, recorded some years before his demise – the latter incidentally happened when I was just beginning to write; and even if he was blessed with biblical age after a long, fulfilled life with many ups and downs, he wasn't spared either gruesome deaths of some people close to him very similar to that of our heroine. Oh, these celebs are rarely blessed like the shepherds!



*Doctor in Love*, let us be honest, is certainly not an art house film; it is just another episode (at least the best rated one) of the slapstick comedy *Doctor* series, which was very popular both in Britain and also on the continent – and my first encounter with Virginia actually took place in the film when it was broadcast again on German television in the early eighties (together with many episodes of *Carry On*). The *Doctor* was also the first of her movies to be released on video tapes – oh what a luck, since both *Island* and *Interlude* had to wait, oddly and sadly enough, two further decades to be available on DVD.

(And you will smile or even be annoyed about that it is still one of my favourite films – although I am also in good company since the *Doctor* remains one of your best-known works until today thanks to many telly repetitions – because of my pleasant memory of how we met again, even if back then only visually pleased since you were poorly dubbed; and I had to wait about a further decade for a new *Prisoner's* edition in the early '90s to be finally bewitched by your very own angelic voice).

The *Doctor* plot is quickly told: *Nicola*, a young but conscientious doctress, struggles in her private life (while asserting herself professionally among the guys who are up to mischief in every private field largely at the expense of patient welfare) with the caprioles of her untrustworthy beau in a usual interplay of Love and Cabal to – spoiler alert! – reconcile with him at the end. But it is well known that the prettiest woman in the surgery (even if mostly the blonde nurse) always gets the doctor.

Of course everyone is eager (especially the male patients) to be treated by our both charming and reliable lady doctor much in contrast to both her chubby female colleague (who is deeply grumbling *the next pleasee*, to better abstain from looking at her if you don't want to lose your taste) and her largely careless male colleagues (to better abstain to be grabbed by them if you don't want to lose your health), all the better since *Nicola* abstains from making prescriptions while holding the ciggie. To be honest, in more private situations she doesn't refrain either from those stinky cancer-sticks; and so it's pitiful to see her smoking in some of the prettiest scenes, such as when she stands between her two beaus (and a third guy with a gun in the background for rather a threatening vibe and for good reasons) in a tasteful maroon gown while the vision is sadly blurred by dense smoke – perhaps in order to advertise again *Abdulla Virginia* cigarettes. However, what may look funny (to obey the instructions of dubious quackery) should better stay on screen. Beware to be actually treated by such naughty scoundrels! And also by a grumpy old wise man, embodied in their boss, played by James Robertson, who doesn't accept an argument neither from his staff nor the patients – this funny little strip is actually a lesson for the greatest wisdom of them all: Never consult a quack and you will live longer!



As for the density of the plot, the first half of the film is rather hard to bear with nothing but slapstick of bad taste and repetitive jokes which are interchangeable between the episodes and sloppily played by a few male comedians (who usually stayed among themselves) and many changing lascivious ladies. Then comes Virginia and the film gets suddenly a boost and unexpected depth – just with her surprising appearance not before half time the plot instantly wins dignity through her intriguing charisma which now completely outshines both the cast and plot. And the latter even escalates into a small drama – as we have already seen it on (or off the coast of) her *Virgin Island* – when she cares for a sick little boy (who will soon recover, of course), which incidentally corresponds to the theories of a certain playwright who will soon state that *in every woman there is a secret nurse and a nesting hen*. Well, those were the times when the male audience had great expectations of female duties!

But Virginia demonstrated greater acting skills beyond her charm, ignited an emotional firework of more expressions in a single sequence than all her colleagues throughout the entire film (to sum up that she was again overcast in such a shallow comedy) – to wonder who the title hero(ine) was, considering that her tame counterpart (whose name I can't remember) left so little impression. The *Doctor(ess) in Love* is particularly interesting for her versatility which she could hardly play out in any of her other films. She showed a wide range of feelings in a rapid change from exuberant to depressed, from gentle and compassionate to jealous and furious (always justified in regard to the mischief of her gallant, the threat of blonde poisons and other disasters). And albeit I don't really like to confuse

fiction and fact, Virginia's spheres on and off stage often seemed to merge, given her surprising and unbridled amplitude of feelings. So I have to think about who and what she really saw in her counterparts and those moments of filming, especially in Cabal scenes (and there are plenty of them!)? Did she perhaps reflect on recent real life episodes in order to transfer her current mood, even her explosives on the tricky height of her relationship, from the bottom of her home to the spotlight of the stage? This is all the more likely given the fact that her obscure companion was watching her performance from the backstage at times. And because of this strange kind of, let us call it method acting, she became perhaps that *super actress* that Leslie later describes. Therefore, when we watch the *Doctor in Love* (and *Despair*) against Virginia's biographical background, it's tempting to see it as a kind of kaleidoscope of her contemporary everyday-life. There may be many common scenes found in any drama piece, but the plot of the *Doctor* fitted perfectly with her very own tragicomic passion so that she could share (not to say reveal or even relieve) all the shades of her private quarrels between half-hearted separations and fervent reunions with the audience, although as usual only artificially as through a looking-glass. And as for the merging of the two sides of the pane (or the pain), there are many interesting aspects worth considering. Here's just a small selection:



What is particularly striking is her sudden change of mood from compassion to jealousy, the latter so razor-sharp, that I wouldn't dare to become her enemy – especially not a female one, as she can show her iciest glance against her opponents, even though we will later learn from her real life that some scoundrels should also be careful not to upset her in order to avoid ending up as geldings (forgive my joke, since you little rascal know that I just quote from the sportive lines of such a certain coward). By the way, in the key scene mentioned above with Virginia between her two beaus (the dreary Michael and the sparkling Leslie), we see a guy in the background just cleaning a gun to be tempted to assume that our obscure writer could have borrowed some inspirations from it, or basically from her films in order to embed them in their joint biography – even if it's rather unlikely that he watched Virginia's movies as frequently as I do and even less blew up screenshots, since he was not really keen on any of her screen works or of any actress either (as we know from his own pen that he was little convinced of their mental capabilities); and indeed, he told some tall tales where pistols in female fists have a certain meaning and which were allegedly *put to his head* – certainly also given the fact that he hesitated to face a proper duel with obscure pretenders to clear the situation of all of them involved.



In *Doctress in Love* we also learn that Virginia could dance; and she danced enchantingly!

It was a freestyle Jive, Boogie Woogie or something like that, but since I am not a dancing queen, I better abstain from technical analyses. Certainly there is no other similarly swinging scene in any of her films, since she largely played restrained and used to portray emotions with facial expressions and vocal means rather than with full physical effort. While she exaggerates to be close with her boyfriend's buddy – played by Leslie; and he looked indeed so much more fitting than the other toff whose name I've just forgotten – to make the latter jealous, she has actually only eyes for her true love (not to say she risks them to be smacked). Yeah, that's one of those masques aka female skills to disguise their feelings, at least according to a certain poet! And thus this is one of those scenes where I have to wonder if her obscure companion isn't watching her performance from the backstage right now (as we know for sure that he sat there a fortnight long holding her ice-cold little hand during breaks in filming after her accident) and if she isn't looking to him as well with that expression of insatiable longing. Our heroine really wasn't a promiscuous diva but a faithful soul until self-sacrifice!

In another charming sequence structured like a metamorphosis we follow our heroine as she gradually appears more casually dressed through increasingly intimate situations from her closed door (standing in her street clothes) to her bedroom (as reclining in a hoot nightgown); and we experience her more or less successful attempts to reject a rather intrusive beau with her lovely expressions and honey sweet words (*fiiiine / good niight*) – similarly sounding like that whispered *hhouw* of our sweet little Eve. And whereas that random toff on screen will later get the lot, I have to ponder about another cross-reference to Virginia's real life, when one day a certain green guy will not be similarly lucky to be treated just as gently but will get the door slammed into his face and be thrown onto the pavement in front of Mephisto's house – and, that's the height, to both the latter's amusement and (despite the proof of her loyalty to him) his confirmation of his general prejudice about the *ruthlessness of women*.



The *Doctor* is also worth a radio play. We listen to Virginia's voice in whole her magical breadth which largely sounds gentle, not to say fragile, although sometimes suddenly alternating with a single angry scream or a pretty dirty laughter – for which she was allegedly notorious in real life, contrasting with her usually rather reserved appearance. Indeed, she was eager to loosen the corset of determined role models and so called appropriate (especially gender-related) manners. Her versatility allowed her to switch between the moderate lady and the unbridled street urchin in the twinkling of an eye (or in the intonation of a single phrase). So who could ever say which masque was closer to her essence? Virginia's physical ambivalence is particularly striking in *Doctor in Love*, and can confuse the viewer since she often appears *feminine from the front and boyish from behind* – to confirm her companion's observations regarding her ever-changing being that eludes every cliché.



Undoubtedly feminine are plenty of bedroom scenes to the delight of the entire male audience (and certainly the female too)! More beautiful sequences can hardly be found in any of her other films, as she often wears (and sometimes undresses) adorable nightgowns, up to similar still-lives in her last film *Interlude* (that seem to be modelled after the doctress in nightdress). The bedroom scenes in both her films are like sacred icons, pure homages to Virginia's heavenly beauty – and all the more

seductive here as she presents us her swan neck that every leech would be enchanted by (and which is all the crispier without her cross, which she wore until shortly before its desecration by Mephisto).



Forgive your receptive narrator (who isn't able to enjoy not even a light comedy, given the real background with plenty of worries and current conflicts) for always projecting a subtle premonition into many harmless scenes – yet I am in good company since Leslie and some other fellows also thought they saw a certain expression of *delicacy* or *fatalism* in Virginia's eyes, if not even whole her personality, an ominous drive as if she were always performing *Les Preludes* to her inevitable fate. And thus I can only see real drama been summoned when she is stirred up by the nightly raid of an obscure man in her chamber (who turns out to be not a villain but a reliable doctor. The audience can calm down) so that everyone rushes to surround the damsell in beddress, and her fiancé cuddles his little wet sparrow – isn't it much the same situation of her last eve in Dolphin Yard just some months before when fierce folks were up to mischief there and transported her to the clinic? Or even further beyond, doesn't it anticipate a no less dramatic event many years later in her Parsonage's attic)?!



And when we later watch the protagonist struggling with her pretty companion during their Cabal and leaving their shared apartment, respectively their partnership – which, by the way, seems to me a little too dramatic in such a shallow strip, and this time only, forgive my nasty words, she exaggerates – surprisingly, her gentle voice suddenly rises to (what I believe) a thundering scream beyond her usual restraint, like the discharge of explosives which are dammed in her depths, with really an echo through the gloomy cinema hall (or perhaps just noticeable in my stomach). Anyway, in this very moment I have no doubt about Virginia's real addressee who is actually lurking outside the bright set on the backstage. The sequence ends with Virginia standing alone in the hallway, surrounded just by suitcases, and looking to us from the door (if not *slamming it in someone's face* or *banging with the fists on the pane (or the pain)* since she had regained her composure) with a mournful, fleeting glance before her departure. Nevertheless, she leaves us behind with a really bad vibe. Since that is how it might actually look like if she loses her little haven to find herself abandoned in a dusty car park of any institution, whether on Highgate or in Hellsbury Vale, dumped by men like *too heavy luggage*.



Getting out of this hall of rage (on the set of the Pinewood studios where all interiors were filmed), we'll find the *Doctor's* house (albeit only in a couple of rare outdoor scenes) located in a Georgian streetscape in Beaconsfield, Bucks, that looks similar to the Risboro Parade with the *Cross and Bones* Surgery in the midst, that very place where one day our conscientious doctress has to swap her doctor's dress with the patient's wing shirt – unfortunately not just for the amusement of the spoiled audience but in bitter seriousness, on her odyssey through the institutions thanks to obscure quackery.

In the very last sequence, our poor protagonist arrives at a clinic ward since she is, despite their recent separation, still worried about her darling who supposedly has to undergo a surgery himself. And thus we watch her running like an agitated chicken through gloomy galleries in search of her lost love to collide with a fierce looking warder who is pushing a stretcher covered with a shroud. Oh dear! Doesn't she look like a ghostly apparition marooned in a maroon gown against the bitter cold white background? I can hardly bear this scene and yet I have to face it – as an ominous premonition beyond place and time. And so I imagine her looking at her own shroud in the same way in Manderley's pathology on a certain gruesome morning on the 25th of January, 1968.

Despite this waving threat, let's close the chapter with a cheerful spoiler: We finally learn that the scoundrel is fine! There will be a happy ending and many kisses in front of the doors to the operation theatre. The victim of quack's art on the stretcher turns out to be the chief physician who has jumped of the hook of death (although that would be rather unlikely considering his incompetent buddies who just embowelled him). In reality, not everyone is blessed to escape medical malpractice, unfortunately!

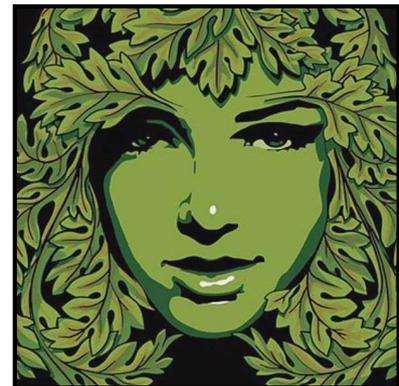


Virginia, barely 24, played so absolutely believable mature and sophisticated characters who were ten years older than herself. She was certainly pensive (both from her very own depths and because of her upbringing by those wise old nuns) but also currently experienced through Cabal and Love in her complicated relationship of many ups and downs to be inspired by it (more or less intentionally) to cover the entire spectrum of *the Doctress in Love (and Despair)*.

*Nicola* is not only professionally conscientious but certainly in her mid-thirties – a big contrast to that carefree mermaid who was messing about in boats on her *Virgin Island* barely two years ago and has grown into a serious young lady. And since her brilliant performance – a cornucopia of sensations – certainly adopts episodes from her very own domestic tempest in her passionate and tense partnership off stage, I understand the *Doctor* (more than all her others films apart from *Interlude*) as the visualization of Mephisto's and his Muse's shared memories, all the more against the background that we will one day get to know every single detail of her private passion from the confessions of her karmic companion (to whom she will remain sworn in iron loyalty until her last breath), even if revealed a decade after she has passed away prematurely due to the long-lasting impacts and her desperate struggles in search of their lost *time that was just like a dream*. While *Interlude* will become the retrospect of an entire decade, *Doctor in Love* is something like the daily mirror of Virginia's current real life.



From early '58 onwards Virginia went through an exciting life phase, both driven by professional challenges and private entanglements (which she would hardly have suspected in her carefree days on the Virgin Islands). She was always on the move as if she were living in a road movie. While she loved Downtown's hustle and bustle, roamed through street markets and secretly hung out (regardless of her increasing fame) in small cinemas as just an unknown woman with roaring laughter about old comedies like Stan and Ollie, she escaped from the professional pressure into the tranquil countryside, both nearby in Sussex (where her father's family lived) and far away in Devonshire (on the grange of a peasant poet). She changed her flats in London almost every year, moved restlessly between Earls Court (what her future companion will call the place that is actually the Abingdon and Scarsdale ward), Pimlico (for rather a short interlude) and allegedly Chelsea (according unverified sources), but mostly in Kensington's heart, initially as a lodger at her friends, but later, with increasing fame and income on the way to the premier league, she will buy a studio house as her first permanent accommodation for several years. During a stressful marathon of film work for both cinema and television and stage tours throughout the country, she lodged in little hotels and even in cars somewhere on the road, whether alone or in a cackling flock of chickens – and sometimes there was a rooster too (who was besides a popular playwright) more or less selflessly serving as their chauffeur. And when one day they were caught barely dressed at a rest area somewhere in the outback (just putting on their costumes for the next performance, what else? *Honi soit qui mal y pense!*) by an East Anglian constable, the driver pretended whole the bunch as his daughters – one of them actual was; and since the latter and Virginia were almost in the same age, they became friends. Oh those were light-hearted times! Although not always unclouded. When the playwright took her with him as light luggage to the estate of his decent patron from a noble Yorkshire clan, the novice was perhaps still to unimportant to be invited into their stately home. Bunnygrove House, even if boasting with Adam's prettiest ceilings, was also full of empathetic emptiness. But our heroine endured it bravely, all the more (as we know her as such a natural being) she made the best of the situation by building her tent under a bold cedar of Lebanon; and the inclined reader will guess that His Lordship wasn't amused about the strange lodger in his pretty park. Therefore she had to move to the local pub (a treatment that reminds me of a certain scene in one of my favourite children's films, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. If you know, you know). Despite this unpromising beginning, Virginia would later become close friends with Lavinia, one of the most illustrious family descendants; and Lord Bunnygrove himself will act as editor of Virginia's first biography (although only a decade after our heroine has passed away), ironically, isn't it?! However, this is how the playwright introduced his favourite in his noble circles (whose attention he was always very keen on, just like every artist); and from now on the Greene Girl, regardless of her common roots, would also meow around with all these weird Aristocrats.

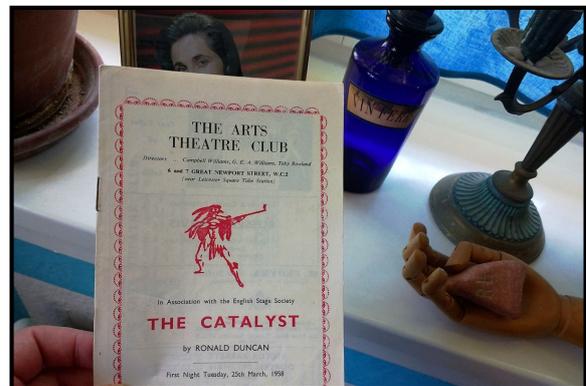


Virginia was also fond to the Greene Island, for good reasons about which we can only speculate, whether because of the Catholic cause (although we don't know if she was a strong believer, we can hardly doubt it, given her devotion to her beloved convent), the beautiful nature or the boldness of its people; or perhaps in admiration of great literature, since we can imagine that she was intrigued by the romantic idea of how the brave Lilliputians asserted themselves against Gulliver's hubris. Last but not least in the course of her many stage tours throughout Ireland, her life line will intersect with a handful of Greene Men quite effectively, escalating in a couple of black eyes due to the jealousy of her future companion. While he will later mention some strange events only seasoned with ashamed elisions to provoke our ever-growing grudge – but I won't annoy you with retelling his inglorious confessions in every awkward detail – we may find in press articles a bit of hidden truth and some satisfaction.



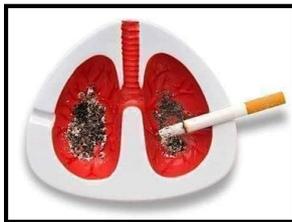
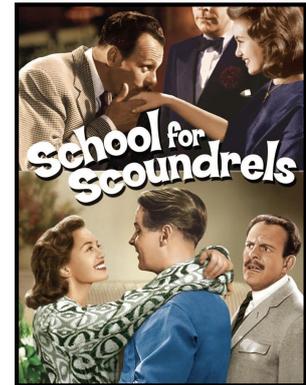
When she didn't film in piecemeal, Virginia relaxed in Heartland. Her host was a busy person who considered, apart from writing, farming and horse-breeding, *sipping wine of all colours* (regardless whether red, blonde or brown, and all the more tasty together) as his path to happiness and didn't bother to confess for one or none of his colourful vessels (and even if he was always thirsty, he was more of a gourmet than of a drunkard). But let's be sober: first of all he was one of the best-renowned contemporary playwrights – and therefore in awe of his works I have to remain objective (which is sadly my least virtue) in order not to fall into worshipping him (unlike our poor protagonist); but thanks to my pen pal Rod (who is a bit more of a moralist and detests him heartily) I am usually

helped back onto the right path). Our bold bard called himself *the New Byron* probably in reference to his corresponding Pilgrimage through the ups and downs of life against all conventions. Over and beyond, he claimed to be a rejected pretender of the Wittelsbachs and therefore related with Ludwig of Bavaria (aka the Fairytale King) – and indeed he was of German descent and even born in South Africa a quarter of a century before young Ginny would escape there the Huns (to be tempted to assume that they had much stuff to talk about, if not even to see in it a foreshadowing of their shared tragedy). And so it was this outstanding man – the attentive reader will have already guessed it – who would become Virginia's companion just some months after her return from her Creole adventures. They had first met in the course of a theatrical rehearsal in her basement chamber in January '58 for his upcoming play, called *The Catalyst*, an initial encounter that was highly effective, even if the beginning wasn't really promising since he had entered her castle like an elephant by stumbling over dustbin lids directly at her feet. Yeah, that was he, a Charming Brute! It was a pretty bumpy start (and not the last strange incident in a chain of quirky scenes drawn by life and his eager pen) so our heroine should have been warned. But who could escape his Herculean charisma? And his deep, dark eyes like those of a sad Panda (if not even a bold pirate) Virginia fell instantly in love with. Vice-versa, he was intrigued by her angelic voice and her magical performance, since *every intonation, every movement she made carelessly was precisely as he had imagined when he had written the part – he felt he had written her*. And from this moment on he called her name with awe: *Virginia, Virginia!*



After he had *Raped Lucretia* together with his bosom friend Ben almost two decades ago – we will meet a certain Kathleen later again resting on her death bed like the Sleeping Beauty in her acclaimed main role – and after he had fallen into a bit of decline, he had recently written *The Catalyst* for something like a daring restart. The play was so xtremely immoral (at least according to the perception of the decent contemporaries who were upset by its *explicit portrayal of adultery and Sapphic lust in a bizarre ménage-à-trois*), that it was banned immediately from the Lord Chief Justice or the Bishop of Canterbury or both and banished from the big stage to the smaller one in the Arts Theatre Club that (despite this and other scandalous performances) still exists today in Soho's very heart. The hearty chamber play premiered at the end of March – and the reader will guess who played the main role of the pretty young mistress who feels attracted to both the male lecher and his (let us call it) tolerant wife (who both also act as surrogate parents to her), even if only for a few performances until the boos of the Puritans drowned out her gentle voice (at least on stage). A whimsical role for a novice actress who has just been released from her convent, and hardly for the benefit of her reputation, not true? But I may, like her audience, tend to diffuse fact and fiction from time to time.

As for merging the spheres, the playwright's plot was inspired if not completely copied from his current real life with Mary, his long suffering wife, and Antonia, his last in a long line of mistresses, who had just dumped him, like all her predecessors before, when sooner or later they had enough of their little Byron for the poor. By the way, the reader who is familiar with Virginia's films will certainly see another synchronicity (if not causality): *Antonia* will also be the name of Virginia's last character on screen when she plays the suffering wife in *Interlude*. Oh strange threads of destiny! Interestingly, the Arts Theatre's emblem, a red fencer, was shaped after the performance of a famous Victorian actor in his iconic role as Mephisto (who even threw lightning with the help of a battery under his costume. Wow!). And one day after Covid, I found in the lesser-known museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in London's East End amidst a vast collection of medical vessels – I love these colourful jars because of their transparency, although not their content (and I could well imagine that you agree with me in retrospect) – an old allegory of a disease (if not rather the influence of quackery and poisoned prescriptions), appropriately subtitled: *If only we had never met him!*



Our heroine's commitment also served to promote cigarettes of the brand *Abdulla Virginia*, which were sold in the theatre lounge, even if with the hint *please not to smoke them in the audience*. But we may guess that the hall lay in a thick miasma of cigarette smoke how we didn't see London after 1952, while the male audience (probably mainly vicars of the CoE, keen on a moral lesson, and supporters of a hospital near Hellsbury, Bucks), clicked their tongues in the face of what was going on up there on the stage

– That's a big contrast to Virginia's own expectations of her professional future, huh?! Our poor reluctant protagonist, who has just expressed her wishes *to become a big, big stage star* and to play Will's works at Stratford, found herself now in Soho's darkest corner in a notorious play much against her own taste. And even worse, she would stick on stage with works of that overwhelming playwright for further years instead of looking for more appropriate challenges in good time, and thus forgive her talents and her career in iron loyalty (as if she was put on a leash like Lady Lamb by Old Byron). Last but not least let us remember her first TV appearance in a passion play of *Robin Hood's Adventures* exactly one year before: An enchanting little Eve was seduced by Mephisto who whispered her with sneaky voice to follow in his footsteps. Indeed, time had come *to learn all about good and evil*.

What is certain is that at the beginning of their lessons that Mephisto gave to his receptive Muse, she *was so disgusted* to be part of this trio while the audience hissed at them that she advised him to see her psychiatrist immediately so that he would become a better person both on stage and at home:

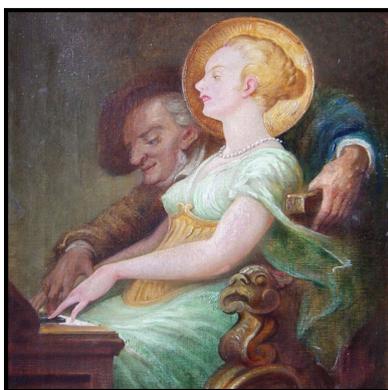
*He might straighten you out so that you can one day write something to help people and not destroy them, as this play does.* And even if Mephisto wasn't really keen on it, he still consulted him – and became addicted to his latest buddy. Her well-intentioned recommendation wasn't such a good idea! On the contrary, she will be soon entangled in their spiderweb of pain, influenced by quackery to increase her problems instead of solving them – that's of course the usual procedure how to stuff geese – and abstain in time from swallowing their deceptive babble and poisoned prescriptions. Mephisto, Muse and Mary would even share séances together with the quack; and I would have liked to be a little mouse to hark what that suggestive egg-head whispered at them. And sooner or later, more or less causally, we will find Virginia stoned and gagged on the doctor's advice at Mephisto's behest – in the best old tradition how to get rid of annoying women. And maybe that's how it began:

*Her Way to the Tomb* – the title of another of Mephisto's plays in which his Muse would appear.

Indeed, over the years, further works will follow that Muse and Mephisto will share, and two of his plays that are inspired by their partnership are explicitly dedicated to her. While *The Urchin* would never be performed, the second one will premiere in October '60 and cause another riot and even bruised eyes (both of the bard and shortly before, even if not necessarily causal, of our poor protagonist): *Abelard and Heloise* is the story of forbidden lovers – our playwright seemed to have been fond of key novels! – written by reality. The suffering couple actually lived centuries ago, but Mephisto's plot, just like his *Catalyst*, could have well been settled in London of the '50s and sounds partly familiar: An old wise teacher who is said to have become *the greatest master of them all* (umm...), and his beautiful young student who *desires to acquire knowledge of any kind*, fall in passionate love (or lust) to only acquire public rejection and personal grief. At the end, he will be castrated and she will become a nun. Look, fact and fiction are not always congruent – unfortunately.



Do you remember the bar at One Palace Gate where Virginia served coffee for about a year or two while she played minor roles on small stages after her studies? At that time it was the only cafe on the street and its successor had remained in the same hand since the early '70s for almost five decades. But after Covid it changed its name several times; and on a recent visit on location while I was writing this part of my manuscript, the cafe had just closed, what a pity. Interestingly, it is also the point where the Broad Walk begins that leads through the park to Orme Gate just opposite of Kensington Gardens – yeah, it's the outlook to New Byron's residence! In this regard, let's switch back in time to 1958: Our novice couldn't yet know (and apparently nobody dared to tell her) the unvarnished truth about that mysterious old man with melancholic eyes who was actually eager to follow *Rake's Progress* in Hogarth's footsteps with such ruthlessness that the good girls in her convent would have only whispered with shudder. Given his unbridled lifestyle, he reminded of another notorious artist, the Saxon composer and wannabe philosopher Tricky Dick, a selfish chauvinist who used to suck out everyone, first of all King Ludwig, for the benefit of his works (which I hate heartily, regardless that I am half a Hun). And both scoundrels also shared their habit of nesting in the dwellings of their noble patrons – Mephisto had chosen one of Lord Bunnygrove's cottages as his cozy burrow in London.



One Orme Mews. Following *the Catalyst's* premiere, a launch party was given. Our heroine, agitated by the uproar in the audience during which she had received both plenty of boos and lustful tongue clicks, was suddenly struck down by a severe breakdown; and even if this was known to be a debutante's symptom, Virginia's eruption was allegedly extraordinary, according to Mephisto's memories, like a waterfall of tears almost flushing to the Celtic Sea. And guess what happened next: Instead of her father and uncle (who had accompanied her) giving her escort back to her basement just a mile afar, they let that scoundrel drive and be alone with her (and his true intentions which he won't hide from the readers) just on their second eve in her tiny chamber. But another sudden mood

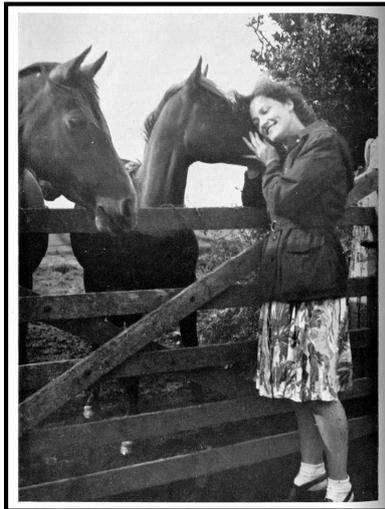
change like the low tide of the Bristol Channel prevented his almost secure raid as she fell instantly onto her bed into a narcoleptic trance for the next 12 hours – it's the first time here in London (after we have found her already on a beach due to her struggle with the forces of nature) that we see her in this whimsical condition and surely not the last time – and thus Mephisto had to be content with keeping a fatherly watch at the bed edge of his slowly melting icicle. Well, what may look like a

soothing still-life, seems to me rather afflicted with a bad vibe of a vague menace (and if I may disturb his sportive narrative through boring analyses, I can only see in it another of his parables to even doubt if the sequence actually happened here and now, or if he wanted to tell us about a certain incident almost exactly 10 years later on a grizzly January night). However, what is secure is that this strange togetherness didn't fulfill his fondest wishes (as we know from his later confessions that he was overcome by a burning desire from the very first sight here in her chamber two months before and that since then he only aimed *to make her*). However, by walking down the Broad Walk she had crossed the Rubicon: Once she had opened the door in a gloomy lane on the wrong side of Kensington Gardens as the Young Miss Maskell, she emerged as *Simon Orme*, Mephisto's most faithful disciple.

But happy is the rake: a new opportunity should soon come! Following the short-living play on the Arts' stage, Virginia was obliged by her bosses to start a tour to promote *Virgin Island* (which wouldn't be released before October, almost a year after filming, so that our poor protagonist had to fall for the *Catalyst* due to this delay; and the rest is history). And both in view of her role as the lively young *Tina* and the fact that she herself was already linked with the image of naturalness, a photo series on horseback was intended to be published in a couple of cheesecake magazines (which are today hard-to-get-stuff, but we are still blessed to find rare little auction treasures from time to time). As we learned, Mephisto was a busy person with many skills – and breeding horses was the greatest of his passions (also in his own perception and probably justified). Indeed, his poem *The Horse* is today his most quoted work, and at that time his fine little stud of fury Arab stallions was so famous even abroad that he would be one day visited by Hollywood star Mitch who was eager to purchase a steed. It was early in the '70s when the latter was filming *Ryan's Daughter* (a pretty popular movie about a complicated ménage-à-trois on the other side of the Irish Sea) so that he set off from Ireland to Devon. We don't know if Mitch ever asked (or learned) about Mephisto's ill-fated Muse. But we may assume he probably didn't, since due their discretion (and to the ostracism by obscure others) Virginia had fallen in oblivion immediately after her premature death, so that their passion remained Britain's best kept secret (until her companion would try to break the silence with their shared biography in 1977).



But let's switch from these depressing previews to their spring fever of 1958. Virginia set off early in April to Mephisto's grange – to ask about whose expectations were bigger; yet we can be sure that she was highly amused to come back to the untamed sea after a stressful winter in misty old London. Better to breathe freely than to freeze bitterly by driving through the countryside, far outside the oppressive climate in Doyle's roaring monster and the annoying events on the slippery theatre parquet. Once approached in Devon, she found an adorable hamlet with just a couple of white-washed cottages surrounding Meat Farm. The latter was run by Mary, the playwright's wife (and whole his bunch, mother and sister, lived also nearby, scattered in old cottages and mills – yeah, Heartland was something like the bard's own country!). And the busy couple also offered bed and breakfast in another farmhouse (called the *Hermitage*), lying in the vale leading down to Malcount Mouth where a waterfall rushes down onto the rocky beach (and carries away parts of the buildings due to wild winter floods from time to time), to his illustrious friends from throughout the country – to earn a small additional income, cultivate his intellectuality and sometimes also to gain physical benefits from it. So Virginia was once again, like hardly half a year before in her blue lagoon, happily surrounded by bucolic folks of leisure farmers, artists, Sophistos and Aristos, enjoying nature and temporary freedom from their social chains far from London's sober and boring establishment like in an early Hippie colony, or rather, like in Boccaccio's retreat during the plague, safe from all threats out there.



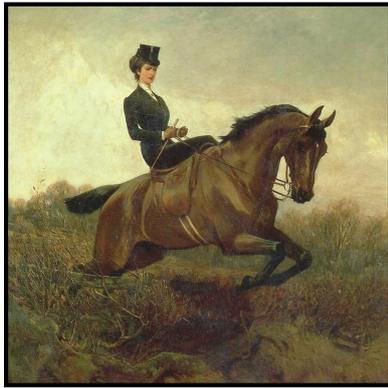
After the series of charming pictures was taken – probably according to the template of a session at the same place with Kathleen, Mephisto’s revered singer, who had been acclaimed as *Lucretia* in Ben’s and his most successful work just some years before to sadly pass away shortly thereafter – Virginia could have instantly returned to London. But what was waiting there apart from annoying duties and dancing on the *Vanity Fair*? That was a meaningless profession! Here was her habitat where she could live out her energies and perform bold deeds (even if in the shadow of other’s). Virginia, raised in her convent and praised away by the nuns to disguise her true nature in the deceptive costumes of a reluctant actress, was in fact a tomboy – let’s just briefly remember the ragamuffin strolling through the streets of Shepherd’s Bush and even more the little girl who grew up in the African outback! She hated to walk down the red carpet, felt life-short like wandering through wrong movies with poor plots written by and for others. She feared to fulfill expectations and to pretend an image that they had painted of her (just like any wannabe biographer, I’m sorry). And therefore our debutante, happy to be one with nature and together with all her animal companions, preferred to stay in Devon (as long as possible and the reserves were sufficient) to help on the farm and to ride over hills and through brooks, *bareback* of course, as the press would frequently repeat – and if this was another of those clichés she was eager to escape from: this very one was much to her taste and emphasized by herself!



Virginia Maskell loves outdoor life; she is here seen with the horses she rides when staying on a friend's farm in Devon. And for the record she rides bare backed!



Admittedly, Mephisto (who had generally rather a bad opinion about actresses he considered largely superficial persons) showed honest admiration for Virginia’s natural talent and boldness on horseback and how she mastered the most daring rides on the steep slope high above the sea in wind and weather. She instantly mounted the wildest stallion that no one was able to ride, and Mary forecasted (if not secretly hoped) that the green girl could be thrown from the horse or drive it over the cliff – but where others failed who believed to be tough guys, Virginia controlled Dulf Arab, her favourite steed, from the very first moment. And she was actually well trained through riding in the countryside on both her father’s patchwork fields and the ornamented farm of her convent. So look: our little wannabe Abelard wasn’t always needed as he likes to portray himself as Heloise’s indispensable adviser (and over and beyond, Virginia could continue just as well (if not better) her riding passion on her own stud on the Greene Island, if one day she would accept the offers of one of her future admirers).



At this point I would like to embed a small digression to another prominent horse lover riding a notorious stallion (that was so fiery that at least three men had been thrown off and found their sudden death): The Austrian Empress Elisabeth (called Sisi) who was born as a Wittelsbach Princess and sold off cheaply as yummy fresh flesh to improve the Habsburg bloodline in decay and to be sucked out like by Polidori's creature. On horseback, been freed from the hated Court in Vienna, her ignorant husband and her obnoxious mother-in-law, she released stress and overcame her depressions (and when she wasn't riding she was often seen chain-smoking). She was also fond to the unspoiled naturalness of the Greene Island where she used to ride months-long. Sisi was a tomboy too and felt

an urge to flee since she was almost suffocated by the expectations of her oppressive environment. Thus she also refrained from a visit to Victoria (who could not ride nearly as boldly over the hedges since she was too chubby, to put it mildly) – and the reader may guess that the Queen was not amused. Later Sisi would be even urged to leave Britain due to her undisguised sympathy for the Irish people (as well as for the survivors of the Hungarian uprising) – it was a little state scandal back then. Another interesting aspect is Sisi's obscure accident in the c(o)urse of this journey, since she vanished for a couple of weeks out of the public. What is secure is that she was medically treated, allegedly for a concussion, as she, too, was thrown from her steed and found in a narcoleptic state behind a hedge (even if she survived the incident in contrast to the toffs above) – but it is rumoured that she actually suffered a miscarriage (from an ominous third person, perhaps a dissident from Hungary or Ireland; but let's be honest, this is rather improbable because it is an open secret that Sisi was fond of women). I assure the baffled reader that these odd events really happened since we know about them from the biography of her favourite daughter (published half a century later), seasoned with whimsical episodes from her mother's life. Valerie mentioned the Victorian éclat in very personal words: The young lady, who accompanied Sisi on that very trip, said to her *that she had never seen a woman of such ugliness*. Well, tastes differ; and we know that Sisi was obsessed with a strange body cult. Actually, she was thin like Twiggy, probably due to a bulimic disturbance, even though she was said to be Europe's greatest beauty, given her chestnut hair, her angelic voice that sounded as sweet as honey, and her hypnotic eyes, so that everyone, if boy or girl, fell instantly in love with her; and so did I – and given such magnificence, it's no wonder that her offspring was shocked by the approach of the other woman. Interestingly, we find Sisi's famous horseback portrait in Althorp House due to her friendship with riding members of the Spencer family. Sounding familiar? Aye, it's of course that very place (I hardly need to introduce to the British audience) where another little semi-orphan, full of fey ideas and blessed with a good heart – rare enough in an elite class that is not famous for its warmth – was born and bred, who also didn't suit in her callous environment. And as we sadly know, it would not end well for both these outstanding women. Oh my poor Virginia, you are joining a good tradition! To learn a lesson from this to avoid toxic circles in order to be blessed with a long, fulfilling life.

I have to apologize for once again such an excessive digression that is, apart from the stallions, hardly related with our main plot; but I was intrigued by Sisi's tragic story from my early youth – of a person full of appetite of life, capabilities and fey ideas, who would become deeply depressed in her ignorant surroundings and disgusted by a life of false appearance – and furthermore regarding her heroic finale as if invented from the greatest of all bards! As for the bard, some poetic aspects are not as far



removed from our story as they may seem. Remember King Ludwig? He and Sisi were karmically connected since they felt like aliens both in their bodies and their social corset. And thus it will not be surprising that they dedicated touching little poems to each other – three of them were set to music in little ayres by a certain Postmodern composer (who calls himself *Andrea Malaparte*) two decades ago. Their poetic dialogue includes *The Eagle* (as she called him), *The Seagull* (as he called her) and a mournful obituary on occasion of his free death – whose circumstances are Bavaria's best kept secret; yet it is rumoured that he tried to escape the unjust treatment by a quack who didn't aim to cure him but to squeeze him into a straitjacket at the behest of his jealous environment.

To close this chapter with a little bang, what is fact is that Ludwig and Sisi were far relatives of our Devonian poet as we have learned that he claimed to be a descendant of the Wittelsbachs. Oh there are many threads of destiny converging in a single life, and strange synchronicities as if woven by Jung!



As confronted with London's climate and the expectations of her oppressive environment, could there be a better place for our poor reluctant celeb to fly (or flee) on the wings of the seagull (although not to Hungary or Ireland, eager to support a fancy riot against the fierce establishment) than to England's most remote coast at the outer rim of culture in the outback of the West Country?

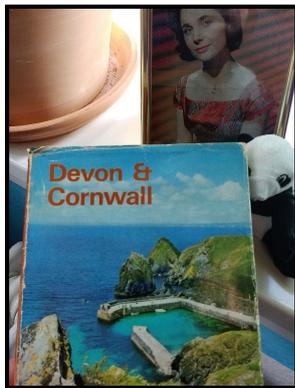
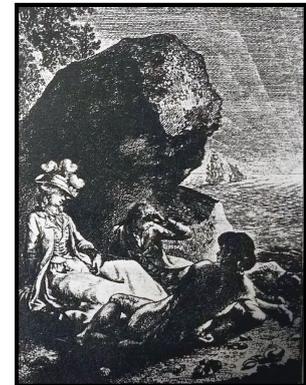
Heartland on the Celtic Sea was that sublime place that looks like Ossian himself created it! Where mighty cliffs meet tidal reefs of bizarre strata spread a mile off the coast like petrified tentacles (to see in them an allegory of Virginia's emotional *change from misery to ecstasy in the twinkling of an eye*). And an anthropomorphic shaped cape, which protrudes from the abyss where the tide banks cease, is always in focus, whether blurred in a cloud of spray or refracting the rays of the setting sun behind it: *The Reclining Lady* gives us the cold shoulder like a marooned mermaid. And out there somewhere over the rainbow the Virgin Islands are calling: *Westward Ho!* This would become Virginia's motto. In fact, it looks here so similar like at Gorda's rear coast where the view extends from the ancient copper mine high above the waves across the endless ocean the other way around to us so that we can well imagine that Virginia was immediately reminded of her *four glorious months* in the Caribbean. And even if only in thought, at this point it was something like a *Comeback to the Virgin Islands*, to that dream place where she was so heavenly happy hardly half a year before. In Malcount Bay she found such a similar scenery and all the more another community of escapists (if not even reef pirates) at stranger tides so that she felt perhaps herself like Daphne at the *Jamaica Inn* (filmed in the iconic version with mighty Charles; and it is highly probable that she watched this film since we know for sure that she fancied the old stuff from the silver screen). And here too was movieland: The popular Disney adaptation of *Treasure Island* with the most iconic Silver had been also made nearby at Heartland Quay (where an adorable little inn with white-washed facades, located on a rocky tongue, still resists the forces of nature) just some years ago at the beginning of the '50s.

And the local bard knew plenty of sinister tales from the past on the shores of Heartland. He claims in his works that just decades before the last beachcombers were up to mischief here and lured lonesome vessels to their doom on the cliffs in order to be swallowed at Malcount Mouth – and maybe they were still there, oh what a thrill for a receptive mind, keen on sparkling adventures, who just hung around rather bored in her tiny basement chamber and was urged by her fat bosses to make second-rate films on Shepperton set (if not infamous plays in second-rate Soho theatres. To wonder what was worse?!)



Given such bold impressions, we can well imagine that Virginia fell instantly in love with Heartland. It may have felt to her again like living in a movie; but this time it was all the more pure pleasure: there were no annoying duties and no sand bugs gnawing on her skin (even if instead perhaps some other leeches sucking on her neck. Well, for an adorable girl, threats are lurking everywhere!).

And like my tale-telling predecessor, I also have a personal association with the place and circumstances. When I first saw photos from a certain source of the couple and their bucolic circle sitting on the beach of Malcount Mouth in a sea of boulders awaiting the right tide to swim in daring waters, I suddenly felt reminded of my far ancestor Earnest with his wife Emilia on the height of the Age of Enlightenment. They often enjoyed staying at a Swedish cape protruding from the abyss where they looked across the Sound to the Danish coast or into a heavenly atlas of the moving clouds (where everything is both in change and in constant repetition) together with a bunch of early naturalists who used to escape from the bigoted bourgeoisie and decadent nobility in Copenhagen's oppressive climate. They were called the *Seelüstlinge* by their poetic friends (what means: *those with love* – aka *lust* – for the sea). Sadly, Emilia and Earnest were only granted four years of happiness due to her premature death by consumption; and he would mourn her loss until the end of all days.



Even if Heartland is a pure outdoor paradise, it is still culturally untouched (apart from its illustrious contemporaries, of course). But the surroundings are full of oldest legends far beyond the Anglo-Saxons into Celtic times, as the native bard will tell us soon in his travel book about Devon and Cornwall. Therefore we can imagine Virginia (apart from manifold activities like swimming on the reefs, hiking through the hills and riding over the cliffs) driving around in the beautiful countryside to inhale the impressions of so many mystic places during the following years (and all the more exuberantly, given her *feeling of freedom* by steering a car, as her companion will also emphasize): There are Tintagel's sublime remains only some miles southbound to ponder about the tragic threesome of Arthur, Lancelot and Ginny, respectively of Marke, Tristan and Isolde who are said

to have landed just at these shores after their crossing from the Greene Island – thankful stuff for Tricky Dick, our hate-loved Saxon composer who, as we heard, shared similar attitudes with the local New Byron and was also keen on plots of forbidden love. Boscastle nearby nestles in its ravine between green hills that murmur of old Celtic rites; and a *museum of witchcraft* was just about to open early in the '60s so that you could shudder there about a woman's skeleton who had exhaled her life in a dump gaol some centuries before for being all too moody – those were the times when nagging wives were briefly locked up by men without any justification (and we can assume that our receptive heroine would have felt sorry for her, given the parallel of those grannies with goiters wasting away in a geriatric care home that she visited during Advent '58; and there was no one who cared about them and not even gave them a ciggie!). Many decades later, a wild flood will flush away half the poor village including the human remains that would be considered a current corpse, oh my! Given such dark legends written by reality, it's urgently time to get a better vibe in Clovelly at Heartland's northern coast, another hamlet clinging unreal on its steep slope, founded by marooned Spaniards after the Armada had been struck by lightning and due to human vanity; but the castaways remained firm in faith and shaped their habitat according to their needs – just like the Westland natives use to do (as their revered bard proudly emphasizes) who are famous for their stubbornness and not really keen on the uninvited blessings from London's far forces. Clovelly, *where a waterfall of cottages meets the sea* (to quote also from his works), is so xtremely picturesque as if a draughtsman would have sketched it as a holistic piece of art. And the coast is granted with a panorama across the Bristol Channel and some scattered islands just at our feet to the doom of countless vessels. Like the Styx, this is an unpredictable fairway that is notorious for its extraordinary tidal range (allegedly one of the two largest in the world). And look, there are even the Welsh shores lying in the haze: yeah, Swansea is calling as more or less a happy preview of her movie *Only Two Can Play* (but apart from a promotion tour, Virginia would be spared to share too much time with Mad Pete on location since her part will be

mostly filmed in Shepperton, what a luck). But excuse me, my native readers, nothing against Wales! The country is, of course, a natural beauty and always worth a trip. And one day, Virginia will return for one of her most iconic roles – to find another picturesque place, built by an artistic nobleman in Mediterranean style, that looks so much like Clovelly. But it's still a far way to *the Village*.

And apart from nature there is also culture in North Devon, as our playwright likes to tell it:

Westward Ho! where *Amyas Leigh* set off to the West Indies; Barnstaple where John Gay was born and bred to create the *Beggar's Opera* (that was recently reissued in Ben's stunning version); and last but not least there is Bideford: the gateway to Heartland is the soothing place of approach after a long and rather stressful way from London – since it needed whole a day to reach England's very desert of public transport (and even more today, as I could convince myself, since the railroad now ends in Barnstaple). Mephisto had a garage here (probably on the east side of the Long Bridge just beneath the now abandoned station, a rather shabby quarter of tiny cottages in decay) to swap his vehicles.

And to switch from ancient tales to the present, it was also here in rural tranquillity where Virginia passed her driving test after countless lessons and a plenty of failures in London. And given the aspect that I am supposed to be a poor driver too (all the more so when I am confronted with narrow, hedge-lined holloways and steep lanes descending into dark, damp vales), I did not face the challenge of reaching this most remote location. And this is the reason why I didn't manage to come back to Devon for decades; although perhaps also due to the questionable prospect of what would we find in Heartland's deep still woods today apart from grizzly emptiness, if not worse the leftovers of past joy: a crushed cola can and an empty pack of cigarettes!

In Heartland, there are many tight wooded ravines deeply cut into the plateau with crystal-clear brooks (here called *leats* as we learn from Mephisto's works) that tend in rainy seasons to swell mightily to dangerous waters and threaten to swallow everything with stone and skin on their way down; but they also drive many mill wheels hidden in the woods or exposed above the sea at the mouths of the vales. The West Mill a mile from Meat Farm, lying at the end of a steep lane that sticks to the slope, is one of these ensembles, an adorable cluster of white-washed Halls nestling in the mighty Rocks where the *Lady is Reclining* at the foot of the mill. As hinted in his *Solitudes*, Virginia will try to tame the leat by creating a little rocky garden and laying out a path to a mighty hornbeam hidden in the woods with a crown of tentacles that lure the careless wanderers to lose themselves in the wilderness. And she will immortalize her arrival in the vale of tranquillity with verses like these: *All was silent in your woods / So I climbed high into your boughs / Warm, damp wood, green smelling, dark...*



West Mill Cottage was Mephisto's most beloved place on earth as he often emphasizes; and soon it will become Virginia's retreat, sometimes alone (awakened by his gentle knocking of his knuckles on the pane, perhaps a sweet tune by Pepusch or Britten, although better not a chain dance, huh?!) but mostly together as their shared lodging on the landlady's suggestion (since the latter may have been not really keen on watching whole the Rake's Progress next to her own sleeping room in Meat Farm – even if we will learn that the motives of all those involved in sparkling adventures were ambivalent).

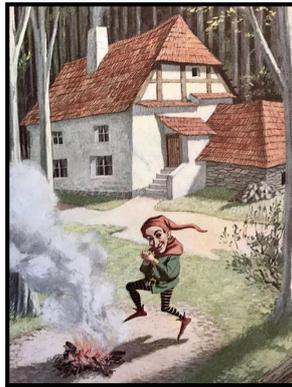
The very first night our two protagonists shared a bed upon his mill stream was a bit more dramatic than their earlier sit-in in her London basement chamber, a pretty disillusioning if not even scary experience, not to call it rather a false start. Mephisto allegedly watched his Muse lying in a trance, making indecent movements and reciting vulgar words (I don't want to snitch about, but they sound to me a bit like the effect of *hormonal disturbances* – to anticipate Freudian stereotypes at least once. We will hear later more about the latter until our ears ring as if a certain little man had penetrated them). However, it was now the second time within the short span of hardly a fortnight that he found her in this whimsical condition, and it was all the more annoying because it was quite contrary to his desires.

But for the baffled companion, the session even turned out to be more exciting than boring this time. Our poor reluctant object of desire suddenly awoke ashamed (and probably scared of unknown challenges as usual) and fled into the heat of the night (or the night of fright that was indeed pretty icy) *only in a nightdress and slippers*. She got lost in the wilderness for a couple of hours and threatened to fall off the cliffs until her gallant happily found her again standing like petrified in another narcoleptic trance at the post box (that still exists at exactly the same place in the middle of the hamlet; to wonder if on a foggy spring night a blurry figure could be seen rooted next to it giving us its frigid shoulder) both to his relieve and astonishment. *She was cold. Five minutes later and she would have collapsed*. And if I tend to over-interpret: Isn't that also one of his parables about a complete different event sometime in the future at an unknown place? But on that certain day no one would be there to save her! And besides, I have suddenly to think of a melancholic song (with Bach accompaniment that sounds a bit like the score of *Interlude*) that will be popular in 1967 and depicts a kind of ghostly encounter:

*When the Miller told this tale / that her face at first just ghostly / turned a Whiter Shade of Pale.  
One of 16 Vestal Virgins / who was leaving for the coast /  
And although her eyes were open / they could also have been closed.*

But back in the present, the woke observer will guess that this time the gourmet was not inclined to let the wine go stale and took the opportunity to *tickle his damself* like once *Sir Walther to a very first height* (according to one of Purcell's tavern songs) – in his sportive words *from misery to ecstasy within 10 minutes* – and to quit Caesarean *that's how it began*. Oh Maskell in distress, oh poor rootless Childe, you would have deserved a nobler knight (who pet the chick instead of plucking the hen)! Strangely, while Mephisto is usually eager to expose lewd details, he never revealed whether Virginia had just moved from her Virgin Island to his Mill Leat. But she gave him a hint in her very first poem

*Heat touching heat: "Innocence drove me to you." Probably she had.*



On the morning after the double event when the Rake sat again at his wife's table to take a second breakfast, Mary asked him casually: *Did you make her?* This is another little curiosity to remember. It sounds to me as if she was awaiting the news of success, maybe half amused, half annoyed, who will ever know (and maybe even released since she herself had long preferred it to stay together with obscure female guests, just like *the Catalyst's* wife, rather than with her treacherous husband). Therefore the baffled reader may be tempted to conclude that all of them involved were quite contented with the recent Progress. And besides, it was certainly satisfying for our heroine to have conquered such a great guy, the first and only man just for herself, all the more so that she snatched him from his wife. Oh, if her mother knew! And all her convent mates would be amazed!

However, the audience should not be disappointed, since after their bumpy start, our passionate couple hardly left the mill for the rest of the month and listened to the rhythm of the repetitive clatter of the wheel; and so they stuck together, *if more whole than holy*, apart from a certain morning when their bed was washed away by one of those floods to find themselves suddenly awakened as if marooned on a drifting *raft* (this time less *of love*, rather *of despair*. Their shared mood was indeed an ever-changing tide; and especially that of Virginia as she fought against her own moral ideas and now even the forces of nature). Therefore she was tempted to see at least a little omen in it – as she herself emphasized under a second flood of tears which was allegedly greater than that of the brook – that summoned up dark clouds over their forbidden relation. However, may this moody sequence have been their actual experience or his appropriate invention, *their raft of love* would become a repetitive leitmotif.

And Virginia would later also reflect on the exciting events in the Mill Leat in one of her earliest poems (which is now her most famous one). It is mainly known as *Rockhall*, but its subtitle is *April* – indeed, *she came in April to his woods / his deep still woods / To feel his strong deep body / stern and thick, in-reaching, rooted in the earth.*



One day I was lucky to purchase a private photo of Virginia sitting at the mill wheel in the spring of '58 (when she started to create here a paradise garden), dressed in a bewitching skirt with apples and pears (as if just picked from the tree) like an adorable little Eve, released from oppressive convention.

Interestingly, her cross is missing that she used to wear every single day both in private and on stage (but perhaps a piece of numb metal – just like any bling – didn't visually suit with the tasty apples and the sparkling water). I really love this photo for its carefree expression and, like Adam, I would have paid every price for it. Oh, if only we could have seen her so radiantly happy forever! But we know that her *Time was just a Dream* (and sometimes twas an *Endless Night*).

Our Malcount emphasized that he was keen on her juvenile energy, her *appetite for life*, which he was granted to share in. Not because, but despite she was an actress! Because he truly adored her naturalness, that *gentle ragamuffin that she was* in her private life off stage. He didn't benefit at all from her increasing fame and he hardly mentioned these circumstances – whether due to jealousy or discretion, who knows; and as we heard, he generally had no good opinion of actresses, regardless of the fact that he danced as a playwright at the same Fair, but of course his intellectuality (or simply his Vanity) was so much greater than theirs; and first of all he was a mighty rooster and they only chickens, and that's what counts. While corresponding relationships (aka *Erotic Interludes* that one day burst like a bubble) are surely not unusual, particularly not in the spheres of artists and celebs, there was something deeper wafting between our protagonists: an invisible karmic thread of two strong characters with highly emotional amplitudes and shared passions in manifold fields: Animal farming, riding, merging with free nature – that was their true stage – but at the same time they were highly effective in creating joint works; and last but not least, even if surprisingly, they were also poetically connected! These outstanding personalities were, albeit separated by generations, worlds and circumstances, attracted (and sometimes repelled) to each other like magnets. He was her Mephisto and she remained his Muse throughout their entire lives. He claimed to be the man who *taught her all about good and evil*; and she gave him her body and her soul. But there is a saying: In the relationship between an old man and a young woman, the man becomes younger and the woman ages prematurely. Indeed, two decades later he would confess in his retrospect and one of his few self-critical moments: *My life had become a mess before I met you. You tried to save me, but you drowned.*

Their everyday life was largely passion. *They thirsted for each other.* When they came together after countless separations, *they tore off their clothes before they could close the door* and then they inclosed themselves in order not to leave their bed for days; and if so, then only at a meeting in the kitchen (what we can be sure of, for so it is written) for a nightly ciggie – their only addiction, which was greater than theirs to each other, and the only one they should have better been cured of.

And they were also inventive! For example, Virginia came home dressed in a costume from the *Doctor* as a cute nurse (which of course is every man's dream) or as a gay hussar (in a waistcoat loaned from the TV play *Soldier in the Snow*, particularly fitting given his perception of Virginia's gender ambivalence). And as we know that he was keen on aspects of her *boyishness*, he may also have liked to fondle her arms, just like Keller caressed *Netty's* (remember her doubts on the *Island?*).



But given the fact that *they made love hundreds of times*, I wonder how she managed to cope with her vast (or wasted) workload of her increasing career with permanent performances on telly, stage and screen, constant travel to the sets and commuting to Devon, so as not to tear into hundred threads and burn out completely. And since she was trying to reduce her contracts by rejecting nine out of ten – whether she was *disgusted* by how she was urged into roles with often shallow plots and lousy colleagues, or whether she longed for the Celtic shores – this hesitant behaviour would surely not promote her career (and neither the fact that she will stick on stage largely with Mephisto's works).



He called her *Urchin*, she mocked him *Arab* – the latter for a wise reason since his life had been much that of a Pasha at Stambul's Golden Gate. But beyond, she gave him many names and one of them will stick with him until her last hour. Once back in London, they suddenly found themselves in front of a toyshop with stuffed pets in the showcase – including a Chiltern panda who begged to be cuddled; Virginia fell immediately in love with his dark sad eyes that looked so much like Mephisto's. And because she was just in search of a missing link to endure long periods of separation, her pretty gallant was both surprised and relieved that his frugal little sparrow didn't long for a precious gem (even less a golden ring, at least not for the moment) but just to stroke a pet as something like

*his deputy*. Thus she was gifted with the fluffy little guy as the symbol of their love. They called him *Pedro*. He became her constant companion who shared with her in silent grief her most desperate moments – and there will be plenty of them, unfortunately.

And Little Pedro is the one whom she gave her fatal oath: *I will never part with him!*

That's how he latched onto her life to accompany his mistress until her last night. And albeit he will often sit at her bed edge to comfort her, sooner or later Virginia's eyes would become darker than his.

Whether in London or in the countryside, they fled into their very own world, sometimes played like children and renounced responsibility, although they were careful to keep their partnership discreet. And when they danced at the Vanity Fair, they didn't do a couple dance – we actually find just a single photo of a public event in which Virginia and Pedro stand next to each other – since both were certainly not keen on sharing their forbidden love with anybody else (even less with Mary's attorneys). And neither was he keen on her increasing fame nor was she eager on his income (although, given his limited assets, he always feared the latter – incidentally, due to her generous fees, it could have rather been the other way around and certainly not to Pedro's palate either, because he pretended to be Virginia's rock in every single field). But be careful: a Georgian wisdom goes that a British woman shall never become dependant on a man, lest she lose whole her freedom and fortune! All the more if she is as gullible as our careless heroine. Virginia detested professional treaties (as she herself emphasized that she hardly reads them; oh happy is the agent!) so that we may assume that our heroine wouldn't even think about a marriage contract. Ouch. Perhaps one day we will remember this!



Our spouses by nature were real escapist. They built their *raft of love* (which was mostly a large bed) on some rather tiny islands, whether in a mill in Devon, a chamber in the Scarsdale or a block upon the Thames. However, it was repeatedly washed away by adverse forces and mostly on a wave of tears. According to Pedro's confessions *their life together was a dream (...)* – that sounds to me as if their true story would become the plot of *Interlude* (and indeed, the guy who will write the screenplay of Virginia's last movie, will prove to have a lot of knowledge about her private life many decades later, albeit we don't know how they were connected). And indeed, we can well imagine Virginia's passion when we see *Antonia* turning over in their bed in an act of desperate love (or rather fear of loss) and raiding her partner with an outburst of explosives from the bottom of her heart – to ponder about what if one day such intense feelings by one or both of them were no longer reciprocated or turned out to be just empty bubbles? Woe, woe, it could become a chamber scene that is only *full of emptiness!*

And indeed, on their rocky path they were always in danger of losing themselves in that dream (or a nightmare), confronted with convention and faced with the fact that time goes by so fast; and so it sounds deeply melancholic in Pedro's memory: (...) *A dream, I cannot, or will not, remember.*

*Were we like two sleepwalkers running through our days hand in hand? So much seems lost.*

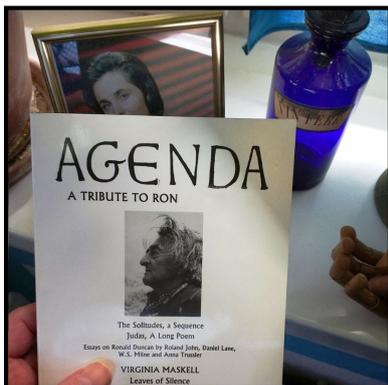
However, thanks to such lines her lost life didn't fall totally in oblivion while other people who were allegedly close to her would never mention her again with a single word, or a photo, after her death. Bitter ironically, Virginia's greatest fear, like that of the ancient Egyptians, was to be ostracized, thrown into oblivion and left behind *as if she had never lived* – this was indeed a presumption of her true fate. And she reflected this dark menace in plenty of poems which are overloaded with transience.



While we got to know Virginia as a sportive, energetic person who wandered around, swam through the tides and rode stallions until exhaustion, there was also such a pensive mind eager for tranquillity. To imagine her immersed in the penumbra of her cell, lost in thoughts. She was also the mistress of discretion by writing poems under an obscure disguise. She expressed her emotions largely artificially, whether due to her natural shyness or her social restraints. As a child, she had been conditioned to always maintain composure and be concerned about what society considers fair and foul manners. Therefore, she refrained from showing her feelings. But what Stoics call a virtue in the drift of Enlightenment is in fact the true scourge of humanity. WE FEEL, THEREFORE WE ARE!

DO WHAT YOU WANT and everything will be fine! Express what burdens you before your belly bursts and your brain blows up from the storm in your head. There are no good or bad feelings and no right or wrong conventions as determined by ossified folks, but only nature guides us in our search for the path to happiness. And I don't want either to drive on the wrong side just to please those folks who supervise the traffic rules. In Love and Despair there is no rule but only passion beyond all borders. Speechlessness is the strongest of all poisons; and what was buried in the past due to false discretion contaminate the present. Reveal your nature and needs that have been banished to the subconscious, come out of the corset that others had squeezed you into, and you can breathe freely in the future. And yet some sober people say: "Let the past rest." Nah thanks, that's a really poor advice and surely not the right direction for our further wander if we strive to find the truth that is entombed in our souls! Skeletons in someone's closets needs to be removed in order that they cease to clatter.

Given their different duties and frequent and long separations, Virginia and Pedro exchanged with each other countless letters and poems that often sound painful, even masochistic, as if they tear themselves apart due to desperate desire. They tried to synchronize their schedules on their professional tours throughout the country and abstained from commitments just to stay together; and when they met again, they instantly merged physically. But when they had to separate anyway, it felt like torment; and when they were alone for more than a day (or just a few hours) they insatiably longed to reunite with the missing half like amputees lacking a leg. And they expressed their feelings in passionate words in their secret correspondence that lasted over a decade, far beyond the time they were physically united. They would remain poetically connected like Abelard and Heloise.



At the end of March 1958 Virginia had left Orme Mews, the place of Pedro's poetic circle, disguised as Simon the Saint (who once lived in a hollow trunk). And look: one single time, Pedro showed honestly respect for her literary talent, encouraged her to carry on and even advised her to one of his friends who published *Agenda*, a journal of literature (that still exists today) in a limited edition for the palate of a small community of both dilettantes and artists. Virginia became even something like a shareholder by donating a not insignificant sum. A handful of her works – *Heat touching Heat* and *In your Hands* (both of which express, just like most of her poems, her intense longing to merge holistically with the beloved) – were published in one of the earliest issues of *Agenda* in April '59.

Whole the bundle of her 16 poems will not be released before autumn '67, entitled *Leaves of Silence*, by Pedro himself under ominous circumstances only months before her premature death, so we'll have to think about a causality between the incidents (all the more given her odd ode of *Love and Despair* Virginia would leave behind at her Home on the day of her final departure to be kept from the public).



In 1958 she came in April to his woods / his deep still woods to embrace the mighty trunks and reveal her most intimate secrets to Pedro – and she immortalized her arrival in the Mill Leat in a poem widely known as *Rockhall* (subtitled *April*) that is today her most popular one and frequently quoted.

Only some steps from the West Mill there was (and still is) a magnificent hornbeam by the brook with a wonderful crown of hundreds of branches reaching into the heaven. And since we know that she loved trees (and even paved the path through the leat) we can be sure that she came along here and imagine her sitting for hours and hours under the tree until her shanks would take root. Over and beyond, I tend to assume that this was her *Sweetheart Tree* (even if I may be a little influenced by a delightful sequence in *The Great Race*, one of my favourite childhood films from 1965. We watch Natalie Wood singing a bittersweet ayre of lost lovers about to be reunited through the grace of a tree). I won't be so pretentious to speculate what scraps went through her head while Virginia was waiting – for a sign, someone or Godot – but I dare to quote from *Rockhall*:

*And all was silent in your woods / all slept dark, and gravely still.*

*You told me no secrets / as I waited there / but your branches held me / and I told you mine.*

And Pedro responded in the metamorphosis of his *Solitudes*, addressed exclusively to his sweetheart. My favourite is the penultimate verse, No. 26, with some iconic lines (worth a night to remember): *Dearest / Give me your Love or give me your Despair, yourself or your enmity...*

My inclined readers, you may forgive me, but given such passion, I can hardly keep on writing at the moment. *It's so hot!* Please give me a brief break to cool down...





It wasn't always just sunshine and roses in the valley of the blessed. Look, that landlady there was an outstanding woman, both gentle and stern, ripened through long suffering due to Pedro's mischief. Apart from running the grange and the leisure lodgings, Mary was a busy person who had also talents in the arts: she sculpted a little and illustrated her husband's works with adorable little drawings. But first of all she kept an eagle eye on what happened in Heartland (and sometimes, as we heard, she commented on her husband's whimsical acts with similarly quirky comments) and used both to admonish and comfort those damsels in distress who were just led around on Byron's leash like once Lady Lamb. And thus she spoke to them (or something like that with my small contribution):

"Don't waste, like me, your precious lifetime on these scoundrels. Once when you are marooned in marriage, renounce happiness and give up all hope of ever coming out of your *spiderweb of pain*. Look, my pretty husband has many bizarre theses. He likes to state that *women invented monogamy*. Of course, that's absolute nonsense, bred by a male brain. In contrary, it were men who presumed to become the keeper of moral. Every natural society, and this is evolutionary fact, was once, and still is, the matriarchy in which some male drones are buzzing around the queen. And since half the mankind is unable to create life, they have to show off creative works in every quirky field, jealously take possession of our body and our mind and suck our lifeblood like Polidori's creature – and even thirstier when they are confronted with those sisters whose swan necks are refined with a radiant cross. That agitate the leeches like the red flag on a bull meadow. Oh my poor rootless daughter, I know

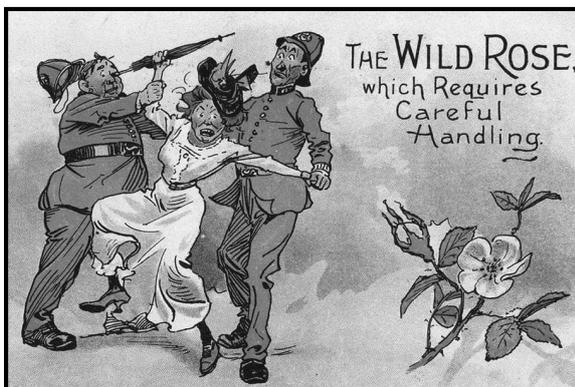


much about these things, since I was, like you, torn away from my convent. And guess what Ron's first glances were focused on?! I believe even to remember that it sizzled when he first touched my cross (and he surely burned his hand and highly deserved). But what's the height is that he wasn't amused when he realized in our honeymoon's first night that I was (unlike my namesake) no longer a virgin. Well, if he has been on a long search since then, he has just been recompensed with a unique innocent girl (and probably the only one in her profession) who stranded in our cursed bay.

Probably you don't know that I am a descendant of a long line of architects?! Of course there was not a single lady among them; but what I learned already in my youth was that they all were eager to erect buildings in very special shapes and dimensions. Look, how our poor old towns are just about to be refurbished with ugly high-rise-towers – but even if the Huns are to be charged for the demolition due to how they scattered lightning over us like Thor himself, these horny spires stand in a long tradition of both sacred and profane buildings, from the Tower of Babel and the obelisks of Egypt to the Eiffel Tower, which all symbolize their masculine self-image. (In contrast to the latter, Pisa's Leaning Tower is of course the true symbol of manliness (or less), particularly for how we perceive the ponies in tame nights.) These phallic follies are absolutely pointless, nothing but embodiments of male competition to pretend to have the Biggest Dickus. Just look in opposite to their martial claim a Venus grotto that invites the wanderer to take a soothing shelter; this is the very place (if not a hollow trunk or mighty roots) where everyone seeks to return into the lap of Mother Nature (to feel for a rare moment like you never hatched from the protective eggshell into the roughness of the mad, mad, man-made world).

Already the Georgians emphasized that as a British lady, you have all your own rights until you get married. Stay free! So called gentlemen, and even more blasé Cavaliers (that gullible young girls are attracted to, for whatever reason, perhaps because of dark eyes, long shanks or tasteful clothing), pretend nothing but false shine, as their victims will learn at the latest when they find themselves abandoned in the kitchen while their fine gallants enjoy to dance both on the May fair and in Soho's barrel houses. Once you are married, decent husbands soon reveal their true grimaces and squander your fortune in the course of superficial pleasure in their odd clubs, actually places of stupidity where weak natures feel bigger than they are (or have) among their peers – just to mention Beau Brummell, certainly the biggest good-for-nothing ever (apart from Georgieboy, of course, his chubby bosom and descendant of a long line of demented Huns; and it is well known that the Huns are the worst of all).

Men are such pathetic creatures! They are eager for discretion in ominous circles of white-aproned brethren who chatter about paradigms how to hew all blocks so that they fit into uniform walls and forge their evil plans of enslaving half the (wo)mankind – just to our best, of course, since we are too emotional and have to be educated to become reasonable; but first of all we are punished with a cycle, whether by nature or by God, and a womb that is said to be a living being, struggling in us like a naughty little squid – one of many awkward narratives of the era of “Enlightenment”. The latter was pretty effective: it only cemented male supremacy! When we were just on the way to be released from clerical powers, the latter were replaced with even worse paternalism under scientific guise; since all those odd fellows feared to become geldings when they were confronted with a new generation of strong-willed re-belles who were eager to cut off the old braids and dressed themselves in trousers. And when a woman has unexpectedly dumped a man, he first flees to Boodles and then soon creep back to her like a whining mutt with his tail between his feet and assure *enduring friendship* – only to behave the same way again and again. A drunkard will always remain a drunkard, even if he promises improvement and begs to be lovingly cared for. But one day we have enough of their full-throated (aka babbling) assurances. We’ll learn to cut their arguments in pieces and make tasty Hot Dogs of them!



Men’s only desire is to get advantage of your heeling vessel, whether for their lust or for their line, to steer it through a sea of sorrows (if not even across the Styx). For men, matrimony means the lust of power, for women, bitter slavery. You will give all your assets to your husband, have to ask him for permission if you want to work, beg for the budget and even a filling of petrol (which he may have withdrawn from you so that you would stay home at the edge to nowhere to be thankful for his grace and novelties from the world outside the kitchen, where you are tied to the oven). But what is worst is to be blackmailed into obeying his will in order not to lose the kids – to some fierce authorities, or, that’s the height, a decent mother-in-law who, of course, is always loyal with her naughty boy (regardless the skeletons in his closet) and the natural antagonist of her daughter-in-law (especially if the latter is more beautiful and talented or even a loving angel in contrast to her bitchiness; there are many popular examples of this in our history). And sadly there are sometimes mothers (not to call them monsters) who even prove to be the tougher men, given the background of how they were indoctrinated during their cheerless childhood to always strive to behave decently; and therefore they pass over the baton of misunderstood upbringing to their puppies by abandoning them in educational institutes in order to become good girls, regardless their needs and nature and with the only aim of showing of their beautiful surface like well-shaven topiary or trees standing straight in a noble avenue. Oh my, that looks so boring (if not pitiful) to me. True beauty lies in the wilderness!

But first of all it is sadly known that our children are always awarded to the father by patriarchal authorities if we don’t submit to their rules. As a decent lady, beware to demand the same rights and manners which those scoundrels claim for themselves. They screw whole the world around us whereas we have to stay calm about their nasty mischief (when we actually feel to sob or shout or even cut or kill them as the righteous reaction). At best, society has pity with us and false respect for maintaining always our posture (what they call *ladylike*, *noble understatement*, or such rubbish) instead of properly nagging and giving them the middle finger. For men, letting off steam means they are brave fighting cocks; for women, it means they are hysterical chickens. We care lovingly about the drunkards over many years whereas they deliver us to any institution, overburdened at the first sign of emotions (even more as we have no quirky clubs where we can relax from our daily duties and domestic quarrels, only the bathroom to secretly sob in the sink). And once we have given them an heir, the lord of the manor

instantly dumps us for a better match, be it through beauty, youth, wealth or social status – remember Mad King Henry’s fierceness? All Cavaliers emulate their fondest idol! And as every woman sadly knows, there is always a successor lurking behind the curtain” (ouch, that hit the spot!) “so that we lose home, face and funds, but all the more devastating, our fondest gems whom we carried for nine months and suckled for years, whereas men’s only contribution was a drop of honey (by the way, as for the latter, isn’t it a paradox that a certain squad that contributes the least to ensure reproduction, calls loudest for morality? Oh my, these blockheads are as superfluous as goiters!). And in the face of such social injustices, a stormy wife with a Creole soul, longing to return to the Wide Sargasso Sea but laid in chains by her surroundings, may one day burn down their houses and their hubris! Good lady!



*Physical pain belongs to women* – another of my pretty husbands’s theses. Good man! At least in one single point he hit the nail on the head. But beyond, our body belongs to us alone, *whole and holy*, and everything that goes with it. Mothers and offspring are one unit; and ignorant men shall never touch the noble vessel with their claws but keep their maws shut from any advice in a female cause. We don’t need any of those moral guardians in black or white or purple cassocks to compensate their jealousy of OUR belly! Since the pure matriarchy was defeated by male fury and desire for power, we are the victims of their endless violence, due to their obsessive competition for the longest sword and loudest gun and for who proves to be the greater rake. All of them are agited in the wolf pack as they were kept in cages their entire lives of both their dreadful schools and horrifying barracks – so that you could have pity with the poor boys. *IF...* they would defeat their disciplinarians, even the male half could create with us together a progressive, better world; but they use to follow the tracks of their idols of toxic masculinity over thousand generations. All wars are always made by men (or madness)! An old wisdom is that hens should refuse the fighting cocks and it would be the end of all battles.

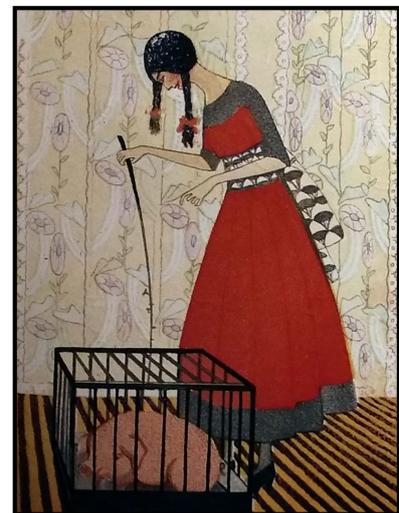
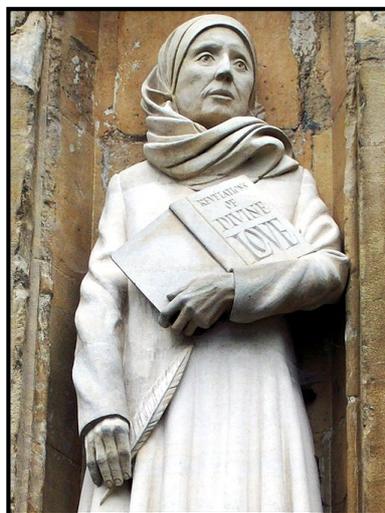
At least on this battlefield my husband renounced to cheer with the goofy herd. He is a pacifist and bravely did his community service against all adversities regardless of the threat of never appearing on any public stage again; and that’s what I highly respect him for. He doesn’t fit into any uniform and never considered to reach a rank unlike all his noble buddies, buzzing around him like gnats seeking for enlightenment by the greatest of all Dissenters. Emotionally faded fathers force their ill-fated sons, just released from their struggles in those dreadful public schools, to become dashing officers like them to prove their masculinity, sharpen their swords and fulfill the experiences of their ossified elderly families in decay – whether they like it or not, they have no choice. Ron was spared from this, brought up just by women, down-to-earth at the outer rim. And besides, it is well known that we Westland natives have always been Independents with their own view of Cavalier’s policy somewhere far away in Westminster’s catacombs; and therefore we suffered countless of their fierce Assizes. He is also an environmentalist who managed to place parts of our Heartland under nature conservation – much to the annoyance of greedy folks who like to exploit nature. And for these efforts, my dear Ginny, I appreciate your contribution. This is something meaningful rather than just playing life. Never let you squeeze in any uniform and set of a helmet that others had forged just to conceal that there is nothing but emptiness in their skulls! But just as men were conditioned to fight for whole their lives, we are only meant to marry and breed. Once ejected from the convent’s blessed bubble into the wolf pit out there, we are sold by our fathers (and worse, by our misled mothers) to the highest bidder and to those who swing the biggest sword. That’s the nature of so-called culture since the mankind lost its innocence from ape existence. Just hanging in the branches and making care-free love, not war, we found us entangled (and strangled) in social shackles. We should have abstained from “evolution”!

As for trees, by the way. There is another one well anchored in collective paranoia, but let us spin the parsons' yarn a little farther: How smart Eve once bravely fought to move away from an old white-bearded man in order not to wither under his protection and find her path to happiness; but Adam clung to his trunk. We could be light-years ahead in development if we didn't have to carry men around like *heavy luggage* over thousand generations. And as for the strange formula of being "expelled from paradise"? I would rather call it *escaped* – from the golden cage of perpetual paternalism! But the male half of humanity was never eager to be free; by the way, much like the Roman house-slaves liked to nestle with their patrons, and also here on the Fairest Isle. But woe, then approached Boudicca's bunch, who bowed to no one, and showed them their place under her plough!



Assimilation always means self-abandonment. We have to fight for freedom until the foe is overcome for a better future of all sisters in the world, regardless personal consequences. Look how the Suffragettes sacrificed themselves, how they were plundered of their wealth and kids, state and health (and even half their brains or whole their wombs by evil quacks) – which is sadly still the usual procedure in certain institutions of so-called "mental health" where myriads of suffering mates are fading away at their husbands' behest, maltreated with electro shocks until their *speech is slurred*.

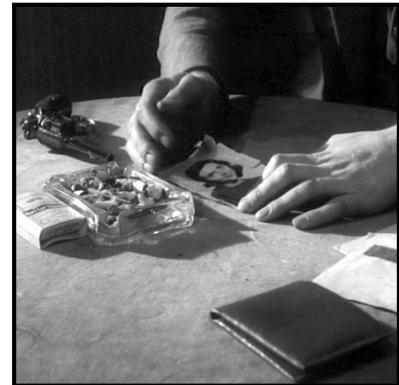
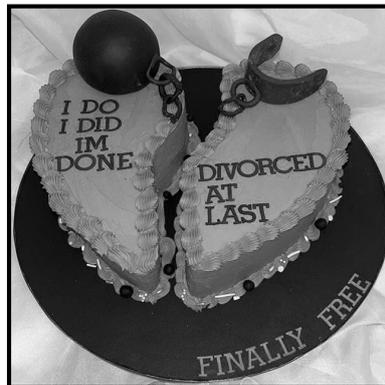
Oh, my dear Ginny, I have bad experiences with the cynical blessings of quackery. Beware to follow in my footsteps! Don't let yourself be lured into their bone and mental mills in order to avoid having your dignity crushed. You will enter the hell gates as a beautiful mind and come out holistically broken, silenced and addicted to their poisoned dishes until your last day, this is what I predict to you! A woman with her own will – that's what men can't cope with! The good ol' Eve or Pandora or both, these bold women were the first to realize men's obsession to submission to superstition and its worldly substitutes. And even if we have tried to enlighten them since then, given the fact that already Adam didn't follow in Eve's tracks, men-kind still lives in paternal supervision until we tear them out of slavery for their own good and along with the roots (what they fear most, by the way). *My poor kid, what world needs is female affection. Not masculine passion!* And let me quote last how a certain medieval anchoress, one of the greatest female masters, considered the true nature of Divine power: *Our Saviour is our Very MOTHER in whom we be endlessly borne, and never shall come out of Her.* Replace the patriarchy with a matriarchy and the world will find heavenly peace!"



Regardless Mother's tirades Lil Ginny felt as safe in the nest of her surrogate parents as she once did in the convent, hugged by her Sisters. And therefore she wouldn't heed Mary's wise warnings (both as a patient pretender over almost half a decade and a brave wife *five long years* beyond). And since she wasn't really keen on further professional engagements while she was waiting on the release of her *Virgin Island*, she preferred to stay in Heartland where she served temporarily as something like a housemaid in the leisure lodgings at Malcount Mouth. And early in the mornings she used to stroll over Meat Farm to feed all the creatures great and small. Oh what a wonderful play of life (if only for a short time that would be like a dream), free from all responsibility in her little petting zoo (that mostly others cared for). But so what? That was she, a little lost birdie having fallen from her branch. She wasn't a glamorous diva at all, but a tomboy, one with nature and with flight instinct.

And she would always be happy with countless animal companions (who are not as demanding as humans and don't expect anything more than to be cuddled): *Pumpkin* her cat, *Rupert* her dog, *Pedro* her (stuffed) bear; (living) fish and turtles; (unnamed) chickens and geese; pigeons in her hand and a wet sparrow in his; *Dilf Arab*, her furious steed, and *Tamino*, her gentle foal; and even the pig would get a name (*Friday*, for whatever reason, perhaps referring to *Robinson's* faithful companion) and survive Christmas by her mercy. What a lucky shepherdess she could have been on her green meadow instead of an actress in distress on the red carpet!

But we shouldn't neglect either her serious engagement for nature conservation, once again in Pedro's footsteps, who was an early representative of environmental protection against all adversities long before it would become popular – yeah, he was a busy and ambivalent person involved in plenty of activities, some of which were admirably alternative, if not even avant-garde, in contrast to his ossified contemporaries. She even founded an (albeit short-lived) association called the *Green Cross Society* together with a handful of companions (who were all disciples of Pedro, of course) who met, among other things, for an annual planting day in Heartland to create a little grove somewhere in the Mill Leat with a hundred small deciduous trees – probably on the slope where the steep lane descends down to the mill; and we still find a wooded piece of land there. Unfortunately, not a single tree would survive due to the harsh climate and they will all have to be replaced with more resilient conifers (as we will later learn from Pedro's essays about their measures). Anyway, Pedro will prosaically call the grove *Virginia Wood*. Oh happy is the actress who not only gets her plays but also her own wooden stage, even though, like in most of her works, she had only a cameo in the movie of another star.



But, but... their careless spring was soon followed by a sudden break and a restless wandering began between them and their beloved places. Particularly Heartland would remain deserted for months, if not years (albeit everyone would return, even accompanied by some obscure players who did not yet suspect that they would one day be shaken, if not stirred in the cloudy cocktail of family affairs). Sometime mid of '58, the children's game was over when the long suffering wife lost her patience, for what concrete reasons ever, since after hundred and one mistresses Mary should have been quite used to Pedro's naughty escapades; and hadn't she herself encouraged him (through whimsical comments) to mate with his conquests and also liked to make friends with at least some of them (or even develop maternal feelings)?! Almost two decades later (when she will motivate him again, but this time to fulfill his oath *to write all about* his greatest passion), Mary will still talk about her fondest rival with friendly respect, even love like that of a forgiving mother (in a lesser-known article in the local press): "*What stand could I take? I was 45 when this beautiful, sweet-natured, intelligent, witty girl of 21, a film star desperately in love with my husband, appeared in his life.*" Mary smiled (and we suspect why, considering how she had agreed to let Pedro *make* her): "*I couldn't win!*"

And indeed, Mary withdrew, at least for the moment. Seemingly this time something was different (to be tempted to assume that the connection between Muse and Mephisto had a greater impact than ever before or since). Time had come to dump her treacherous husband for the first and only time in their life in the course of a long enduring (although never finalized) divorce battle over the following years, to expel her antagonists from Meat Farm and settle in Weymouth, Weston or somewhere westward ho. And, even worse, Pedro was banished from his London mews (probably due to the fact that the Bunnygroves were also befriended with Mary and more loyal to her, given the awkward events) where he had comfortably settled down with his patron. Ouch, from one day to the next our little Abelard *lost all his friends and appetite of life* and became a homeless vagrant – admittedly I have not much pity with him; and anyway, it was all the better since our heroine was now blessed with an unexpected opportunity to reach the golden goal. Look, happy is the mistress who can replace the rightful queen – a certain green girl of another *Erotic Interlude*, even if only a fictional one, would later not get a similar chance to catch her old gallant (and Oskar would be spared from stumbling over dustbin lids). However, Big Pedro had to settle now in Virginia's little mouse holes, first in her basement chamber in the Scarsdale and later in her somewhat larger apartment some miles away in Dolphin Yard, where they would experience a rollercoaster of emotions that would soon escalate into a not really merry Christmas after a stressful Advent season. Ironically, isn't it? He liked to mock his mistress for her alleged dependence on him to now become her wriggling appendix – all the more annoying in regard to her increasing actress fees, since she became just wealthier than him. And maybe given her rather advantageous situation, during the following time, his hopeful landlady *sat him the pistol to his head* in order *to marry her or she would leave him*, respectively slam the door into his face, as our bigamist complained bitterly to his adolescent son (who, like Pedro, had just graduated from Horror on the Hill that is known as the first forge of male paradigms). After just sipping with pleasure a blonde and a brown pint together, Pedro now threatened to become a reluctant teetotaler; this wasn't really a nice prospect for a decent gourmet, huh? And beyond, they made fun of that gullible girl whose deepest wish was a proper ring around her pretty slim finger. Oh what pathetic creatures there are!



At this time Don made another film at Shepperton with our newbie in a minor role among a great cast of fellows (some of whom Virginia would meet again and even overtake them with her role in *Only Two Can Play*, apart from Dick, who would be granted with a world career and even survive the dinosaurs at a biblical age). *The Man Upstairs* is a chamber play if not even a parable about how society (here a house community) interacts with outcasts in a wide range between rejection and consolation. Dick plays a scientist living in a grizzly attic under the influence of heavy drugs since he has withdrawn from his profession after an accident in his lab. He feels compelled by his bosses to continue his work although he cannot longer bear it, and therefore he tends to have paranoid thoughts. His turmoil is increased by external forces (portrayed by harsh Millicents who were hastily called) completely overloaded with the situation whereas it would have been better to let him cool down in his self chosen hermitage where he expresses fervently: *Leave me alone. I'm not available!*

Anyway, after they had learnt about the causes of his misery by his summoned fiancée – now comes Virginia's appearance, once again not before half-time to invade into a closed system like an alien – at least the ambivalent house community manages to get him out of the escalating situation so that he is finally transported, instead of to the prison or the morgue, into a lunatic asylum (to ask what is worse). At first I was disappointed to find a stern looking lady as the sympathetic voice of the bunch (what I would have considered Virginia's cast) but when our heroine entered the room, I understood again Don's perfect choice: How strange she looks in her radiantly bright and strikingly wide coat

(perhaps as an allusion to a nurse or a nun) much in contrast to the ordinary folks in their casual clothes. She won't take it off throughout the entire film, even if she unties her scarf to show her very own cross (that she still wore around her neck, whether on stage or at home); and she conspicuously tries to hold the coat together with her little clenched fists as if she were under great mental pressure about whole the time and felt uncomfortable in every situation, if not especially in her body – I can't really figure out whether these gestures were her contribution or Don's direction. However, her guest appearance is intriguing. When Virginia approaches from afar and wanders through a world of which she isn't really part, she immediately gets our full attention compared to the random crowd; and therefore she becomes the secret main role – that's the curse and blessing of her genuine acting.

Her appearances generally seem as if she were only in transit through space and time, due to her angelic voice, her mysterious glance (of her uneven eyes, one of which looks to us and the other to the beyond) and her skill to switch her expression from transfiguration to furious rage within a second. Indeed, her acting appears as if she lived it from the bottom of her heart – to ponder about the effects on her receptive soul. Since she often came home agitated, how could she fade out the fictional triggers and switch off emotionally, given the fact that she never had true confidants to support her?



Our protagonist is confronted with mental instability and threatening suicide (culminating in *Suspect* two years later when she won't save her fiancé) and even physically challenged as she is pulled around while trying to lure *the Man Upstairs* to come out of his chamber – and suddenly it looks to me as if she is the one being led away by brutish warders. Indeed, I am tempted to assume that this second-rate strip, which we hardly find in any film encyclopedia, might have one day a deeper meaning for her when she finds herself in a similar turmoil locked up in the attic. And she too could fully recover if she were simply allowed to rest a fortnight long in narcoleptic trance (as it has been proven more than once to be her very own system for calming down) so as not to trigger the fatal chain reaction of shaking doors, fists banging on the pane (or the pain), chattering quacks and rabid warders, to increase her crisis and drive her into the bone and brain mills of insane institutions, allegedly to her benefit and certainly for their relief. But this is the usual procedure how ignorant folks like to sanction behavior that is considered socially inappropriate and they cannot or do not want to cope with it.

There are also iconic scenes where Dick points to a jar full of pills prescribed to him by eager quacks and states he is *now swallowing them every 10 minutes for his headaches* – that of course are caused by exactly these poisons. But this is well known the paradoxical principle, if not even intentional, to acquire gullible patients (aka cash cows): that once you start devouring them, you will become addicted to Ordeal's dishes instead of been cured of your (imagined or talked-into) "illnesses".

And when we see him sitting at a table racking his brains over Virginia's photo (crumpled up due to his rage), a pistol and an ashtray overflowing from his sleepless nights, it's also a trigger for me to ponder about some of Pedro's bizarre narrations – like his strange phobias (of risking his life or at least losing certain body parts because of his beloved) or how Virginia found his late uncle's weapon to stroll carelessly around with it and *scare her colleagues half to death* on the set of an unnamed film. But watch out: We can never be sure about the truth in his tales! He might have simply watched too many of her movies (as it is fact that many years later he would quote from *Interlude* to describe their complicated limbo); and indeed, just around the time of *The Man Upstairs* they watched *Indiscreet* together – with a plot very similar to theirs and even with an escalation of *a pistol to one's head*.

Even if the indoor scenes of *The Man Upstairs* were entirely filmed on the set of Shepperton, there are a few exterior sequences in a nightly street where at the end an ambulance is waiting to take the protagonist to the asylum. These scenes were made on location in Earls Court off Cromwell Road, just steps from the Scarsdale so that Virginia could walk to work for the first time.



Scarsdale Terrace is a typical Mid-Victorian street of semi-detached houses with stucco facades, inviting stairs to the ground floor and quite narrow steps leading to the basement (so that careless visitors have to watch out not to trip over dustbins on the way down, especially if they have elephant feet) – that’s the environment in which Virginia lived from end of ’57. And in contrast to most of her other dwellings (which remain largely in the dark due to her later discretion) we can well imagine her chamber from at least two different perspectives: A guy from the press (who wrote a rare home story of the raising star around the days of the *Island* release) found it in an invitingly tidy condition whereas Pedro uses to describe her tendency to domestic disorder (which may well be possible since throughout her youth she had to live only from a side-table in a crowded dormitory. And given the aspect that he also complained about her inedible dishes, probably due to the fact that she had always been catered, we must wonder what those pretty nuns had taught her except of kneeling and singing pious songs). However, her tiny cave included a bay window, a chimney with a pouffe beside (where she sat as Pedro listened to her angel’s voice in breathless rapture in January of this year) and a Victorian divan much like that of *Tina and Evan*. There was probably also an Aladdin lamp (bought by Pedro to decorate the West Mill shortly before they were expelled from their first love nest) as we will find it similarly later in the girl’s apartment in *Interlude*. What we know for sure is that she had a jar with 50 ciggies much to the taste of the reporter (and probably also to Pedro’s and her own delight) – well, I myself prefer to imagine the odour of fresh flower bouquets to stale smoke).

At her basement entrance she had a funny nameplate of the British Railways Services with the inscription *Reserved for Virginia Maskell*. How cute is this? She seems to have been rather happy here before Mephisto latched onto her life. And even if we know from her poems how eager she was to wear his name, we can assume she would never add *Ron Goblin* to the sign, given the sad fact that the delicate circumstances didn’t allow such openness at the moment. Since her gallant’s biggest efforts were now primarily aimed to avoid meeting Mary’s attorneys (whom he named with rather rude words which I’ll spare you to quote). But regardless those annoying folks, he enjoyed to submerge under his landlady’s duvet in her snugly divan – yeah, at that very place where he had kept watch at her bed edge some months before in the heat of the night after the *Catalyst*’s premiere. But we may guess that this time their sleep was less narcoleptic, even more given the fact that they were sometimes startled by the sudden approach of uninvited guests who would press their noses against the basement window. When I sneaked around on location, keen to find hints of Virginia’s past presence, I was rather disappointed to find not a single fragment that bears witness of her life (even less her plaque that I desperately sought for everywhere but couldn’t find anywhere, probably due to the ostracism that would later befall her). Beyond, it was a little challenge to take my photos when I first approached in the summer after Covid: A constable was hanging out under a street tree opposite, as exhausted by the heat as I was after miles of wandering, so that he didn’t seem to be inclined to leave his post and soon asked why I was taking intrusively photos (albeit rather quietly, at least not clattering with dustbin lids and more on mouse paws than elephant steps) on the property’s forecourt. But when I told him about the late lodgers just at our feet, he was also intrigued. Furthermore I felt suddenly reminded of another key scene not unimportant in our plot. Because when we stood on the pavement, some dweller in the cellar could have seen our shanks through the window bay, just like those of a certain guy who had once caught the couple in a passionate embrace. Back then, another naughty sleuth had been eager to prove adultery on Mary’s instructions. Ouch! Our heroine, just a good convent girl, was now a defendant in a legal dispute to become the reluctant protagonist of a divorce scandal (but the reader can rest assured that it was never mentioned in the cheesy press. Well, it was a time of many secrets).

Let's be honest, their life as spouses-in-sin wasn't really a heroic story in accordance with good morals and surely not appreciated by every contemporary, not even by Virginia herself since she longed for a conventional relationship. And albeit they were lucky to share their little retreat against all adversities, they didn't fade out that their togetherness was *more whole than holy* (as Pedro would later depict it) – also in a strange contrast to the fact that she still wore her cross as a devoted Catholic. Against the background of this rather oppressive situation, let's take a little retrospect to an eve some months ago when this was the stage of another key scene in our little chamber play. Indeed, it was Virginia who first regained her alert sense (that Pedro always claimed only for himself). She had realized the hopelessness of the partnership with her hesitant gallant who obviously wasn't inclined to decide for one or none of his Queens of Heaven – whether to stay with Mary or marry Virginia. But above all (as she emphasized herself), given her traumatic childhood experiences (when she was abandoned in the course of an ominous argument between her irresponsible parents), she now empathized with Mary and her children and wasn't inclined to do the same to them. And thus it was she who took the first initiative to end their concubinage in time before all of them involved would be swept away in a maelstrom of passions. Brave girl! But you will guess that it was Pedro who whispered to her like a goblin sitting on her neck to maintain the relationship which was much to his favour and according to his insatiable appetite. He was rather content with the prospect of being mothered long-term by both his spouses. And beyond, following further separations, he would be the one who always sneaks back like a dog, begs for forgiveness (something we literally know Virginia detested since *love means never having to say you're sorry*) and assure her of his *lasting friendship* (whatever that meant by Byron's standards), even if he would present it in opposite ways when his alter ego *Abelard* is the one trying to end the limbo again and again – by being cruel to *Heloise*.



The obscure place of their intended “last meeting” (which the little scout in me thinks to have found) took place near her home somewhere at Earls Court Road. Pedro bought a flower bouquet (probably at Rascall's, a well known society florist that still exists at the same corner) – maybe to cover up the stench of those myriads of cigarettes they would consume during this long night of high tension – before they spoke plainly in the pub next door. It was once the *Pembroke Arms* which is now called the *Hansom Cab* – ironically, since Mary was a descendent of that architect family whose best known representative had invented the popular cab in the Victorian era; it became world-famous through *Holmes and Watson* and their many wild rides through the *monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country*. After their final farewell with tears and terror, our desperate lovers also released stress by roaming through the gloomy streets on their own. And this could have been the end of their passion. But, happy is the bride(groom), their separation would only take half a night!

Look, there were these two lost vagrants in midst of Doyle's magnificent monster who would find each other again under almost unbelievable circumstances in one and the same (even if this time not a Hansom) cab at the junction of Kensington Church Street and Notting Hill Gate (a bustling quarter that had survived the Blitz to be currently demolished and refurbished with a couple of modernist carbuncles) where I remember that gaping excavation pit – also a bit symbolic, isn't it?! Virginia rushed into the cab, Pedro was just getting out – this is one of those many coincidences throughout their lives, as if conjured by Jung, if not by fate. Oh, they couldn't get away from each other! And now began for them (and also confusing for me, given their blurred traces) a long and often painful time between countless separations und reunions, and they would wander around restlessly over the coming years – to guess that it would be probably a tour de force for them to coordinate their schedule and setting; and perhaps that is why at least she will age a decade prematurely in just a few years.



Let's short stick with the backlot of the reunion at Notting Hill Gate and stroll through its neighbourhood that we know was Virginia's favourite. She liked to hang out here after a hard working day, alone or with Pedro together, and loved watching decades-old comedies on the silver screen in one of these cozy little cinemas (that still exist today) along the roaring main road. When the latter – one of those tentacles which stretch out westwards – makes a sudden turn at the foot of the modernist ensemble, it actually feels a bit like a gaping gateway through which we are sucked into *Downtown*. Northbound is a residential area that was socially quite different from today, rather shabby not yet refurbished, with a just developing Caribbean community and Calypso music sounding from the pubs – and if we follow our Creole heroine we can imagine her immersing herself in the cheerful crowd. Southbound of the bustling axis is a rather soothing sphere with decent terraced and detached houses, ascending onto Campden Hill – do you remember how we looked over there from the rear side of that mansion block in Holland Park Gardens where you were born and sadly soon trembled by your mother's hand behind the door in the L-shaped Room Upstairs? At the highest point of Audrey Walk rose an eccentric tower from the Victorian era – that was a breathtaking eye-catcher, not true? A little later, the Blitz transformed it into a no less bizarre ruin looking like a hollow tooth which was finally replaced by a pretty little housing cluster in the early '50s – I apologize for this digression without a particular connection to your life, yet it's one of these magical places where I was somehow struck by lightning (as is often the case on my restless wanderings) as if I had stood here many decades before; and thus I had to ponder if your toes have ever tickled the cobbles (and echoed through the lane as I thought to have heard in other moody places) on your own search for scraps of memory. And I could well assume that such a modernist cottage could have also been your dwelling dream, since it seems more appropriate for a carefree young lady than an ancient manor overburdened with tradition and dreadful duties – but I admit that this is just another of my weird associations. By the way, next to the cluster is the house where the singer and telly presenter Dusty would live in a loft from 1968 onwards. At the next corner (separated by another atmospheric lane that runs along the entire park wall and also reminds us of our *Suspect* location) is the entrance to the wilderness of Holland Park, a little-noticed green idyll in Kensington's hustle and bustle with a youth hostel shaped like a cloister which was also completed early in the '50s just at the same time when you left your cozy convent; and I tend to assume (since this is the very green lung closest to most of your homes) you might have enjoyed chilling here under sheltering plane trees (even if we know that Pedro preferred Kensington Gardens, especially when he caught carps from the edge of the Pond for your cold kitchen from time to time). What is fact is that in this area on both sides of Holland Park Avenue some not unimportant sequences of *BLOW-UP* and *Interlude* would be filmed a decade later, and both residences look so much like yours – southbound is the basement chamber where a green girl would welcome her old gallant, northbound is the studio where a mysterious lady and a young photographer would come together.





But spoiler alert: Just like in *Interlude* our protagonists won't be blessed with a happy ending as Pedro will fight to avoid divorce – regardless of the fact that his wife had long since replaced him with a Sapphic friend. But he still liked to make himself comfortable in the beehives of more than one queen (what of course is every man's desire, at least according to his theories) – while Virginia was eagerly trying to be granted with a golden gem as the goal of all her dreams (what is fundamentally every woman's driving force since *women invented monogamy*, for whatever absurd reasons that remained hidden from Pedro). We may find in this discrepancy of gender-related demands a striking proof for the fact that men and woman just don't fit together. They should stay among themselves

to find their paths of happiness (so far a little philosophic contribution from your outlandish narrator). Anyway, if they had unravelled their ragged patchwork in time, all of them entangled could have lived a more or less contented life with appropriate companions. But the tissue of their relationship would remain an endless limbo without ever being cleared or ceased. In the face of their War of the Roses, Pedro didn't conceal his turmoil either. And so he will later quote a bosom friend's advice:

*You make a mistake (by not confessing)! Virginia adores you. Marry her or she'll leave you!*

And his divorce attorney (bewildered if not disgusted by the scoundrel's mastery) admonished Pedro: *You can't be in love with both your mistress and your wife!*

Pedro's delicious answer was: *Why not? I like both red wine and white wine!* – a quote to remember (and to assume that *Only Two Can Play* would hardly be a movie title from his eager pen). Since our drunken drone continued to flutter excitedly between his desirable queens, he also got caught in a tempest of psychosomatic complaints (that he would share in detail with the inclined reader) like the *Imaginary Invalid*, even if the more delightful the more at least one of them would take loving care of him, preferably in a hussar's or a nurse's uniform; and since we know from the greatest of all masters that *there is a nurse and a nesting hen hidden in every woman*, was that to be expected. But let's be honest: isn't it the fondest dream of every little Werewolf to be nourished like by Jenny (who would become Ginny's successor as another *English Rose* and the sweetest nurse ever seen on screen)?

Despite the decent care that Pedro received, the hesitant would apparently one day feel so drained from his balancing act that he would see a doctor at the end of '59 – ironically, that very man whom Virginia had once recommended to *the Catalyst* in order to help him getting better by reflecting on his weird views on stage and in life. And this wicked quack will whisper to him like a little man in his ear: "Tis time to dump your mate and move into my backyard!" – that's called professional distance, huh?!



Once upon a day Virginia incited the long drive to her former convent in the outback of Essex in order to present Pedro to Mother Superior. They loved each other and were said to be as close as an adoptive mum and her favourite daughter. Thus the latter was eager to have her relationship blessed, which was so much against her belief. And the inclined reader will guess that her husband-in-sin was not really amused to be dragged into the spotlight and scrutinized by such a close confidant, even less been urged to get out of his comfort zone with still the pleasant prospect of being fondled by more than one wife; yet he agreed to be introduced into the beehive and even to the queen who was recommended to him as his most devoted reader (perhaps given the fact that he was pretty famous for writing pseudo-religious verses); and probably so flattered, he accompanied Virginia to her fondest place on earth.



We know for sure that Wain Hall was Virginia's one and only home, as our orphaned little sparrow emphasized herself. Since she had been thrown out of her true nest in her early childhood, she longed for nothing more than a real, lasting family. She had become estranged from her *biological mother*, who had fallen out with her father in the course of an ominous struggle (so that afterwards the parents never met again or spoke a word to each other a single day in their entire lives), probably married a dashing officer and certainly dumped her poor puppy behind dark cloister walls. Virginia never coped with these events and the relation of mother and daughter was icy. I promise that these disturbing facts are written down in Pedro's memoirs and other literary sources exactly in her own words. Therefore, instead of hanging out with her beloved brothers, she found herself left behind in front of gloomy cloister walls, just surrounded by her heavy luggage (or rather she felt like the latter since she was obviously too much of a burden for that callous woman) on another of those many car parks where she would often be marooned during her lived road movie; and once locked up behind the bars, she may have exclaimed as she looked through the foggy panes: „I don't want to be here!“ – but no one harked. Nevertheless, she submitted to her fate and felt to be home in a flock of sisters.

And look what irony: she became (respectively believed to be) absolutely happy and sheltered in her orphanage; and so she soon adopted the Canonesses, who led the institution, as her better relatives. And vice-versa, Virginia seemed like a sunray through the chapel's gloomy panes (probably given the fact that the nuns were united in holy melancholy) and thus she was caressed as their favourite child (perhaps under the jealous glances of the other pupils; but let's hope that all the chicks were angels). And it is no wonder that everyone (apart from her mother) was overwhelmed by her genuine beauty and gentleness: Virginia was the living Madonna! She stretched her swan neck to the sky, ennobled by her proudly worn cross, and looked transfigured through her magical eyes; but first of all she raised her angel's voice and breathed the mightiest verses like Shakespeare or Shelley themselves – into the ether, into the souls! That was her; and all the nuns and mates worshipped their idol (until Mephisto would approach for a more effective appearance in the course of his Pageant through the holy halls).



But first of all she attracted their attention as an actress. So we can find our young protagonist in the role of the enchanting *Livvy* in *Quality Street*; and she appeared in many other (more or less profound) society comedies that were highly acclaimed in the early '50s (and they are still well remembered). The stage class of Wain Hall was renowned wide beyond the convent walls. The inmates did not lost themselves by chance in cheesy counterworlds of Barrie and Co but probably to suppress the fact that they were abandoned by their pitiless parents in a Pan bubble. Indeed, these institutes are often famous for their stages, due to the principle of replacing genuine emotions with superficial art form – let's just think of the Bonnie Prince, as it is said that he found on stage a rare retreat from his callous environment. To play life instead of living! To articulate yourself artificially in order not to be mocked by nasty mates and ignorant teachers for your tears in the pillows; to wear strong appearing masques (if you are a boy) or cheerful ones (if you are a girl), because, in the face of homesickness and competition, you are unable or unwilling to show true feelings in the hostile crowd. And once you are expelled from your deceptive bubble, you can hardly cope with the challenges outside and you are presented as canon fodder (if you are a youngling) or as yummy fresh flesh (if you are a debutante) on the tables of the rakes, as you were conditioned to serve only (the maintenance of "social order" – whatever that means other than pleasing the palates of petrified elites and powerful people. Boo!).

However, given her charisma on stage from an early age, Virginia was advised to become an actress. And thus she was pushed into the spotlight, regardless of her shy and gentle nature. Twas one of these many wrong decisions mostly made by others; and the gullible good girl always followed her advisors. That's how it began, her professional wander. And let's look how it is written in a cinema brochure: *The nuns at the convent school would make excellent talent scouts. For they noted her acting in religious plays – and prompted her to make acting her career. It paid off handsomely. For she found success in television and then leapt to screen stardom in "Virgin Island." Now she takes another step in her exciting career. She stars in "Suspect", playing one of a team of scientists who are suddenly gagged by the Official Secrets Act (that sounds familiar). And thus she confirms the view the nuns had: that Virginia Maskell is an actress with a great future.* Umm, let me add, my odd Sisters, with regard to the effects: Thanks for nothing! Neither for wisdom nor for empathy. That was a really poor advice.



Wain Hall is located in the desolate Great Plains of Essex where certainly no one born and bred in London's comfortable West would want to hang over the fences. It's a stocky old house, Jacobean looking, on ancient Tudor foundations – and, indeed, Ol'Mad Henry was up to mischief here together with some of his ill-fated mistresses (we will later hear more about poor Anne and her damsells who would also be portrayed in one of many school plays in the late '40s, of course starring Miss Maskell). A bold avenue leads over a mile to the front that was then protected by a couple of cedars (sadly only one is left). The property extended in large open space (which is currently being devoured by Post-Modern settlements) almost like an ornamented farm with horse meadows, a petting zoo, an Aylesbury duck pond, orchards and kitchen gardens, where young Miss Maskell used to snuggle in a haystack (what was actually captured in pictures) while sharing ciggies with her mates (which is most likely) and sending smoke signs into freedom – to certainly provoke rebukes from the decent nuns (which I would rarely support). And there was even a pool in the park that felt rather like the Arctic Ocean. Many mates used to get a cold in it (as they like to tell us when they are still able and not lying in the earth on the Canonesses graveyard because they suffered from consumption); but the few who survived this shock treatment were hardened for their future labour.

Sports has always had a high status in all these educational institutes, and for many good reasons: to maintain the principle of competition and prevent the inmates from reflecting on their slavery against the background of exhaustion (and you will guess that I refused to dance to their tune and I can look back proudly on the fact that, of course, I was a decade long always the last one on the sports bench). And in this sense we hear also rumours about wood runs at Wain Hall that whole the flock had to complete every single day of the year, early in the morning, against wind and weather – probably in order to train the chicks to longer stand upright during the messes, or rather to crouch, without their backs hurting (since we know for sure that they had to live *more on knees than on feet*), but all the more so to cut a good figure on their debutante ball so that blasé Cavaliers can pick out their specimen for a tasty soup one day; eyed by many mothers who are keen for a proper son-in-law regardless of their daughter’s true needs (namely, good souls rather than big purses, swords or mouths, even less glitter and titles) – since all the chickens, once released from their farm, were determined to fit into another, more glamorous flock at the Vanity Fair; to get stuck in a petrified class system and submit to its representatives with suppressive gestures from the Middle Ages. Nay, free people bow to no one! Anyway, who wouldn’t be enchanted by young Miss Maskell who always looked like the Madonna in her radiant white gown? (Even if with burn marks; and your inner Urchin may sometimes have been inclined to stick your tongue at them. I apologize, my little rascal. You know I’m just kidding, as you were for sure a well-bred young lady, and everyone was immediately taken by your noble restraint.)



As we approach the manor, we may be overwhelmed by its impressive facade which is crowned by magnificent tall chimneys and structured with repetitive bay windows. But woe betide you, the latter looked less impressive from inside, as the Spartan dormitories were located here with curtained clinic cots standing in long rows; and even the sinks were open in the bays, ice-cold in the hazy mornings and lacking any intimacy like in a POW camp! This is undoubtedly the right place where pubescent girls mocked each other for their peculiarities, such as hairy shanks and boyish backs. Although many photos can be found in public sources, I must refrain from sharing them, given my slightly critical depiction; yet I couldn’t resist the temptation to borrow a single impression considering how the chamber makes me shudder as if it comes from a Poe tale. This is how I imagine children’s limbo!

To be squeezed together in sticky, noisy wards, breathe foul air in the nightly miasma, listen to the cough of the ill-fated mates who suffer from consumption and to a thousand sighs from all the lonely souls who have cried themselves to sleep, given their longing to come home and reunite with their foolish parents, regardless how carelessly the latter had dumped their true gems like heavy luggage; and when they pressed their little red noses into cold pillows, hopefully there was a stuffed animal (*Pumpkin, Rupert, Pedro*, or whatever they were called back then) that gave them at least a brief moment of comfort. Given these circumstances throughout growing up, Virginia had no room for privacy but just a tiny box (to be tempted to call it Pandora’s), so that she never learned to be alone and take care of herself; and thus she may have been conditioned to her syndrome of untidiness. But first of all this is the place where our heroine may have developed strategies in order not to become insane in her cage and even get to sleep by calming down her metabolism in a kind of narcoleptic trance. But as for my particular perception, I may just be a little too influenced by readings of Brontë. By the way, those bathroom sinks! If I remember correctly, isn’t it rumoured that one of the ill-fated inmates slipped on a bar of soap and broke her neck so that her mourning spectre can be still seen in one of the bays in the mirror? Oh my, that’s certainly not a place any girl would want to stay forever! But perhaps I confuse these events with an episode from a strange children’s film series that I saw on telly some years later (to quickly pull the plug since it seemed to me like a propaganda show for public schools and their petrified staff (who allegedly gained new hope thanks to this second-rate advertisement when they were just in a phase of long-lasting decline) of a certain female author who would besides attract attention with her interesting contributions to social discourses (such as about

diversity and gender order) that sound a bit like dug out of an Iron Age mound (in good company with some folks on the other side of the ocean who currently blow in even larger Trumpets). And although I heartily detest this ossified stuff, let's short stick with those crude nightmare fantasies:

Apart from the aspect that almost all the goodies died whereas the baddies survived (that reminds of the sinking of the Rhone, which was steered to its doom by careless leaders), the paradox height is that the protagonists would dump one day their poor little children in the same dreadful school, regardless of how they themselves had once suffered from the maltreatment by quirky, negligent or even evil masters. Obviously, the maker of this nonsense adores patriarchal structures that will be never overcome by parents who gave up their own brains, free will and feelings for their offspring at the same school gate long since ago – and this is the principle of how the baton is passed across the generations throughout the entire history of so-called “civilisation”, sadly in reality without Barrie's rose-coloured glasses. These upper-class parents, conditioned in the flock like gullible sheep, may even believe it's for their own and their children's best, but this husbandry is only for the benefit of shepherds who are keen on their fleece, or worse, for the good of wild wolves (sometimes in sheep's clothing) who want their meat (and especially that of tasty good girls who are just destined to serve). They all shared a cheerless childhood, were penned up in barracks or lived in (not even) gilded cages where they had to kneel every boring Sunday in the chapel until their spines hurt while they sang pious psalms and were stunned by unctuous phrases – just as later with pills and potions, instilled by the quacks at the behest of their husbands so that their little birdies continue to chirp sweetly; and in order to prevent them from racking their brains or breaking their wings (or even worse, their bars to fly away from their servitude to freedom).

The metal cots of these unfortunates remind us of cages on a chicken farm or how Lady Isabel had to lodge on Edward Longshank's command (to be released from the dreadful gaol many years later totally devastated, both mentally and physically, so that she passed away in a convent just short after): *Let her be closely confined in an abode of iron, made in the shape of a cross, and let her be hung up out of doors in the open air, that both in life and after her death, she may be a spectacle!*



Dreadful dormitories, regardless of whether in public schools or asylums or barracks, they are all grizzly gaols and no one can maintain their mental health therein. That's how I imagine hell on earth! And what's their only purpose? To integrate you into the herd and condition you for war (if you are a gent) or pregnancy (if you are a lady) to forge the elite in the lifelong competition in the pecking order. On the direct path from the school grounds through the trenches or the maternity wards to the military hospitals or asylums. From cage to cage, that is the principle, a life in step, prescribed by institutions; condemned to make the rounds in a patronizing system. Once a slave always a slave!

Our poor reluctant heroine will also be laid in these bed cages again and again during her half-numbered wandering through the institutions, as if she were sleeping through an endless nightmare. And thus we can imagine her later in the asylum suffering some flashbacks of those sickening sinks in the convent bays (where she was unable to hide her hairy limbs), but now surrounded by drooling lunatics and lecherous keepers who are eager to catch a glimpse of such a magnificent statue like they had never seen before. It could be the culmination of her traumatizing degradation – and a nice reminder (not to call it the final arc) of her awkward adolescence, not true?! And don't be vain; don't hope for a bonus based on your previous status as an adored actress or a fine lady, ha, ha! Once you are in this abyss, you are no longer an individual but nothing more than the woman of the crowd, desperately struggling in the midst of a beast cage, exposed to the scum of humanity who croaks after you like a granny with a goiter in a certain care home on the Southbank: *"Come on, darling: move yer bloomin' shanks!"*

Well, let's calm down and be sober again. Virginia's convent was surely a safe place for an innocent young girl, all the more so since there were no male threats lurking in sinister corners – apart from perhaps some parsons and (what is widely attested) a houseward with Baskerville dogs to the fright of every little girl; but given the fact that our brave protagonist was attracted to all animal creatures (and vice-versa), we may well imagine her roaming with the dogs across the green meadows of the ornamented farm to everyone's astonishment. That's a soothing sequence – very much in contrast to Horror on the Hill where Pedro was brought up in one of Britain's most notorious wolf pits. And we know for sure that he detested his school days which were nothing but a long ordeal so that he didn't understand at all why both his mistress and his wife spoke about their convent time with love; but what is even stranger is that he wouldn't refrain from letting his son suffer in the same place – another sad example for how the baton is passed on from parents to offspring until one misfit will boldly dare to stop the chain-reaction of false education and finally break the evil principle of deporting children in educational orphanages. Where so many fellow sufferers were bullied for whole their stolen youth to *learn all about (good and) evil*, how to become a pretty chauvinist (and may even have developed attitudes that are considered *unnatural*) by warming the loo seats of the elder and submit to the lashes of autocratic educators who derive their rights from ossified conventions. Until free spirits will take their right, which is given by nature, not by convention, and flog those evil folks through the corridors. A righteous way how to get out of the young person's guide to patriarchal submission is indeed shown by Malcolm in 1968 with a big bang. Good boy! *IF*... you know, you know.



Only brain-dead monsters give their parental rights into the hands of any institution to allow their offspring to be conditioned against their needs and nature, just as themselves once were, and be kept on a leash like dogs, at the mercy of brutes, to the bitchiness of elder mates and the grudge of teachers. In the darkness behind mighty portals, it's an open secret what is done to them: Nothing but emotional neglect, mental maltreatment and physical abuse. Thus the homeless orphans leave these schools holistically broken, traumatized for their entire lives. But discretion is kept across the generations.

In contrast, lest we forget Maya's wisdoms on the Islands in the Sun: "Don't let the kids be cut into an art form in any quirky nursery! Let them sprout according to their nature, breathe like lonely trees in the open meadow with unbridled, twisted branches stretching towards the sky, instead of squeezing them into human corsets so that they become topiary cartoons for the decadent taste or hollow trunks standing at attention in long rows like the military. Let everyone be their own tree!"

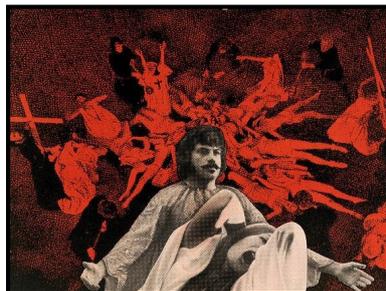
Worshipping *Paideia* – to deform people according to an ideal instead of nurturing their nature – that's the really evil principle. To hark on the repetitive beat of the Ps – parsons, parents and pedagogues! Phew! The disciples of paternalism consider the foul lessons as fair; but since it was beaten into them just as much, they secretly long to be redeemed by a young generation that has finally enough and cut off the olde braids. Never heat up the seats for the old butts again! Dash them like a Potter's vessel! Who legitimates them to condition us like Pavlov Dogs? Conventions from the Middle Ages to the benefit of those who are eager to rule and determine how others have to live according to their ideas. Legality derives only from nature, not from the art form of a system and its leaders – who are actually the greatest of all cripples, since they were crushed in the same mills (so that they deserve pity, if not urgent help to be released instead of being worshipped – just imagine these great masters naked on the loo seat and there will no respect be left!). But their chalice was passed down through a thousand generations: *Suffer little children* as your grandparents did, submit yourselves to the patriarchal hierarchy! There are just two ways to cope with these oppressive circumstances: to assimilate (the dishonest and slowly poisoning one) or to boldly resist and thus become free, *IF*... with fire and fury!

But, but... we aren't all destined to become resistance fighters unless we revelled in '68. That was her! And since our birdie was blessed with a good heart and a gullible mind and thus with every ability to adapt completely – even easier when you are the darling in your flock – it felt wonderfully nestled in its cage. Beep, beep! Until the evil weasels out there would devour it with every single feather.



And indeed, like Petra Pan she came never out of her Barrie bubble. Virginia returned to her convent always and always again. A photo from June '54 probably shows her (while she studied at the RADA school) on occasion of her first graduation anniversary – I am rather sure to recognize her convent's multi-purpose theatre hall – as she sits at a banquet table in a white gown and once again looks like a bride (maybe in search of a proper groom) with such a radiant smile from the bottom of her heart as if she were giving us a sign how happy she was in this blessed place. We will later see her only once similarly shining (just short before her tracks begin to disappear into the Chiltern's fog) when she plays the main role of *Perpetua, the good spirit of the house*, in *The Pageant of Wain Hall* in 1964, dressed as a Canoness, with her arms outstretched and looking so fulfilled as if she had never been anywhere else; and those who witnessed this great moment still speak with awe about her performance. Good people – this is called culture of remembrance!

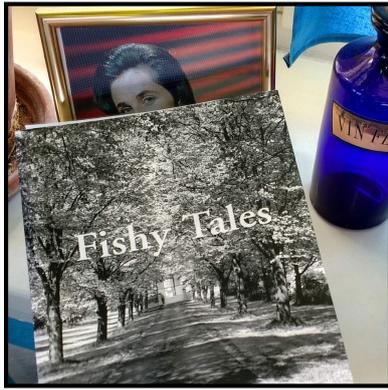
But let's stick with her equally unforgettable visit in 1958. Having knocked at Mother's door in the holy halls, our spouses-in-sin probably expected a mighty thunderstorm to pour down on their heads (and Pedro may have thought how rudely Abelard had once been treated against a similar background so that he had to join the herd of geldings afterwards) – but the inclined readers will rub their eyes in confusion. Do you guess what happened? Mother, instead of giving them a good talking to, approved the forbidden love! Is it believable? Perhaps she felt sorry with the damsell in distress when she found her favourite daughter so lost in passion; but allegedly she was also keen on Pedro's autograph in all his works which were actually locked in her closet. And Rod (who is much more of a moralist than I am so that we often argued properly about questions of interpretation), considers this moment as the very beginning of Virginia's *way to the tomb*. Nay, I have to say! On the contrary, they should have stayed together until the end of all days and not cared what others thought. Love comes from nature, not from convention, and does not require legitimation! It doesn't need blessings and pieces of metal – well, so far my personal opinion, and the baffled audience must surely not agree; and even less Virginia who struggled like a lioness throughout her short life to be a good wife with a proper ring.



The event was not over yet. Whole the little sisters swarmed around the scoundrel in a weird trance like gnats seeking for the light and he was pleased to be surrounded by those cross-wearing ladies who were eager to get his autograph (if not his kid), in a kind of collective Obsession like once the Nuns of Loudon danced around Father Grandier and his devoted Jeanne (and it wouldn't end well either for Oliver and Vanessa in 1971 – by the way, another role in which I would have liked to see our star).

Did his Muse suspect on that morning that this very day would become *Mephisto's Pageant*?

Last but not least Virginia was eager to proudly present Pedro the statue of the Holy Virgin which was sculpted for the school chapel in the early '50s after the modell of an obscure young pupil; the latter was allegedly everyone's darling and blessed with heavenly beauty (albeit due to different statements we can't be sure who the modell was). By the way, imagining the nuns venerating this statue seems a bit strange to me, given the usual restrained monastic attitude. Isn't it a symbol of vanity?



One day I had a little correspondence with the Canonesses who friendly sent the *Fishy Tales*, an exciting trip through Wain Hall's rich history from the alumni perspective (seasoned with their memories, largely happy ones but also some doubtful facts). They confirmed that the statue still exists and there are *three different opinions about who it was modelled after*. But when they were just about to send me a picture, I dared to quote Mephisto's memories (with even a copy of his statements or rather their former Superior, confirming that it was certainly Young Miss Maskell) and – ouch! – from that very moment they never contacted me again (annoyed about the reading or raided by another cheeky Fritz who possibly tends to perceive the world a little too much through Panda eyes,

who knows). Or they felt a dark menace that one day the quirky stranger could scatter nasty gossip about their peaceful green meadows, or even worse, misuse their (and his) most revered graduate to proclaim his strange paradigms like a little goblin on her neck – but this is of course completely foreign for me since my only intention is to trace her wander through the institutions which sadly started at this place, neither more nor less, and led her from Wain Hall to Wain Hill, and vice versa.

Virginia never had a choice; no one ever asked her where SHE liked to be. Since early childhood, others determined her habitat. Once trying to become a good girl, confronted with the savages out there, she couldn't cope with this challenge, so simple, so fatal. Since she had been thrown out of her warm nest into a cold world of manifold temptations, she lacked any hold and haven and longed for a shelter. Thus we can imagine her coming home to the blessed place where she was so happy, floating along the avenue through the wildflower meadow in search of the grove with the hidden graveyard where she once sat immersed in reading like in a long enduring narcoleptic trance. And in the face of such heavenly beauty: who wouldn't be inclined to follow in her footsteps through the countryside?



As for the end of communication, let me say that this collective syndrome is symptomatic. When the poet is mentioned, everybody becomes stubborn – and that's why I better stick with *Pedro* in my little story. Beware (paranoid) folks: never call his real name (even less together with hers) if you don't want to be blocked by non-transparent algorithms (or obscure people watching us with google eyes)! But what is worse, I didn't get my promised picture! And since I must abstain from burrowing through closets too close to our charming brute, I couldn't see the snapshot of their session either that still exists (even with a certain number which I found out one day) in his estate at the University of Exeter. Therefore I have to imagine her statue like Santa Teresa in the catholic church of Risboro. Even if there is no single hint, I am tempted to assume that our heroine would later attend the service there. Once on location, I had the sudden brainwave that this statue could have also been shaped after her model or even been moved with her from Wain Hall – but this quirky idea was probably just hatched on my exhausting descent from Wain Hill in the first oppressive summer after Covid. *Twas so hot!*



Let's return to the storyline back then. In the face of the Madonna, Pedro had as usual his very own perception of the situation. According to his tales, Virginia's dress was more showy rather than chaste and thus it contrasted with the sculpture, much to his delight, as he always wants to make us believe that two souls struggled in her chest between sense and sensuality – and with him even more, *thirsting together only for love*. But he actually demonstrated once again his ignorance about why she had dressed in a red (or maroon) gown for this special occasion, namely as a reference to the colours of her convent's uniform. This maybe a further evidence of her deep sense of belonging to her most beloved place. And we'll find in countless pictures that she wore these colours whole about her life (that, by the way, harmonize with her strong complexion, chestnut hair and hazel eyes); and beyond, she even chose maroon vehicles from her first boat until her last car – to set off with the latter one day to a *drive to a beautiful spot in the country*.

I won't spare you with my view either: It would have been better for her to take off her dress in time. Every single uniform all around the globe is an insult of nature! There's no more effective cruelty than urging kids in uniforms, the beginning of the chain reaction of the loss (respectively the rape) of their individuality. Every single displayed denomination to any group or system – whether represented by symbols, colours, flags, hymns or brand marks – means nothing but conformation and subordination in the bleating herd. Those who have allowed themselves to be branded and predicated by any random power (which considers it fair to act against nature) will burn in their Nessus shirts throughout their lives – and what is worst is that they will pass the straightjacket on to their offspring. Lest we forget how Miss Maskell expressed her preference of clothing when she first breathed freedom on her Creole adventure: in Eve's natural costume! Can you guess why? With regard to the awkward clothing of her stolen youth – as her suffering mates remember it: *highly uncomfortable* since it was extremely *scratchy* (and even more daring if you are hanging out in a haystack with the ciggie passing around!).



As we heard, Virginia always proudly wore her cross, even never took it off on set and stage as a young actress. Not long after Mephisto had seduced her, she tore it off her neck (and this is both literally and visually proven). In fact, her life was a delicate limbo between nature and convention, a long enduring battle to put her partnership (that was so much against her moral ideas or how she had been conditioned) on a legitimate basis; and none of those allegedly close to her appreciated her fight. Let's briefly mention *In your hands*, one of her earliest and most passionate poems: In every single verse she merges with Pedro beyond the pain of threshold – *except with his name*, which she was eager to wear like a holy robe; and yet she would never reach the golden goal. For obscure reasons this poem will be embezzled in the *Agenda* millennium edition, released in 2002 on occasion of Pedro's 20th death anniversary. Whereas 16 poems are announced (exactly like in Pedro's issue *Silent Leaves*), only 15 are printed – that's a thing, huh? Even four decades after the fatal incidents, some obscure people seemed to have been eager to maintain the sovereignty over Virginia's life – but I may tend to over-interpret and it's only a print failure (nay!). *If...* she had lived carefree just according to her needs, instead of like a statue to everyone's delight, she could have entered the path of happiness in time.



Short before Christmas '58, and if it sounds strange regarding their icy relation, Virginia moved from her basement chamber to the bigger flat of her mother (who had just settled in Germany) in Dolphin Yard, together with Pedro as her *heavy luggage* (to quote his sometimes likeable self-ironic words) who was still hiding from Mary's divorce attorneys. This claustrophobic superblock is located at the Thames embankment in Pimlico rather outside her usual habitat and preferences of rural housing westbound. Dolphin Yard is said to be London's, if not Britain's, most notorious residence, burdened with sinister tales of murders, suicides, jealousy and spy dramas – and it happened almost exactly at this time that two young women moved in who would soon be the protagonists of the *Profumo affair*. But of course, these are incidents without any connection to Virginia's private little tempest, I must emphasize that to the inclined reader who might be eager to spin a larger plot beyond our little chamber play (albeit I myself would have liked to have seen our little sparrow on a more adventurous flight beyond the horizon, regardless of what is considered fair or foul). Virginia was surely not entangled in annoying politics (even if we learned that she had been, in juvenile ardour, keen on daring deeds and that she would become a bit involved in nature conservation and charity work). Some bigamist adulteries of a little-known actress and a playwright in decline would have hardly been big stuff for the contemporary cheesecake press – and indeed, her secret love nest would be never mentioned until 1977. The spouses-in-sin were the masters of discretion; and the times were more relaxed before internet pirates would spread nasty gossip, even if relatives and friends (and most likely her colleagues at the latest after her near-fatal mishap during the *Doctor's* filming) eyed their whimsical companionship, more or less amused. And thus the naughty sleuth we met in the Scarsdale wouldn't get further information, not least due to the building's volumen and its confusing structure with miles of gloomy galleries connecting the house blocks (which are all named after naval heroes, even if not Buccaneers) – much to Pedro's benefit, who used to sneak through the secret war tunnels during his persistent divorce battle. And he liked to enter the ensemble from the block that was accidentally named after a lesser-known figure like himself to approach his landlady's flat on silent paws like a little mouse that fears being eaten by the cat. The latter lodged in a block named after a highly popular naval officer whose remains were brought back to Britain in a barrel after he had found the appropriate heroic death in a certain battle off a Spanish cape protruding from the abyss. On one of my trips Pedro's block was just in refurbishment and I was granted to find all the entrances invitingly open so that I could wander in his footsteps through the galleries in awe (well, these are the sad highlights of a location spotter's life to immerse yourself in spheres and vitae more important than your own) and once again I felt like I was part of the big game and (it may sound presumptuous) blessed to walk with our late protagonist through the present by my hand like Orpheus and Eurydice.



Let me briefly add an interesting, even if anachronistic digression that is once again not really related to our main plot: Exactly two decades later, another ill-fated Lady (coincidentally also with spatial connections to both Earls Court and Kensington) will care for chicks in a nursery just at the corner of Dolphin Yard before she herself would become a chess mate (or cheep meat) on the Royal plate.

But let's also stick with the mentioned admiral. He may be well remembered as a popular sea hero, but honestly he wasn't a nice guy either, given the fact how he sacked Copenhagen in 1803 to tear the peaceful Danes from their narcolepsy and forced us into a war that had nothing to do with us (with the effect that my far ancestor Earnest had to declare the state bankruptcy in 1813 and, by the way, to mourn the loss of the family fortune). And as far as he ignored the events of Naples, where thousands of brave democrats were tortured to death in the *theatre of horror* to the ridicule of a rotten royal line (incidents that were so disturbing even for the hearty taste of the contemporary audience that they found their way into Sade's true tales), with his eyes wide shut, and how he became obsessively lost in his love affair with Lady Hamilton, he did not cover himself with glory. Which proves once again: Heroes don't exist. They are just vain! A wise man throws away his weapons, keeps to stay alone and submerges until the turmoil is over – that's how Hippo Knautschke survived the Battle of Berlin – that is always conjured up by the same savages who make war instead of love and let us pay the price. That's the chauvinist principle through all times and peoples. And anyway, it isn't worth struggling for anything worldly, even less any denomination, society or leadership, beyond your own dream; rather, it's more soothing to observe the disturbance from the distance of an eagle's nest.

We will never know what Virginia's patchwork thought about her heroic lodger (since he rather mentioned them or any of her friends for some obscure reasons), but we may guess that they were not really amused about her whimsical choice. What we literally know is that her brothers sometimes slept in the hallway (oddly enough and hard to believe, but maybe they were discreet and didn't snitch her to their mother; as we heard the siblings were very close) while Pedro pondered about why his lovely nurse was rather careless and behaved like a frigid squid on these occasions. Against it, her very first act had been to build another *raft of love* by swapping her tiny divan with a much too big bed in a much too small chamber – so we are tempted to assume that it felt pretty satisfying to establish her love in mother's abandoned nest. But unfortunately our poor heroine wouldn't really be happy here, since this very place will be connected with a couple of conflicts over a one-year-period in sad contrast to her former outdoor adventures – so that one day she will wake up pretty disillusioned.



And hardly had they moved in, the whimsical couple should experience their one and only Christmas more or less together, rather a sad, if not even traumatic experience with long lasting impacts, given the fact that Pedro set off on a sudden journey westward ho to his abandoned family (who slammed the door in his face; afterwards he suffered an Odyssey of a day trip back through half the country, which was so dramatic that it found its way in his works to be later frequently quoted); and he let his mistress smoulder (just like her goose in the AGA, that became meanwhile blacker than his panda eyes) lonely in the cold kitchen – her strangest habitat, by the way, as we learn now at the latest from Pedro's nice depiction that she was a dreadful cook (and thus rather not the ideal of a contemporary marriage candidate; Pedro, on the other hand, used to serve her chicken curry). Well, let us be honest: this is the fate of every mistress. And we will later watch together a fictional scene much like this when a gullible young girl is similarly treated by her treacherous companion who prefers to hang out with his buddies while she cooks passionately and waits later desperately for her love in her basement flat – to assume that the plot of *Interlude* could be one day like a déjà-vu for our poor protagonist.

But around these Advent days our lady was also rather busy to hold the lamp high while most of her fellows preferred to dance on the tables (remember the *two sides of Miss Maskell?*). She led a small bunch of disciples through cloudy care homes on the Southbank and encouraged the elderly folks by singing happy Cockney songs (as the convent mates used to care for the less-fortunate after singing pious songs in Chelmsford Cathedral at Christmas). But we may assume that the impressions were less edifying than disturbing to our highly receptive soul. Virginia might have been triggered to express some of her experiences poetically: Her most obscure poem *Hospital* sounds oppressive, if not even threatening, when we approach poor ol'inmates, some of them with abominable goiters, who can hardly articulate themselves and seem to be eyed by fierce authorities lurking behind the alcove curtains who even deny them the ciggies – that's of course the biggest menace! But first of all, as faced with neglect and decline, Virginia pondered about the transience of everything worldly. She asked herself whether an unknown granny, who had died alone in her bed just after her visit, would be mourned by the world like a certain Pope who had passed away in the same night. Since the latter can only be Pius XII, the events can be dated to October '58 – to resume that her tale might have also been inspired by earlier experiences. Indeed, we literally know that in this autumn Pedro was hospitalized due to abdominal complaints that he liked to describe in every hearty detail; and according to his ideal that *a nurse and nesting hen is hidden in every good woman*, Virginia sat at his bed edge to comfort him. It happened just on those October days when *Virgin Island* was released – and thus she neglected her public appearance. She will later tell to the press that she watched her own premiere hidden in the corner of a little cinema *scared half to death* like a tiny mouse (certainly due to her shyness, but probably also related to the highly stressful circumstances). And we hear from Pedro that his little birdie didn't even know how to put on her feather dress without his wise advice. Oh my, that's a big contrast to her sparkling adventures one year before when she boldly flew on the wings of the seagull over the Islands in the Sun! Thus we may assume that she would never forget this time of disillusion which increased in her forlornness at the cold stove, so that the kitchen sank in a sea of sobs – and I am tempted to forecast she might suffer flashbacks of these cloudy events in any future autumn.



One year later Dolphin Yard would become indeed the stage for one of the hottest explosions and saddest episodes of our concubinage. Both spouses-in-sin came home quite upset, the one from a conspiratorial meeting, the other from any stressful works or basically depressed by ominous autumnal memories (if not simply both of them annoyed about the dish that was burned again, who knows). Thus he blurted out the *fait accompli* that he would leave their flat *stante pede*. Ouch, that hit home! Let's briefly enlighten the reasons which led to the climax hidden behind closed doors. The audience, of course, had no idea back then (in contrast to a second, this time almost fatal drama some months later that will be publicly announced) that the *Doctor in Love (or Despair)* threatened to become a total disaster due to the sudden loss of its leading actress. In fact, our conscientious doctress had to change her doctor's dress with the patient's wing shirt in autumn '59 short before the filming, due to Pedro's sudden decision to move into the backyard of his suggestive quack – a lesson in male solidarity and probably a smart idea how to acquire resident patients, not true?! Do you remind the dude Virginia had once recommended to him? Yeah, he is back! And now he should become the little man in Pedro's ears; and they whispered to each-other like nasty little goblins: *This girl could kill you!*

In the course of nightly consultations they had probably imagined how the bad chef was cutting large cucumber sandwiches into tiny pieces (given the background of a certain discontent with Pedro's nurse's manual abilities which were allegedly declining – and the latter doesn't spring from my smutty fantasy, but it is testified by Pedro's hearty narrations, I assure you!). Apparently their relationship had become a bit frigid; furthermore, the master of the manor felt he was losing control over his beeping birdie whose wings had grown a little too large – hard to bear for every rooster, even more the toxic epitome of all misogynists (nope, not speaking about Sean, another of her current stage partners, who liked to slap a woman's face from time to time; and he was pretty proud of it. Those were the times. We will meet him later). And it may have confused Pedro's idea about the distribution of gender roles. As we know *All Men are Islands* and mermaids swim around them in rapture, oh what a wonderful chauvinist world! Yet once they are stranded on stranger tides, they are in danger of suffocating like carps gasping for air, or even being crushed by lorries – but this is another of Pedro's strange parables. If you know, you know, and if you don't know, you should read his whimsical confessions (to perhaps kindle a fire with the pages like I did and dance around it like a certain priest's disciples at the *Purgatory of Vanities*, given Pedro's almanac of Freudian prejudices and obscene revelations).



Once again having lost her tiny haven (even more in the Arctic Sea of her mother's flat. Remember Holland Park? Everything is cursed to be repeated again and again) she instantly collapsed and sobbed all day and all night so that her raft of love was washed into the yard on a wave of tears – the Dolphin Fountain allegedly tastes salty ever since – and she remained as a drained shell due to dehydration (a frequent condition of our little squid by lacking its natural habitat). And the rake wondered about her reaction to his ruthless raid. Of course, he would never be the one accused, this hesitant who wasn't inclined to take responsibility or make a decision in time (all the more so as he was secretly pleased by the lustful prospect of continuing to commute between his landladies). He didn't understand at all how he let Virginia wriggle like that cold carp on the Round Pond's rim that he would one day greedily present her as a more or less yummy gift – perhaps he is referring to (and making fun of) *Old Fishes* (who are said to be frigid) or her sign of zodiac (as Pisces is considered particularly sensitive); but if I tend to over-interpret, we can stick with his explanation that it is a *symbol of their cooled relationship*. And so he assumed that Virginia's emotional outburst could only be the sign of a *mental disturbance*. *Female hysteria* – yeah, that's the classic, diagnosed in the twinkling of an eye (even if not yet bruised; but time will come for a couple of Panda eyes)! Thus, instead of comforting her, he let a handful summoned buddies grab her, drag her across the parking like Guy Fawkes to the rack and squeeze her between them into a car (just like we will later see her in a re-enactment as a gang bride in desperate love to a fierce villain) with her gown so soaked with tears, like the dress of the almost drowned girl on the *Island* beach – but this is how he (and all his male brethren) fundamentally loved women: fully *in his hands*; or as he himself will one day depict it in particular: as *a little wet sparrow!*



But since Pedro didn't like to see her raging, he preferred to get rid of his nagging damsell. Thus she was gagged and transported to a certain institution – same procedure as usual since he was well practiced in destroying women like Byron, his idol. Some years before, Mary had experienced much the same on her months-long hell trip through Bedlam's mental mills at his behest; and once discharged, she was done with male domination, so she never reunited with him (physically) and instead preferred to live with a female (surely more compassionate) companion afterwards – but Mary was a tough guy, much in contrast to our delicate protagonist with nerves of silk and a receptive soul. However, that's how and where it began. Virginia was Stoned over a fortnight with masses of tranquilizers, prescribed by strange men who were not even related with her, to suppress the true miseries instead of facing them and overcoming her toxic surroundings. Once again, others knew what was good for her and showed her the place. And our gullible sparrow surrendered to her fate, given the prospect *to be brought to nuns*. So it's worth thinking about: Who will be the decoys next time when those people close to her deport her into Britain's most notorious hospital?

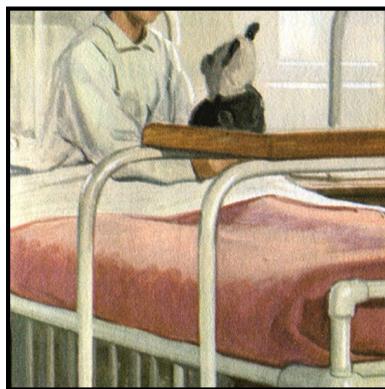
We can only hope (albeit doubt) that she would be treated with the same loving care as by pleasant Sisters when she will one day found herself bedridden with her voice withered due to a serious illness over her final months. Or would she suffer alone, mocked and rejected by all, humiliated as a common lunatic, in life and beyond – stigmatized with a degrading diagnosis (based on half-baked anamneses and a single statement on an obscure little scrap as a proof of her *mental disorder*)? However, the guys at her side would certainly have a spotless vest again, in the good old Victorian tradition.



But this time it didn't hit her so badly (rather she got a chance to come out of her spiderweb of pain). Bethany Convent was located on a ridge of Highgate in clean air and cozy gardens hidden from the roaring monster. As we approach from Archway, we are greeted first by a gloomy campus of lunatic clinics clinging to the slope – rather an oppressive atmosphere – but once we have ascended the hill, we find a bright ensemble of Victorian, Neo-Georgian and Modernist wings, that still looks almost exactly as it did back then, although it's today a pretty elderly retreat since the sisters left the place long ago. In the east there is a deep-cut ravine with an eerie bridge that crosses the main road like the River Styx – it's actually called the *suicide bridge* since hundreds of jumpers were crushed on the pavement (or by lorries, that's the classic) over the years – and in the west lies Highgate Cemetery, where ghosts are said to be up to mischief and mourn their early lost loves and lives (if you believe in such things like your weird narrator). But the pastoral ridge between is covered with religious institutions, a handful convents, schools and churches with both sharp spires and gentle domes greeting from miles afar like the crown of the town – certainly an energetic place for both a little geomancer and a receptive soul (and by the way, tis another proof of Pedro's perception of Virginia's natural habitat, as he saw her always surrounded by sacred folks and sites. And if I tend to twaddle, I'll feel the same mood on a certain chalk hill in Midsomer County with its similar geography of a traffic gap in the east and a mound in the west – but it's still a far way to Somerton, our final destination).

When I first approached the old convent, exhausted from miles and miles of wandering through the bustling city with smoking feet in your steps, I felt released, if not even raised like a seagull in the view of that highly soothing place. Thus I fell into a deep sleep on a garden bench and dreamt from ancient times as if we had shared them for a rare afternoon. Albeit most of the time numbed with drugs prescribed by ominous quacks (who seemingly besieged the female community, just like the priests do instead of leaving them alone), I saw you lovingly cared for by pleasant sisters who vice-versa were

enchanted by your gentleness and instantly eager to dress you in their noble garment – but you would miss the board to change your destiny and instead continue to follow the path of two unhappy wives. At least, even if only for a while, you enjoyed nestling again in a sisterhood and recovered from paternalism – or as Mary would express it at exact this place and time (yeah my inclined readers, she’ll be back for a highly effective cameo): *What you need is female affection, not masculine passion!* And your magical attraction was also so effective that the sisters began to adore you and dance around the apple tree in rapture (as the nuns had done in your convent school); and when you worked together in the nursery (obviously slowly withdrawing from medical drugs in the face of that compassionate and natural environment) and took a break for a ciggie (yeah, the classic since Wain Hall’s times!) one of the sisters exclaimed *she would do anything, anything for you* – even burn her hand to encourage, if not even urge you to stay with them together (for certainly a long, fulfilling life). And as a proof of her sincerity she followed her words with action by squeezing the ciggie into her hand. Oh these quirky nuns – and what a pretty Avenger this hot-blooded sister could have become to take Jacobean revenge on those villains who would first drive you into despair and later into the woods, and tear them from their graves like Ireton’s corpse had been drawn and quartered due to Royal hatred!



By the way, Virginia sometimes used Pedro’s hand as an ashtray too – and probably highly deserved. However, thanks to the care by her lovely sisters, this time our heeling heroine recovered in time lapse, *from misery to ecstasy in a fortnight* (or something like that), even if it shouldn’t be concealed with participation of that worldly sphere which had burdened her outside the protective walls. Paradoxically, Big Pedro visited her every day and fluffy Little Pedro was sitting at her bed edge to be cuddled during lonesome nights. But first of all it is here where we experienced Mary’s most iconic and forgiving appearance which Virginia had allegedly longed for so long. Since Mary was also a capable draughtswoman (just to refer to her charming illustrations of the mentioned tale of the mice) she now portrayed her favourite rival, ironically as a Mater Dolorosa, lost in trance and silent grief. Oh how I love this mighty lady! Albeit the drawing remained sketchy (as a hidden gem over almost twenty years until it will be published on the back cover of Pedro’s confessions), our poor protagonist appreciated this little attention from her motherly friend. And Pedro emphasized the remarkable similarity of the event with a key scene of *The Catalyst*: Since his fictional wife and his mistress feel attracted to each other, the green girl likes to rob a precious lighter from her mature antagonist as something like a devotional object – or actually to light a ciggie and squeeze it on the bigamist’s claw. Did I already write about how fact and fiction merge in our little chamber play? But I assure you, it doesn’t spring from my weird fantasy, rather it is written by reality and Pedro’s eager pen.



near-fatal incident in the wintery

And look what a luck, given such joint efforts of female affection and masculine passion to comfort Virginia: Once released from her retreat, she could start the rehearsals again in all her old freshness and swap her wing shirt with the doctor’s coat at the usual speed of her life in time lapse. And neither colleagues nor spectators would ever have suspected *Nicola’s* strange Odyssey through the changing tides of the Bristol Channell before she would become the most conscientious Doctress ever seen on screen. Albeit we will soon learn that the filming will end as it almost didn’t begin with another Pinewood. Oh sinister destiny we can’t escape!

The latest Cabal had also a spatial aftermath. Our heroine was seemingly expelled from the Dolphin lagoon when her mother returned from Germany just around these days. We may be tempted to guess that the latter wasn't amused about to find how poorly the furniture in her abandoned bed room had been screwed together to form a tear-soaked mattress instead of her dusty divan that was rotting in the cellar. Thus Virginia was now homeless like her gallant and similarly homesick so that once again her so-called confidants advised her *better not to be alone* – and that is the essential problem: She never learned to be alone, always remained collective, if not even a relationship addict until one single time in whole her life she would be no more, no less than rare 10 hours totally free from any false advice. Now she moved into another commune in Kensington's heart in the house of one of Pedro's (allegedly platonic) female friends, ironically, huh?! The illustrious lady, descendant of the Bunnygroves and mostly involved in long-lasting divorce battles – well, these are seemingly the good morals of Aristos not only in the Swinging Sixties – was the same age as Mary and him and a mother of a handful kids. Lavinia had pity with our wet sparrow and invited her to stay with her for a couple of months.

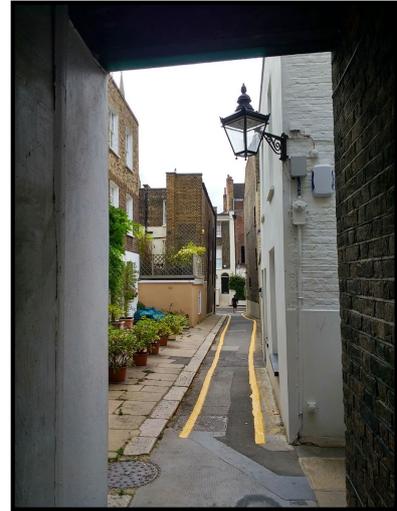


The timeline is uncertain during this diffusing period since Virginia was also seen (by an actress fellow who lived in Sussex back then) at her father's home and even abroad (as we learn both from Pedro and the cheesecake press) where she spent Christmas at her mother's side (brrr) in Rheindalen where the High Command of the British Rhine Army resided in a brand-new modernist garden town (much to my palate and perhaps to yours) in the north of Cologne. And even if there is no detailed information, we may imagine our adorable candidate dancing on the Christmas ball with dashing officers as bewitchingly as on the *Doctor's* set – even more encouraged to choose a son-in-law more to mother's taste. Thus we can sum up that it was a busy phase for a handful know-it-all who eagerly tried to tear their child of sorrows from Mephisto's arms – odd I have to say, and highly paradoxical – into which they had driven her by their own negative example. Those pretty folks should have better thought about it some decades earlier when they preferred to scratch their eyes out to never see or speak each other again and coop up their little chick in an orphan's farm!

As for Lavinia's asylum, and even though she may have been a really nice person, I am tempted to presume that our little *Abelard* had also an ulterior motive. Contrary to his alleged efforts to *cease the relation through cruelty* (as Pedro will later depict it himself), he actually wasn't really keen on a final cut. Rather, he lurked his little birdie with manifold decoys, probably to keep the nest warm. And indeed, Lavinia would become another influential confidant. However, Virginia's snuggly birdcage was now located in Carmel Court, a soothing place that slumbers like a rural idyll, hidden in the bustling middle of Kensington old town. On my wanderings through Virginia's spheres it was my favourite stop. Even more, it felt like coming home in relation to the backyards (called Gänge, not to be confused with gangs) of Old Lübeck to find here a similar ensemble of narrow lanes and a tiny passage which today look almost unchanged – a time capsule of merry old England just a few steps off Kensington High at the foot of St. Mary's CoE. And behind the passage lies the Catholic convent of Simon the Saint, an eremite monk who had lived in a hollow trunk on the biblical Mount Carmel and later founded the Carmelite brotherhood – to see in it a further confirmation of Pedro's observation that Virginia has always been attracted to sacral places and religious people.



When I paused at the wayside place of worship (that seems strangely Mediterranean in London’s sober sphere) at the iconic corner where the Church Street curves, I was almost thunderstruck to find a depiction of a spectacular Marian apparition in the early 1970s (in another sanctuary to which my lost beloved – she is an Egyptologist – would lead me decades later on our Pilgrimage through Egypt) that looks so similar to your Bethany portrait – and in this moment it felt like you were with me.



Lavinia lived in two semi-detached cottages with gabled roofs, which dreamed in a secret garden. They are still there, even if sadly refurbished barely recognizable today; but when I sneaked around there many times, one day I was granted a glimpse through an open door with a young lady just leaving, oh what a great joy! And first of all there was (and still is) a magnificent London Plane. And albeit it’s not mentioned in my sources, I see you sitting under this tree for hours and hours like in a narcoleptic trance, while Lavinia – who was also a dilettante pianist and opera singer – sings my favourite ayre from Handel’s *Serse* (when the hero, just fallen from vain heights, is waiting for his premature death): *Fronde tenere e belle del mio platano amato. Per voi rispend’ il fato...* Oh, leaves of silence and a contribution of fate! That sounds familiar. Your love for trees was also boundless and for good reasons: they are so much more amiable than humans, stable and protective; their trunks are always waiting for an innocent embrace and their roots provide a mossy pillow.



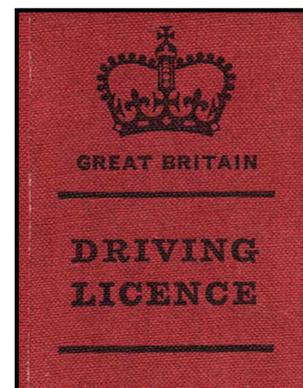
At the next corner of Carmel Court we can find an iconic pub called *The Elephant and Castle* (strangely miles away from the Southbank) to be reminded of the welcome scene in the Scarsdale and to wonder whether you all hung out here together with your canine companions back then – like I did on a first summer eve after we survived the oppressive Covid times (or as some quacks liked to call it).

Lavinia was also a dog lover. She had a quirky mutt from Tibet whose name was probably *Alooka*. There even exists a picture of them grinning at the coast (maybe of Devon where she also owned a cottage – who wouldn’t have thought that?). And so perhaps in these days she encouraged you to adopt a Shih Tzu puppy too. You called him *Rupert* – albeit he wasn’t another bear, his name may have referred to that street where you liked to stroll through the market with Pedro – and he would become your most faithful companion over the coming years (perhaps even until your last breath, apart from Little Pedro, who will keep watch mournfully at your bedside on a grizzly January night).

We shouldn't forget Big Pedro's whereabouts either. Apparently his arrangement as a lodger in the backyard of his quack didn't last for too long. At an uncertain time he nested long-term in one of Lavinia's mews houses (according to his usual procedure, as he always found a willing landlady) while Virginia also moved again (according to her restless rhythm, as we found her in a different place every single year) so that the inclined follower (as perhaps she herself) could lose track; and therefore I can't conceal that I couldn't find out on my exhausting wander how long, since when and with whom she lived in her most mysterious dwelling (and thus I refrain from a boring analysis). However, it was probably around this time during or after the filming of the *Doctor* when Leslie visited her home (allegedly *in Chelsea off Kings Road*, although I assume it could have been her *Kensington studio* where we will meet Virginia later) with that adorable *indoor dovecote*. Unfortunately, he would not only find her feeding pigeons but also *in an awkward situation* of an uncertain conflict with some uncertain persons of uncertain gender whom he avoids naming (since he is more discreet than I am) – nevertheless, we can be fairly sure that he knew about her strange relationship at the latest from January '60 (by Pedro's surprise appearance backstage after Virginia's car accident).

However, Carmel Court would remain the fitting stage for their private chamber play with many scenes of Love and Cabal – such as half a carp, one black eye (or two) and a green man (or three). Yeah, the inclined reader hears correctly: our odd protagonists have learned nothing from their shared misery; and thus, instead of daring to make the final cut (ouch!), they will continue to stay together in an open partnership until at least mid of '61 and do something that is now called “apartment sharing” by commuting between their homes – well, in a certain way they were quite a modern couple. But considering the fact that Pedro will never write about Virginia's studio, she seems to have mostly stayed in his mews house. According to his few hints, the latter fits well into the corner where all the lanes converge, with him like the spider in the web, but this is uncertain, admittedly.

Finally, it's worth to mention that a Mini (by the way, in her favourite colour) is parked opposite “his” house today like a prop for Instagrammers. And I as well found it as a trigger to ponder about from where Virginia could have set off to her almost fatal drive through the Pinewood. According to the timeline of the *Doctor's* filming it could well have been from here in January '60 (regardless if she lodged in Pedro's or Lavinia's cottage). Anyway, her life was soon hanging by a thread again.



According to Pedro's willful perception, Virginia was careless in manifold fields. She was absolutely dependent, too childish, too emotional, a terrible cook, xtremely untidy and always switching between frivolity and frigidity (especially as a negligent nurse who didn't always handle the manual therapy according to the taste of her demanding patient). But first of all, she was Britain's worst driver. She had allegedly absolved a few hundred driving lessons (by the way, like me, and I wasn't even forced to drive on the wrong side) to still fail a handful of exams; she finally passed it in Devon not too long ago. While our bundle of nerves hadn't been able to finish driving school in London's oppressive climate, she instead loved driving at high speed through the open countryside like a little daredevil – very much to the confirmation of Pedro's usual view of gender-equitable behaviour patterns: Driving a car would mean: *for men, the lust for the engine, for women, the feeling of freedom.* (Indeed, we'll have to ponder about the latter, and not just once. Sadly, he is sometimes right.)

Oh so many stereotypes and a chain of expectations! To ask about his outstanding qualities (I guess at least one but I will not snitch). And to wonder: What did you see in him? To answer: Where love falls!

What you surely shared at least, was your biggest vice: smoking chain all night and day together. And it is written that here in his house you took a deep drag sleeplessly in the kitchen and read and laughed about the letters of a green gallant in desperate love, with your ashtray on the duvet and crumbs in your bed (and as we all know there is always a crumb that prevents us from getting soothing sleep).



Indeed, we rarely find a single photo, both in private or on stage, without either of you holding a cancer-stick. But there is just a single press pic (due to your notorious discretion) showing you together at a charity gala the following summer – an extremely rare apparition because you both avoided such events in general. Look, you had that in common too! We see you as a pretty threesome with a truly radiant nurse (oh what a lucky lady!) – and the highlight is: you have no cigarettes! I don't want to withhold this little gem from the inclined audience since I am pretty proud of it. I could purchase the picture after a long search; and therefore, in order to present it, I am neither forced to raid ominous archives nor am I dependent on the treasure chest of our letter friend Rod.

You sacrificed him everything, your career, your body and your soul. And what did you get for it? A sad-eyed Panda to cuddle and a quirky little mutt to care for. And sooner or later your eyes would be darker than theirs. You had so many fancy ideas, but nothing would remain from them but disillusion. You wanted to play from the bottom of your heart, but not to dance at the Vanity Fair. You hoped to become a big star on the stage, but you only appeared in movie cameos.

You were eager to serve as a nurse in Africa, but you only completed a first aid course in Worthing. You laid out a garden, grove and path at a barren slope in Devon, but hardly a single seedling sprouted and the bare branches were washed away by raging floods. And you were involved in elderly care, but the grannies would all soon die. Oh my dear Ginny, you were an ill-fated heroine, only blessed with a deep reach into Pandora's Box and later Silver's Chest. Everything what you started was destined to fade away. You were the embodiment of Gryphius' poetics: *It was all in vain!*

As a wanderer thrown into a strange world, you had little talent to find your path of happiness (lacking will and nerves and always listening to the bad advices of your more or less deceptive confidants). You struggled for so long to maintain your karmic companionship, but no one would appreciate your efforts. And given this holistic failure, you would burn out prematurely and lose your *appetite of life*. And once fallen in despair, your overwhelmed surroundings would quickly dump you according to good tradition of how to chastise nagging wives and how to silence them with poisoned prescriptions.



Against this background, let's come back briefly to the recent hussar feat of our hate-loved scoundrel who tried to get rid of his annoying mistress (albeit just temporarily, given their mutual attraction). She was heavily drugged for about a fortnight by a bunch of strangers. Who gave them the right? None of them were related to her! And even if they had been, they should have refrained from filling her up with (un)forseeable effects, namely to make her addicted. Let's just remember how the Georgians firmly rejected the dishes that some evil cooks (we Huns call *Eisenbarths*) used to stir or shake together: *Don't trust any quack and never take a pill if you want to be blessed with a long life!* But what does a weeping woman matter anyway who can barely articulate herself thanks to their prescriptions? Yeah, that's the appropriate way to ignore problems instead of facing them – with the

good intention of preventing her from realizing who is actually responsible for her misery: it's always the man who uses her body and dump the remains! Just like the great hero and his henchmen did here. But because our gullible poor heroine was so dependant on other's attention and so well-bred in her convent, she followed every advice and never complained or even asked her determined place (which can actually be quite cozy when your are only surrounded by nuns and not a single warder is lurking – at least in Bethany she was spared from savage men for a while). And it was only for her own good in order not to lose herself in sorrow but even more so as not to rack her brains over her life in restraints. The most effective method of maintaining slavery has always been to numb free thinking, whether through medication or incense. The latter to mask the smell of rusty shackles and to demand gratitude for the gifts of patriarchal powers and their deceptive care for the poor (who are lured with promises of healing and salvation). And women in particular submit to their fate and serve in the system as pawns, playthings and housemaids of fathers, partners and all their odd fellows in aprons and cassocks who have always entrenched themselves in circles, clinics, clubs and closets.



When women collide with male expectations, it's certainly not the fault of men but of female emotionality. They are frigid, hysterical or postnatal depressive; and always driven by hormonal disorders, of course – obsolete clichés taught by the suggestive grandmasters. Thus it's time to dump them in any institution of so-called mentally disturbed people or to secretly lock up those misfits whose manners contradict common moral values in the attic of the manor (by the way, a pretty popular motif in romantic literature). These are the principles of patriarchal psychiatry, totally controlled by a league of gentlemen with dusty closets full of Freudian prejudices. Men are supposed to be rational beings so much in contrast to the emotional tides of women. Ha, ha – the truth is the opposite: Men behave like elephants in stranger castles. They never confess for one or none and love to sip all wines together. They are ignorant of feelings, they lack empathy and, even worse, they tend to destructive aggression. And in certain situations they turn out to be brazen bulls or tame ponies (and usually there is no big intermediate stage). Therefore, it is no wonder that women are frustrated every night, whether they are reluctant lovers or unsatisfied wives. What they really need is *female affection, not masculine passion* (or what the latter think it is). And all this is well-known behaviourism in the relationship between two absolutely incompatible genders. Men and women (since Eve escaped from their deceptive shelter and dragged Adam with her) are at two different stages of evolution simply due to the fact that men are struck with a crooked chromosome. The sexes are even something like two different species; and therefore, when their paths cross they must get into an endless chain of quarrels. They should better stay among each-other: men in their callous clubs and women in their cozy convents – and there would be peace on earth (and first of all at home). But some relationship addicts will never learn it.

Women relieve stress by being excessively immoderate, by crying, shouting and scratching out eyes (preferably of all scoundrels in the world) – that's the appropriate way for an agitated mind to calm down, just as a Volcano must eject all the magma from its bowels until the pressure subsides. Look how men like accordingly to splatter the juice that makes them evil over half of humanity – what is considered as normality, even as a bold act. But when women demand the same rights, given their persistent frustration in the face of the lazy guy's performances, they are branded as hysterics. And it is the sad rule that a bloody drunkard (whose burping is valued as part of his ambivalence, just like his philosophic vomit, by his brethren) is lovingly cared for by his long-suffering wife, whereas she is instantly deported to any institution if she cries for just a few hours or even screams at him (or looks at his loins with googly eyes while holding a knife in the kitchen) and he and his buddies can't cope with it (or rather because they fear to lose the control; or they are simply paranoid cowards who have swallowed too much Freud). Oh my poor damsell, don't ever complain about their manners and deeds; or even hint in a weak moment in view of their mischief that *you don't want to live any longer*, if you don't want to find yourself been diagnosed with a *severe nervous breakdown* by one of their henchmen at the first superficial glance and labelled as *mentally disturbed!* Be always a good girl, smile brightly and beep nicely if you don't want to annoy your little Pasha; and just hide your feelings if there is a quack present who wants to correct you and show you the place in the Freudian universe

of the disciples of Enlightenment who consider emotionality as unnatural. Always disguise your nature in order to avoid their sanctions. Woe, woe, quacks are always in search of Guinea pigs for their crude



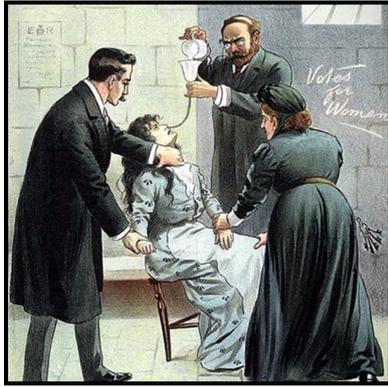
experiments and poisoned dishes! They will fatten you with masses of drugs in order to suppress desires that are said to be inappropriate (actually just annoying for your pretty partner) and to prevent you from thinking about your cheerless life, tied to the oven and the cradle, whereas they have joy (aka Freud) in Boodles. There is no place to escape from your home and no chance to relieve stress; therefore you banish the storm in your head into the depths where it summons a maelstrom that one day will tear your heeling vessel down. Never speak (nor even think) about what they do to you (mostly nothing good) or what you have to do for them (to live in enduring servitude) and swallow your sorrows instead of facing the facts, making own decisions and necessary cuts – ouch!

In this sense, let's remember Pedro's thesis that *physical pain belongs to women*. Indeed, our charming brute was the embodiment of archaic views in regard to cemented gender roles. Despite it, he was an admirer of Sapphic love that was his obsessive passion; and he used to write about it with mischievous joy (well, he was an ambivalent character). But first of all he revelled in castration fantasies (perhaps as a reference to Sigmund, another of his quirky idols. Oh these Huns are such nutters!).

“Mental health” – that's a deceptive phrase (invented in the '60s, the culmination of mind-control and drug research) of paternal authorities who want to make us believe that it could be determined what is healthy and what is sick. But the interpretation about this is ambivalent against the background of ever-changing views (particularly with regard to gender manners and duties). Every attempt to define normality under scientific guise is nothing but charlatantry! Rather, it is humiliation of nature! Feelings are my birthright, not destined to be categorized or sanctioned by dull dudes without empathy and fantasy (a frequent symptom of Sophistos)! Just like the beauty of a landscape panorama, you can't cut the mind in tiny pieces (unlike any useless physical appendices). Outside of their wholeness, the scraps are completely meaningless and empty. Hark, suggestive folks: Take your hands off my head!

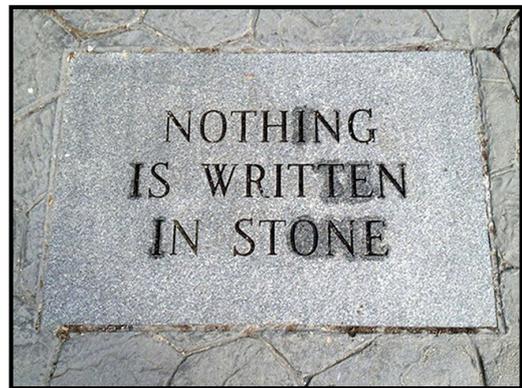
It is fact that back then the asylums were full of women who had been dumped by their relatives, and the vast majority of them because they couldn't (or weren't inclined to) fulfill their physical duties and the demands of their family chains. It was normality that women (mainly of the upper classes who had been drilled never to show weakness in the face of female complaints) were Stoned with drugs throughout their pregnancy – with dramatic effects for both the mother and the unborn child (as we experienced particularly badly in the course of a pharmaceutical scandal in Germany in the 1960s, which I will not discuss here) so that the pregnant women quickly became addicted to medication; and they were hardly supported by their embarrassed surroundings through hugs or words of comfort. Rather, they were rebuked for “their” failure and still drugged to numb the symptoms – a nasty chain reaction only for the good of *Ordeal Pharmaceuticals*. Those were the times when relations between the sexes were not on equal terms and misogynistic psychology was the norm. Women in the stranglehold of male expectations had to function physically while feeling xtremely uncomfortable in their bodies. Their environment was poorly educated, lacked knowledge and interest in any female matter and mostly aimed at taking advantage of their bodies without caring about the consequences. For men, love meant pure lust; for women, it meant nothing but long-lasting labour.

Physical complaints of women (or as defined by men) were (and still are) the biggest of all secrets in patriarchal systems and especially in all societies where the folks in cassocks were highly influential – but ironically also (if not even more) thanks to what it called “Enlightenment”: Sober Sophistos and stern Stoics tried to define both body and mind only through lenses clouded by science with a total lack of understanding for whole the wonderful bandwidth of feelings (and by the way, the real miracle of the becoming of life that actually happens almost without the contribution of men but therefore accompanied by their jealousy in view of their own poor capabilities). So women were totally forlorn among their ignorant environment, could hardly speak (and breathe) freely with anyone and had to swallow their sorrows until one day whole the pent-up pressure would burst out of them in a big bang. In the '70s, the true era of Enlightenment, the asylums will empty in time-lapse and myriads of women who were just supposedly disturbed will be recognized as absolutely healthy – that's a thing, isn't it?!



Women who had let themselves be lured into correction institutes at male behest, suffered months and years in the dungeons. They were harassed by savage warders, ducked into hot and cold baths, maltreated with electro shocks until the loss of their language; and sometimes their wombs were even removed (far beyond the Victorian era) as soon as they were diagnosed by ignorant quacks with *hormonal disturbances* (another men-made art term, just like *frigid* or *hysterical*). In fact, their frustrations were causal reactions to male inabilities – as the poor women were threatened by brazen bulls or confronted by dudes who turned out to be nothing but tame ponies; and they were denied to choose companions more according to their taste. But what was worst: mothers who didn't function like clockwork had their children taken away in the twinkling of an eye (or two, and even if the latter were blackened from time to time, the contemporary people were inclined to overlook this).

Let's now enter such an institute in a certain Vale where nobody wants to be marooned (but, my inclined wanderers, we have to come together here again and again, unfortunately and reluctantly). As we approach Hellsbury, an ugly little duckling somewhere lost in space in the bone-dry desert northbound of the soothing Chilterns, we are always attracted (or repelled) by one of Britain's most Brutalist carbuncles that protrudes from a large pit in the middle of the poor old town and buries the fragments of former glory. The County Hall, a high-rise tower in greyish concrete, erected in 1966 and crowned with two cheeky devil horns, is another of those phallic follies as mentioned in Mary's narrations. Woe, woe, give up all hope as you descend from the Chiltern escarpment to the ominous eye-catcher that greets half of Buckinghamshire! Brrr. It will feel like crossing the Arctic Circle!



Hellsbury was surrounded by a couple of mind and bone mills back then. One was (and still is) Manderley, a vast campus of desolate barracks for somatic treatments, largely focused on paralytic diseases, that would one day become Britain's most notorious hospital due to a bunch of Savages who liked to take their rounds through the patient's beds for a couple of decades (under toleration of parts of the staff in a fierce system of command and obedience – sadly more the rule than the exception in such institutes of public welfare); we will later also have to talk about this place more detailed, unfortunately, yet the inclined reader has to wait a while until our doubtful trip to hell. But we'll now attend another not less dreadful place: St. John's Stone, Buck's lunatic asylum. Contemporaries still whisper with shudder and don't dare to speak plainly about what happened behind the walls where an army of pale women was wandering along half numbed like living ghosts, robbed of their brains and sometimes their wombs, their physical skills and grace, thanks to patriarchal quackery in good old Victorian tradition handed down to our days. Stone was another sad example of an institute where the inmates were locked up permanently at the behest of their relatives like once in the workhouses, and the vast majority of them due to uncertain female distress, such as infertility, loss of a child, unwanted pregnancy, postnatal depressions or perinatal drug addiction – yeah, the entire register of suffering in which the unfortunate women were recorded as outcasts to be hidden from the public under degrading conditions – widely into the second half of the 20th century until the gates would slowly open not earlier than in the late '70s. Finally the asylum was abandoned to merge with Manderley around 1990. And no one wants to be reminded of the awkward history that was white-washed by a deceptively innocent postmodern settlement on the former site. When I stood on location, it seemed to me like the

most soothing place on earth, with a beautiful view to the Chiltern escarpment behind meadows full of buzzing bees and silent leaves rustling in the breeze; and in the middle Wain Hill rises from the haze. But, but... when you cross the main street, you will suddenly find fragments of an old lane where the warders used to walk along from their cozy dwellings to the gloomy gaols; and it is said that sinister shadows scurry through the holloway under its slim lantern in the night. Just half a mile in the north lies an abandoned cemetery lonely in the Wilderness with myriads of graves of the least fortunate who were secretly buried after years of suffering in the asylum hell, forgotten (if not ostracized) by those they considered their closest. The gravestones are overgrown, partly sunken in the ground and hardly a name is left legible (if any names were ever mentioned instead of just numbers of unknown grannies who died in their cots alone in the night and were mourned by no one). Nobody feels responsible for maintaining the sad site and wants to face what happened here at the edge of nowhere where every single patient of whole the County, supposed with symptoms of *mental disturbances*, entered the gates to hell back then. Even if the latter were camouflaged by a modernist admission ward (erected in 1959 in the shape of a White Cross) in a strange contrast to the grim Victorian ensemble, it was waiting greedily to swallow myriads of healthy women who had only been deported because they couldn't fulfill (or weren't inclined to obey) their family's demands. These misfits were locked up on the basis of questionable certificates from academic henchmen and hidden from the public at this grizzly place in order not to burden their fine relatives, or worse, damage the reputation of their decent bloodline. Man, there were plenty of other good girls eager to get married and have kids! So why should one care about such deviants who question their role in the gender hierarchy? And if they were left to the mercy of the quacks, they would soon be corrected, by hook or by crook, and cured from their nonsense! It was here the most touching place on my search for clues off the Chiltern slopes, given the bizarre contrast between the previous terror in the name of humanity and that beautiful spot in the country.



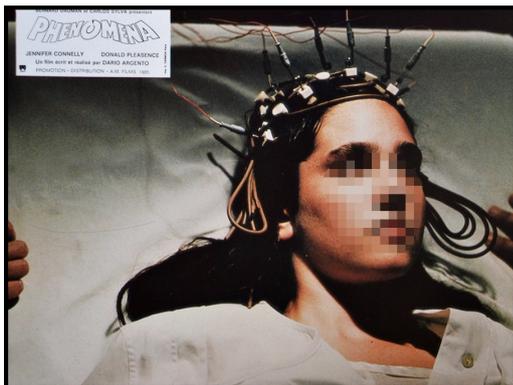
Sadly, both location and plot are not an invention by *Hammer Film Productions* but to read in plain text in the works of a certain Doctress who asserted herself professionally – by chance in clinics around Hellsbury – among her male rivals at that time. Sounding familiar? And she was probably more compassionate than those arrogant Sophistos who thought they knew all about female nature as the old grandmasters had hammered it into their brains. Diana Rally was back then one of the first female perinatal psychiatrists world-wide and mainly concerned with questions of so-called postnatal depressions – another preferred and meaningless term used by quacks, given the sad fact that they lacked the imagination for more subtle differentiations. It's so simple to *file, stamp, index and number* patients and thus stigmatize them with a handful of superficial phrases according to the male palate.



As for *Hammer*, by the way, I have just to think of *Asylum*, a pretty little film from 1972, based on the Poe story *The system of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether*, a confusing game about who is foul and who is fair, respectively who is the doctor and who is the patient – highly recommended with regard to the general question of the sovereignty of interpretation over the wealth and woe of quackery.

And these were exactly my persistent doubts when I served as a keeper in one of the most notorious asylums in the continent's rough north for a few formative years. I felt so much pity for the inmates who fought bravely against dominant doctors (who slavishly followed their ossified forefathers) and brutish warders (who treated the patients without any respect). And so I acclaimed (even if only speaking with my eyes): "What the heck am I doing? I don't want to be here!" But no one harked.

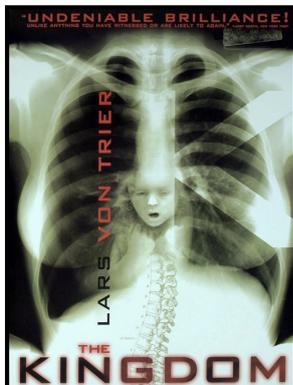
And given this background, I imagined becoming the Catcher at the Gates to prevent the slaughter cattle from even entering the gaol in unawareness of what would be done to them by white-aproned Gods. But I was just a little frightened mouse, overwhelmed by new impressions and countless dreadful incidents. In gloomy Victorian wards, masses of fully stoned folks wandered through sinister corridors like a pack of zombies – due to the usual procedure of overdrugging the patients to prevent them from annoying the staff and racking their brains about their misery – not that they recognize the true evil lurking in the person of their callous surroundings who actually caused their endless grief! To this day I remind the habitat in which no sane person could recover, with disgust. I still see sticky dormitories; I smell the stench of the drug kitchen; and I listen to the cacophony of quiet wailing and horrible cries whole day and night to go insane about it. If you were admitted with full health, you certainly came out as a lunatic, I promise you! And it wasn't even the '50s or '60s, but the late '80s. I particularly remember the geriatric ward with masses of senile old folks who no one cared about, among them goitered grannies who croaked after me: "*Come on, keeper: move yer bloomin' shanks!*" And one of them even pinched my butt – it was the running gag back then (sadly enough, to confess my own increasing numbness). But most of the inmates were middle-old women and even young girls, dumped by their relatives who couldn't cope with their emotional tides or, worse, gynaecological discomfort. Once in, never out again was the equation, or as we called it *the Ol'In and Out*, but it was no game! Once wound in their Clockwork and stigmatized as insane, society turned away from the patients who had to come back again and again until their premature death; and the latter was causally chosen more than one time to *escape from the madhouse*. Yeah, I saw great successes of quackery! And even the shocking chamber was in frequent use, I assure you! Electro shocks were on the daily agenda, not at all to "cure depressions" but just to calm the agitated, with the bad effect that their *speech was slurred* for hours or days or even never recovered. And although it is proven (already back then) that this treatment is good for nothing – apart from burning brain parts including one or another emotion that is supposedly foul – it was (and sadly still is) gladly practiced as the perfect tool to bring misfits into line, and often those unfortunates who don't fit into the mentality of the eternal struggle in the wolf's den, the most delicate minds whose emotional amplitude *from misery to ecstasy* is considered too large. Think about it! And I was (and still am) ashamed of how I myself led the inmates to their torturous therapies, just to their own benefit, of course, on advice of pitiless egg-heads who believed they had swallowed wisdom with a spoon since a hundred years ago a handful of chauvinistic dinosaurs had fantasized crude paradigms about mental (or social) health (actually about how to gag the voice of the female half to the benefit of men-kind); and these erring quacks still followed in the footsteps of their stone-old masters as if in a trance. Indeed, those were unforgettable and unforgivable years. (I don't want to hide either that some mates are still pondering about on whose side I was in).



I feel like mentioning now a certain sequence that still bothers me. Even if the episode is hardly related with our plot and – spoiler alert – not really appetizing for the sensitive palate, I won't spare the audience from it. Tis time to tell the truth! Once upon a day in autumn '90, I first noticed a certain middle-old lady in an overcrowded ward. Despite some signs of former grace, she was totally worn-out by grief and negligence, looking like a skeleton, lying nearly nude – for whatever obscure reasons these nasty nurses hadn't even dressed her and she had torn away the duvet in convulsions – in a much too small crib, curled up like an embryo. Due to her anaestazition until almost unconsciousness she wasn't able to cry out her pain. She may have perceived me (like a rigid face made of stone or bronze) and was perhaps eager to communicate, but only her eyes articulated. She had been dumped by her family after a recent breakdown due to an ominous incident. Albeit no one spoke about the reasons

(since certain female matters were kept discreet and even the elders just whispered behind the curtain of the quack's office) and I wasn't permitted to look in her health (or hell) chart, I guessed it had been a fatal loss. No one bothered about her awkward accommodation and even a dog would have lived more comfortably and would have been treated with more respect. I was tempted to cover her, but there was no shroud, and I couldn't take my eyes off, blurred in tears or even blackened by fists banging on the pane (or the pain) so that I became aware that infusions merged with her battered body. I will spare the audience further details of her dreadful condition, but I was so upset about how and why the heck her dignity was so badly violated by that ignorant staff; and I was especially disgusted by my own weakness, for lacking the backbone to accuse those callous folks (or better biff them some) of the evil that really happens behind closed doors. But recently released from my boarding school bubble, thrown into this epitome of hell, awoken in reality with my eyes wide shut, I was just a tiny worm. However, I will always remember this day in November. It was the final trigger for my perpetual aversion against clinical psychiatry (and instead of following these traces through the catacombs of medical abuse, I preferred to resign – and if it sounds arrogant given the fact that I was just a small Number in the big game – with a legendary letter (less of Love and Despair than of rage, according to my nature) in the hospital annals, lucky enough not to find myself *in the Village* afterwards to be also *socially corrected*. So I switched from my original goal of studying pharmacy to pedagogy, even if not really happy either and similarly reluctant, as the reader might not have guessed. Nevertheless, I remained an admirer of colourful jars, albeit not really because of their content but even more so because of their transparency. You can't hide the truth in it, unlike skeletons in a closet. And I generally abstain from swallowing medical drugs – and from consuming cancer-sticks of course, the greatest vice of all and the primary reason for wasting away prematurely.)

As for the catacombs: in retrospect, I call them *Riget* (the Danish term for *Kingdom*). There were miles of underground passages through which patients were secretly driven to their treacherous treatments; and it is rumoured that people were never seen again after entering the tunnels (maybe I myself am still wandering there, unable to find the exit) – or do I confuse my memories with a certain series that I saw some years later? Thanks to Lars' realism, it was like a review of what I had actually experienced.



I apologize for once again getting lost in my traumatic memories which have little to do with the main theme. So let's come back from gruesome reality to cheerful fiction and the *Asylum* roots. It's no wonder that I love this movie as it is pure pleasure to see a deceptive doctor (magnificently played by Mad Pete's long-suffering sidekick Herbert) being crushed synchronously with the bowels of his fetish puppet; and an ominous lady (another tasty role in which I would have liked to see our protagonist) also takes part. The latter is supposed to be a lunatic and badly bruises her own face with an axe in hysteria due to unreleased traumata of her past so that her speech will remain slurred until the end of her days – to always wonder where the heck those quirky screenwriters get their inspiration from.

I don't know what became of that patient above. But later in the winter, while snow flocks danced merrily, I saw her walking along the circular path of the asylum campus, albeit still as if in slow-motion, with seemingly improving health (to remain objective, I won't conceal this fact) and a bit of her former grace – she even turned out to have been a Creole beauty (I am sorry for such a superficial aspect in the face of her ordeal). Her finale had not yet been written. However, this soothing sequence relieved me a little from racking my brains about fair and foul and present and past, but to this day I have flashbacks of this episode; and my attentive reader, you know that all of this really happened.

But lest we forget what really happened in Hellsbury Vale:

Diana Rally (who passed away just recently) was the chosen one who made sure that hundreds of women, who had been maltreated for years for fantastic mental diseases which never existed, were released in only a couple of months in the mid '70s (if I remember correctly also from Stone). She was basically extremely busy and successful in eliminating grievances. So we can read in her obituary: *She researched and published countless works about post-natal depression and drug addiction in pregnancy. She incited the first mother and baby mental health unit to care for mothers with post-natal depressions without separating them from their babies – a revolutionary act at that time.*

But of course, there was mostly silence about this unexpected evolution (or paradigm change) since none of those people involved in previous deportations more or less shortly before, both quacks and negligent relatives, liked to admit their fatal failure – that's always the principle of the great cover up, particularly given the procedure of dumping misfits in dreadful institutions, based on pseudo-scientific paradigms that can change in a flash when old wise men are fired and their closets are cleared of all the skeletons therein – at least back then in the progressive '70s. Unfortunately, we are currently experiencing how the bones of the dinosaurs are being dug up again by chauvinist blockheads (mostly wearing dark and currently orange cassocks) all around the world, and even in "enlightened" cultures where "women's rights" (ha, ha! 'Tis just another of such awkward terms, since every right is gifted by nature, not by verbal vomit of vain men) are more threatened than ever before.



„Mental health“? What is that supposed to be? That's a lousy term, an error of science, an awkward construction of conformation, the mightiest tool of coordination. Who the hell is so pretentious to decide which emotions are foul and which are fair? Just stern Stoics who fancy to forge a chain of callous links according to their own dullness! To be emotional, this is my birthright, given by nature, not by convention, and I will never let a single temper (and even less a proper tempest) be plundered by anyone. Only the bulging cornucopia, whole the range of feelings is fair. Foul are those poor folks who want to forbid us from showing emotions. *I feel, therefore I am!*

Mental disturbances do not exist. They are an invention of Sophistos with the intention of maintaining their paternalism. To bring people into line in their crude universe of predetermined norms, once in the name of paternal superstition and today of patriarchal substitutes. To stigmatize free spirits who don't bow to their wisdom, as deviants and misfits – yeah, there is a pretty continuity in how the baton was passed on from the parsons to the scientists who even pretend to enlighten us. As we were once stunned in clouds of incense (or nonsense), so today we are fed with academic phrases. Poor puppies are conditioned from childhood to drool to the rhythm of their bells, always with the same intention: to drag the pack for whole their lives through both the barracks and the birth wards in order to maintain eternal competition and breed an army of clones (or clowns). To eradicate what is considered weak and social inappropriate. To burn emotions out of our brains, to make us callous like them.

Above all else, psychiatry (just like every field of mind research), isn't a science, it's charlatanry! Emotions are not destined to be defined until doomsday! They are our greatest treasure. And only jealous people whose chests are full of emptiness, due to their very own poor capabilities or because they themselves faded under the canes of the repetitive Ps, are eager to plunder it!

These toxic people are like leeches – and their appetite for our lifeblood is limitless.

While their predecessors preached false morals against human nature, they invoke "mental health" as it was hammered into their heads in their cheerless childhood: always to subordinate, deny themselves emotions and maintain their place (or a certain seat, more or less well-tempered) among their peers. And, that's the bitter joke, they even believe to be influential. Ha, ha! Actually, they are nothing but poor puppets of the evil system. Hello *New Number 2!* You are as exchangeable as everyone else. Instead, let us listen to the statement of our *Number 6* against their evil procedures:

*I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed, or numbered! My life is my own!*

Yeah, academic harlequins, this is the right motto of all free people in the world who renounce becoming perpetual *Prisoners* in your brewery of poisoned recipes and deceptive dishes! Apply your methods to your misled and brain-dead disciples, whereas we agree with how a certain misfit passionately calls out to the bleating herd that has submitted to the authorities in *Doctor Zhivago*:

*I am the only free one. You are all cattle!* Indeed, lunatics are the only blessed in earthly asylum.

Subordination to unnatural constraints of both religious communities and social conventions, means nothing but to revel in collective neuroses. The commitment to one system means the rejection of any other (including the self-abandonment of individuality). Do not wear any other colour than your own given by nature; never desire any brand to participate in vanity; never cheer with the majority who are always wrong. Never run after a ball to aim a meaningless goal (which is supposed to be valuable by the screaming crowd). Every sports ground in the world is nothing but a battle field where the cubs are early conditioned to worship the competition – that always leads directly into the trenches!

Trained to be one with the pack in which we were born purely by chance and – this is the height of stupidity – even to be proud of it, be it its emblem, its anthem, or the veneration of its alpha wolves who drive the peoples against each other: This is not to our advantage, but only for the benefit of selfish elites! On the contrary, the hopeful youth should break the rusty chains of petrified patriarchs and grumpy grannies who had neglected them, orphaned and indoctrinated in order to repeat their mistakes over and over again – until we renounce following in the Dinosaur tracks of the Jurassic age and abstain from collecting artefacts of their mental calcification. There is not a single wisdom we can learn from the elders apart from the best way to warm up loo seats.

Every generation should spark a proper riot! To tear the family threads in which the kids have been entangled like in spiderwebs of pain since they cried in the cradle – and hark, they will breeze freely! It's the right, even the duty of all free people to rebel against unnatural rules and their evil preachers! *IF...we got rid of alpha wolves in general, all leaders whole around the world, their henchmen Scum and all their Manifestos (best in the footsteps of the *Giardinieri*), the world would be a paradise!* *IF...long-suffering pupils whipped their tormentors through the corridors of their breeding facilities.* *IF...every patient ripped out the bowels of the white-aproned gods (as we watched Herbert's final with greatest pleasure in *Asylum*). We detest those insane folks from the depths of our hearts!*

Stop harking to the Evil Ps: Parsons, Parents, Pedagogues – and Psychiatrists of course, the suggestive spearheads of the pack – pooh! To the repetitive beat of the Scum-bags!



Bitter blockheads are eager to tame nature and jealous of the lucky ones who enjoy life and love. There is no objective convention that can be derived from genuine nature but only dictated by petrified skulls of leaders, teachers and Sophistos (and wannabe philosophers who are, of course, the worst of all and destined to drag societies to hell. Umm, something to think about). They are nothing but poor harlequins naked on the loo seat. *DO what YOU WANT!* Not what others expect you to do, think or be. Live out every single feeling without caring about what those spoilsports consider to be appropriate. Don't let your cornucopia be plundered, your holistic personality (and first of all melancholia, the driving force behind all creativity). Only the whole is holy, your emotional tide in all its ambivalence! In this sense, let Sigmund speak, the grandmaster of all suggestive folks, in his own hearty words: *Don't let the assholes around you diagnose you with obscure depressions!*

Good man (at least as far as this one line is concerned)! A soul in distress doesn't need neither pills nor rebukes but a big amount of embraces. And never hear *calm down* and *pull yourself together*. Ouch, that's not helpful! We can do without such wise (ad)vices of sober know-it-alls and people (too) close to us, and prefer to stay alone. Waiver of needs is what we renounce and being smoothed blocks. We like to be rough stones! Eliminate negative triggers of those toxic people at your side instead of letting yourself be desensitized by their coldness; overcome those ignorant folks who poison you with selfish expectations to their advantage and society's perception – and you will feel better day by day. Free yourself from the pathetic pack that only makes you sick, whether on stage or at home, so that you are relieved from all dark thoughts. Never nest in the anthill, always do it your way; that's the only path to happiness. All people are lonely Islands (and even more so when they sink into the sea)! Follow Simon's and Lavater's wisdom and live in *sweet Solitude (the most reliable companion)* in a remote hermitage (preferably in a hollow trunk), one with healing nature. And there will be peace!

Whole the wealth of sensations is our true treasure! What some call disturbances, we call emotions! When we are happy, the laughter shall thunder. When we are sad, we want to sob a fortnight (all arts are born from grief). When we are horny, we want to make every woman in the world. When we hate the foe, we'll dash him in pieces like a potter's vessel (the mightiest of all emotions, and best with a big pistol placed at the scoundrel's head). And to love obsessively, if more whole than holy, that is the sum of it. But the scope of every drama requires a worthy conclusion. The curtain of the stage of life must fall in a noble way; and as Abelard gave his body to Heloise, our earthly vessel shall be consecrated to the beloved. Then a lament shall be sung, as Orpheus did when he followed Eurydice across the River Styx – that's a sublime culture of remembrance! Free Death was praised by all the ancient peoples before blockheads preached empty phrases of a merciless culture of suffering. Taking our own lives is the righteous way to forestall unending grief and lasting pain (and growing old, all the more so as confronted with the transience of beauty). Leaving the earthly vale of tears in good time and with dignity is the wisest decision, instead of withering in a metal cage of a stuffy dormitory with a silent voice and only articulating with your eyes.



In my sober narrative, it's not absurd to assume that her excursions to the Pinewood (where Virginia was loaned from Shepperton Studios to make two of her three colour films) were something like cursed, given the fact that our ill-fated protagonist suffered her first breakdown shortly before filming of the *Doctor* in autumn '59; and shortly after the completion of *Interlude* it will happen again – but in the fall of '67 she wouldn't be quartered with noble nuns but with savage folks. And soon afterwards that treatment she will seek for salvation by embarking on her final journey to another wintery wood in January '68. Oh strange threads of destiny from which she couldn't unravel!

As for the *Doctor*, it is lesser known that just as the filming almost couldn't start, her second colour movie also ended almost fatally. One bittercold morning in January '60 Virginia drove through the avenue leading to the Pinewood Studios. It is uncertain from where she set off but according to the timeline it was probably from Carmel Court; and thus she might well have been stressed by Cabal and Love on her private little stage. What we know for sure is that her car (which she had recently purchased) was registered on Pedro since a young actress had to pay a higher insurance fee than ordinary people. Those were the times when women (even more in a whimsical profession) were disadvantaged on every single field by their chauvinist environment – and especially in regard to their questionable driving skills without a male instructor; but what had to be proven: Virginia overturned her car on the icy axis. While her vehicle was a total loss, our little birdie crawled out of the wreck, pitifully beeping. Again, her fragile ark of life had escaped the River Styx. She was just slightly bruised on her forehead (allegedly with a *bad bump*, but I couldn't find the latter in any film still when I blew them up; obviously she was well made up). Even if the *Doctor's* release had to be



delayed for an uncertain time due to the temporary loss of the lead actress, neither her colleagues nor the audience noticed much of her worries since her manners and posture were always perfect (facade).

These events are not an invention of any wannabe playwright to spice up the plot, I assure you. Rather, they are well documented at least from three different perspectives: the Press (which this time considered the incident promptly), Pedro and Leslie (both in retrospect), with some discrepancies regarding the duration of Virginia's absence. It's not clear whether the release had to be delayed for just a week or a month, but we are tempted to assume that the bosses weren't amused about Virginia's drive (sounding familiar?) and afterwards perhaps not really convinced of her reliability. And while Leslie describes her (apart from the fact that she was quite *delicate*) as a conscientious colleague who soon stood upright on the ramp again, we learn from Pedro about the true condition of our reluctant protagonist. Behind the glittering curtain the situation was somewhat more dramatic than in Leslie's perception. Virginia stayed in hospital for a few days (certainly cuddling Little Pedro at her bed edge) and then she carried on trembling like a wet sparrow; rather, at this moment she was tempted to give up not only the filming but whole her career. She detested this profession! It wasn't worth wasting time on it. Remember Maya's wise doubts: What is more pointless than playing life instead of living? We know that she used to return home from every single filming day highly stressed and fell bedward narcoleptically – to ask how she could retreat at all in this overheated time, torn between professional pressure and private quarrel which alone was enough to consume all her energies. She should have renounced the vain competition and she might have lived a long, fulfilling life in unspoiled nature, more according to her delicacy. Another forgiven chance for a change, sadly enough.

And Pedro proved another time to be a pretty rascal (aka a suggestive little goblin in her ear) by persuading her to persevere (probably less out of compassion than due to his fear of having to support her financially, as he likes to hint; and who can blame him? Instead of this Sword of Damocles (of every man) he himself preferred to lodge comfortably as his landladies' house friend. A basic lesson of the School of Scoundrels!). But once again she surrendered to her fate, even if only on the condition that her secret companion accompany her until the end of the filming – to call it a *pistol to his head* (and a rather effective one)! Look, our heroine also knew to be a little rascal: Big Pedro cuddled her on the backstage a fortnight long, eyed by them all (so that now at the latest his iron discretion had melted into honey and Virginia's colleagues learned all about her whimsical taste) – That was worth it! All the more so since some months and injuries later to both herself and her gallant, she was gifted with a silver ring for which she had struggled for so long – rather cost-effective for a couple of bruised eyes. Her golden one would cost her far more.



Another movie this year was made at Virginia's actual base, Shepperton Studios, Surrey (a rural place, cozier than Pinewood and thus loved by all film folks), and partly on location off Cromwell Road near to her Kensington home (so that she could walk to work, at least a few days, and didn't have to drive through sinister woods). Apart from its title, *Suspect* is more of a relationship drama than a spy thriller, and let's be honest, it's not really an important film both in regard to its rather shallow plot and Virginia's career; but concerning our narrative, there are some interesting aspects worth highlighting. In *Suspect* our protagonist is faced again with mental instability in her environment like in *The Man Upstairs* and squeezed between professional duties and private challenges while she is seeking for her own path to happiness (albeit rather urged by her gallant to submit to his advances. There is always such a burden if we don't follow wisely Lavater's advice: *Loneliness is my dearest companion!*).

Virginia's roles (not only) during this time contrasted strangely with her real age. Albeit she was in her early '20s, she portrayed mature ladies in their mid-thirties – there a conscientious doctress curing a sick boy, here a sophisticated scientist nursing her handicapped husband – so credibly, with such a great intensity that we have to wonder where her experiences came from. Even if she was not educated in (what would later be called) *method acting*, she certainly *lived* her roles to the last consequence on a high emotional level. Maybe an inner voice inspired her genuine acting (my, she was an olde soul!), especially how to express *restrained despair*; but beyond that, it is tempting to assume a causality with her delicate relationship (with that olde wise man who had taught her *all about good and evil*) so that she sought and sometimes found a valve on stage (to discharge pent-up energies from her private chamber play) and vice-versa (what we know for sure) she also used to bring the roles (including some of her costumes) back home with ambivalent effects (that may be delightful in regard to a comedy – but what about a tragedy?). Unfortunately, there will be long enduring periods when the public stage is lacking and private frustrations prevail so that her delicate balance between lived fiction and played reality is probably so shaken that she (or those people close to her) can no longer cope adequately with the size of her tidal range; and therefore repeatedly she has to swap her seat from the doctress' to the patient's side of the doctor's desk.



Virginia played now in one of her most dramatic roles a conscientious scientist who nurses her former fiancé, a *war cripple* (as it was called back then) *fully dependant on her love* since he lost both hands (even if probably not due to their usage as ashtrays; please forgive this tasteless joke that could only have come from a Hun's brain), who emphasizes that he *doesn't want to further swallow pills* to numb his traumata and aches; and without her devotion he is threatened *to be institutionalized*. We also see Virginia raging as she *bangs her little fists on the pane (or the pain)*, given her turmoil between keeping iron loyalty to him while she has fallen in love to her lab colleague. But as we know (from Pedro's theories that *a nesting hen and a nurse is hidden in every woman*), women take generally care of sick companions (even if the latter are the worst drunkards) while men, as faced with female disturbances, are instantly overloaded so that they force their nagging wives to take feel-good-pills by Ordeal Pharmaceuticals and hand them over to the quacks in order to be "cured" of their (to ask whose?) complaints – that's always the same principle of gender-specific behaviour in matters of care.

However, despite her sacrificial efforts, our brave protagonist won't succeed either at the bitter end when the poor lad takes his own life, also thanks to the contribution of fierce investigators who were questioning her (in the course of the eponymous espionage affair that is actually only a subplot); and thus she couldn't come home in time to save her darling who took advantage of this delay (if he didn't even incite it) to free her from his burden. Sounding familiar? Moments before we saw their last meeting in the walled lane mentioned above, of course, for a last ciggie – for me the secret highlight of the film, even if perhaps just because of the moody location. That's a pretty sad farewell (all the more annoying if you know my disgust for cancer-sticks, both in real life and on screen). But what the heck? At the next morning we'll find her happy again with her sober partner and *no one will remember the man who passed away last night* – That's not really a compassionate plot, not true?! But there is another remarkably dense scene, as we have previously listened to her melancholic monologue. With a longing gaze out the window at the medical labs, Virginia philosophizes a little about how *happy trees turn green again after a big frrreeze, while unhealthy people never recover* (or something like that) – to think about who inspired her to juggle with such pensive phrases. I am inclined to assume (if it's rather unlikely in regard to her studio corset) she might have improvised with her very own words, given the fact that we know about similar thoughts expressed in her poems *April* and *February '63*; and as for *January '68* when she will leave her very last odd ode of *Love and Despair* (even if the latter is withheld from the audience), it sounds to me once again like a sinister premonition.



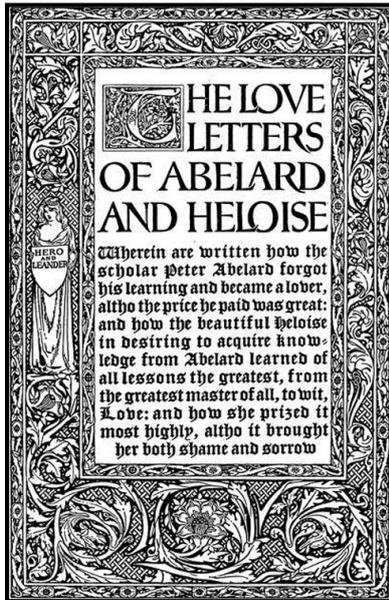
Especially in *Suspect* Virginia looks very different from that chubby girl we saw hardly 3 years ago on her *Virgin Island*. She is quite thin and I'm tempted to consider it could be related to her quarrels in her current concubinage (interestingly, Pedro will admonish her much later, when she is married, to eat better, so that we can assume at least partially a mental cause). But what a luck, thus her noble swan neck seems longer than in any other film (if also due to her sober hairdo). In this regard, my little rascal, let me add a fancy idea: Peter, with whom you played for the first and only time, should have recommended you to his fellow Christopher – or straight to me, your Malcount's little epigone who is eager to gnaw on your neck! But apart from this ribald joke, let me basically say that you would be my dream cast in *Hammer* horror films, particularly in the '70s when the stuff will become tougher and damsels in distress are confronted with ossified authorities, both secular and sacred, and their medical henchmen – to bravely overcome the latter with fire and fury and give those savage folks what they deserve (at least on screen)! But in fact, you will suffer it, your very own psycho thriller and a dreadful horror trip through the asylum abyss already in late '67 – sadly without a happy ending.

Another main location of *Suspect* was the Sunbury Petrol Campus near Shepperton. The modernist labs have long since been demolished, but there still exists a similar building some miles away in the north: the former headquarter of Ordeal Pharmaceuticals at Somerton Station – where you will pass by frequently on your way home from the studios when you settle in the Chilterns for a short time of decline, ironically close to that very place where all the poisoned dishes are stirred together, if not shaken, that are prescribed by the quacks (to particularly numb distressed women at their husbands' behest). And if I tend to twaddle and see always secret threads (or threats) where nothing exists than accidents – it's once again an intriguing choice of place, since here, even if this time not surrounded by religious folks, you are in the focus of white aproned people who are keen on human Guinea pigs.



Let's now leave the cinema with your mentioned last farewell while casually juggling a ciggie (since you don't foresee that you will never meet again your partner alive, or vice-versa) – then you walk alone down the gloomy lane with your footsteps fading away. It's a final fleeting glance after we were granted to share a short dream time together, and even if just in the course of a Black Series movie.

*Suspect* may have been an interesting little strip; but both from the professional and private point of view, the climax of 1960 was certainly another stage play of Mephisto with his Muse in the main role that artificially reflected their delicate relationship – and it was even literally dedicated to Virginia. Oh happy is the actress who is blessed with her very own play (if only it would stay on the stage)! Pedro's *Abelard and Heloise*, which was more of a recitation than a play, was another adaptation of a well-known ancient stuff – and not the last one, by the way, since a decade later a heartier version will be performed by Diana, more popular as *Steed's* sidekick, as iconic *Heloise* who would remain in memory as the first naked nun ever seen on stage. It will be a pretty scandal even in the liberal '70s. Albeit Virginia was spared from similar lewd glances – the audience has to wait until 1962 for her most permissive appearance on the big screen – she will be soon in the middle of another proper riot.



The template of his play is a real story from the French Middle Ages of an old (yeah!) wise (nay!) teacher and his female protégé who faded out convention and fell in love with dramatic effects, as it is confirmed by countless letters that they wrote to each other over painful years of insatiable longing. The misled pupil, who had *learned of all lessons the greatest – Love – and how she prized it most highly, although it brought her both shame and sorrow*, would finally join a convent (to live out a long, fulfilled life. And they say: *Nuns have no sense of humour*). The sinful teacher would be lucky enough to only lose his testicles on his opponent’s instruction – well, those were the times when tougher guys had a sense of honour. Pedro had, of course, his special view about the events and transformed the story in a headstrong plot in which the ancient protagonists would probably not recognize their relationship and original feelings. Rather, he let the wise man exclaim some of his very own secret fantasies: *Abelard* tries to cease the wrongful love by being emotionally cruel to her while *Heloise* clings to him desperately. She repeatedly insists with suggestive arguments that he visits her. Just like his *Catalyst*, Pedro’s *Abelard* was again his

narcissistic alter ego, a Suffering Prince faced with female demands, who would *lose all his friends and appetite of life* to die in deep, deep grief. Ooh, how sad!

Interestingly, we find similar thoughts as a leitmotif of his *Solitudes 21* (which he had written shortly before and also dedicated to his mistress), an allegoric series of attempted murders of their love – *several slow ways to kill you, yet you have not died* – to be inclined to assume that he too was pretty burdened by their long-lasting limbo (I am sorry but I can’t feel much pity for a Pharisaic debauchee).

*Abelard’s* final action is to give her his corpse (a pretty present, I have to say, which everyone involved could have waived from):

*If you wish for my salvation, then withdraw / The only way we can meet us is through the love of God!* And therefore, after she herself had survived a severe disease, *Heloise* finds redemption in religion. Sounding familiar? We have heard similar words before from an adorable little *Eve*. And Pedro, even if probably not really a strong believer, was also famous for his vast pseudo-religious odes. Our protagonists couldn’t refrain from always performing passion plays, each for themselves and together.

Pedro’s narrative was, of course, a complete reversal of their complicated relationship fabric (aka *Spiderweb of Pain*) since it was Virginia who actually tried to free herself again and again from his oppressive paternalism, whether through unfinished separations, throwing herself into the arms of an obscure third person, or even by attempts *to kill him* (at least according to his Freudian phobias, because he may have watched her making salads with suspiciously small sliced cucumbers – but there could be a little truth in it, since she used his hand as an ashtray as retribution for her Panda eyes. Well, they were a hot-blooded couple, not true?!). However, it was definitely Virginia who initially insisted on a separation in their early days when she tried to avoid the repetition of her painful childhood experiences from her dysfunctional family patchwork. But as we have already learned, their first attempt to renounce forbidden love took only half a night. And afterwards, whenever they parted again, he was the driving force begging for their lasting friendship in the course of endless letters, or he strategically (or tragically) quartered her with his bosom friend to make sure that she doesn’t fly too far away. That was him, our little *Abelard*, who lacked the will to draw the final line (and so did she, let us be honest, until one day it would be *Heloise* who would finish it). The couple were devoted to each other against all reason and circumstances. Indeed, their passion was *Obsession*.

*Abelard and Heloise* premiered in autumn ’60 once again in the Ol’Arts that has always been the appropriate stage of both scandalous plays and true little dramas whose background remained obscure – so that it would have needed a sleuth by Dame Agatha to find out what was actually going on behind the fluttering curtain. By the way, the latter is remembered today at the bustling crossing with a bust (since her *Mousetrap* has been performed for generations in a theatre at the next corner).



Another night to remember was the second performance early in October. As usual, she was celebrated for her recitation: *Virginia Maskell was a superb, clear, tragic Heloise*. But sadly the press was rather distracted by an incident that was more or less related with her voice or the fictional plot: *The duet, which only consists of the reading of letters, has awakened remarkable passions here, most spectacularly when one member of the audience shouted “Rubbish” and blacked the playwright’s eye*. In fact, when Virginia exclaimed *I don’t weep for myself, I weep for my big love!* an upset youngling sitting in the first row suddenly shouted out loudly *that’s all rubbish!* jumped up from his seat and ran out foaming with rage, followed by the playwright grumbling in the air. A little bar brawl took place in and off the foyer, which ended unfavourably for Pedro as he received a decent amount of blows. He was left behind on the kerb waiting for the doc. And I would have liked to shake the stranger’s hand. Eye for an eye!

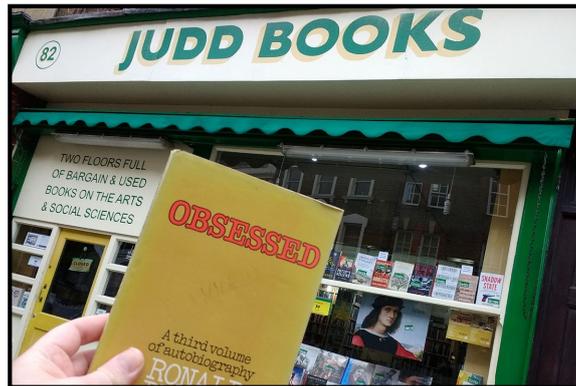
Since the incident was greedily received by the cheesecake press, Virginia was urged to take more than one stand on it – and it sounds as if she was beating around the bush when she made statements like *she didn’t know the invader. He was surely just a drunkard*. But, but... regarding his Irish accent (that didn’t remain hidden from the audience) and the fact that he came together with some sort of a silent second, we can assume that their was actually a relationship between all of them involved.



In this regard (even if I may be on the wrong tracks due to my sketchy sources) let’s dare a quick look back to the time a few months ago when Virginia had returned from a theatre tour through the Greene Island. This very special trip seems to have been pretty effective, given the fact that she had gained (allegedly rather reluctantly) a persistent admirer we may meet more than once in the course of some awkward events (even if we can’t be sure, due to public discretion and Pedro’s patchy memory, whether the obscure beau is one and the same or two or even three different people). However, Pedro’s reaction was not long in coming. And thus, in the heat of the dog days, Virginia proudly presented to all family and friends a pretty ugly blackened eye that she considered as a sign of

Pedro’s loving passion (to even refrain from wearing an eye patch, albeit it would have been a nice memory of her *Island* adventures, not true?!). And look what a lucky turn: A fortnight later she was gifted with a silver ring to ease her pain and Pedro’s guilty conscience – did I ever mention what a Charming Brute he could be? Finally, due to this little drama, she was almost at the goal of her dreams, for which she had struggled like a lioness, and released from a long-lasting limbo (even if the alternative would have probably been to become a horse-breeding millionaire on a noble estate high above the Irish Sea. She chose a pirate’s nest at the Celtic Sea. To each their own taste. And it is well known that women are often fond of the baddie). Well, I spare the baffled audience with further details in this awkward matter. Admittedly, I’m not really eager to retell Pedro’s confessions since I am not so fond of masculine archetypes; and neither do I appreciate heroes who smack women’s eyes nor do I understand gullible women who confuse their toxic gallant’s jealous possessiveness with love. You probably wouldn’t have thought this, huh? Therefore the inclined readers who are keen on more gossip have to take a look in Pedro’s tome themselves. Some copy should be found hidden in a library in the countryside, even if almost whole the volume seems to have been burned shortly after publication due to the grudge of obscure contemporaries.

I found mine after long research in a well-renowned Bloomsbury antiquarian (just some steps from the RADA School, by the way), oh what a lucky guy I was! I first read it passionately in one single night and sobbed and raged and sometimes giggled (I am sorry) about the hearty stuff; but I had to wonder about both the chauvinist stereotypes of an old wise men who obviously hadn't learned nothing from decades of personal mistakes, and about his strange omissions. Maybe there are countless innuendoes which have still to be decrypted, but in largely disregarding of Virginia's decline, he preferred to beat around the bush; and as he was especially negligent about time and place, he gave us many nuts to crack. But at least he tried to break the speechlessness that others had prescribed during the obscure final phase of life of our ill-fated protagonist and beyond her premature death. And thus he gave Virginia a little bit of posthumous justice while other folks liked to *bury her with convention* under an oppressive shroud of legends (which have been in circulation ever since) and conceal what a *gentle ragamuffin she was who BEGGED TO LIVE BY BEING REMEMBERED* in all her *ambivalence*.



HER TRUE STORY WAS REVEALED in 1977.

But no one wanted to hark. Even worse, Pedro didn't have the will or the strength or both to speak plainly and blow up her true misery which led to the catastrophe, both of her delicate nature and her ignorant environment. As for the latter, he was even denied the right (by convention, not by nature) to quote from her poems despite the fact that they were dedicated to him and him alone, by obscure players lurking in the dark. Oh what a malignancy! (And what a relief that their poems would one day be released together in the *Agenda* millennium edition to reunite the *Modern Abelard and Heloise* at least artistically, even if decades too late.) That smells to me like a bitter dispute about the sovereignty of interpretation – of who Virginia belongs to even after death, just as she had been thrown around like a toy or a pet and remote controlled by others almost whole her life. And given the prospect to be faced with quarrels (and as we know him not always heroic), Pedro refrained from publishing the last third of his memories (which are sleeping in a certain archive and are still waiting to be unearthed) so that he could never reveal what happened to her after they both had renounced from living their dream. Virginia fell in oblivion, ostracized by the grudge of those people who she considered as her closest. But maybe they too have skeletons in their closet. And certainly there is no room for interpretation that our poor heroine would not die as a happy lover, but as a haggard wife; that's what it all boils down to. To be reminded of *Justine*, who passed away prematurely through the sufferings of virtue instead of becoming blessed through vice (and she too would finally be struck by lightning, just like *Amyas* on his last drive *westward ho* – an ironic synchronicity, not true?!).

But let's calm down (from my headstrong and quirky moral values which, of course, absolutely contradict the manners of our well-bred heroine) and return from the aftermath to the living Heloise. Pedro himself would never mention the embarrassing scene of October '60. We know all about the incident from the press all around the world; twas a pretty little scandal everyone was keen on – and a big advertisement for this less important work; oh lucky is the playwright! Thus, regardless from the fact that the background of the riot would remain obscure, it was his last play that was in everyone's lips throughout the country and even beyond the Fairest Isle, hardly remembered for the plot (and unfortunately not the wonderful voice of our poor protagonist either) but this single hearty scene, when fiction and fact were merging. Otherwise *Abelard and Heloise* would have certainly fallen in oblivion, like most of his late works. But Pedro liked to hide some unfavourable aspects, particularly those that didn't fit his image as the New Byron, given the embarrassing fact that he was properly beaten up by a green youngling – to turn out to be just any old goblin.

However, Pedro may have lost his first duel, but he remained Virginia's hero – and there would be further events with similar results. The Lady would hold up his Lamp.



One uncertain day in the early '60s Mary would be back and the quirky couple, who had renounced divorce after a long battle to be more or less reconciled, would run Meat Farm together again, accompanied by plenty of guests in their leisure lodgings like in former years, among them artists from throughout the country – just to mention Anna, another actress who was allegedly popular back then (admittedly, I've never heard of her) and will even be photographed with lil Rupert at her feet; and albeit I couldn't find out how Pedro was related to her, I am tempted to consider (hopefully I am not doing her an injustice) that after hundred and one mistresses she could have well been No. 103 (if the New Byron hadn't renounced physical love after Augusta had left him). Last but not least, Virginia and her future spouse hung out in the Leat (and they would frequently recline in Heartland after their marriage) under the clatter of the mill wheel. Malcount Bay must have seen an illustrious bunch of mature Hippies – that seems familiar to me: I smell the salty air of Beef and the sounds of a bacchanal are wafting from the cliffs – as it is well documented literary and visually. Indeed, there are adorable still-lives from Pedro's estate published by the University of Exeter; sadly, I have to renounce from sharing these forbidden fruits since some folks on both sides of the Mendip Hills might not be amused by it. Odd I have to say, to see them hanging out happily together after painful years of Cabal of Love and the Olde and the Young Pretender seemingly befriended – but what the heck? That's just how they are, these celebrity circles and customs (or costumes) of the Cavaliers, which simple minds like you and me, who are rather fond of daily labour (and if necessary of a proper exchange of blows), don't understand. And what is secure is in regard to the tempest that is brewing behind the innocent green belt of trees with silent leaves gently rustling in the air of a sparkling mill leat, that both (or three or even four) of our protagonists would actually never be happy with this weird limbo and continue to be *Obsessed* with each other in insatiable longing until their last days. Our *Modern Abelard and Heloise* were entangled in self-destructive desire and they were torn by countless separations, whether spatially due to their different duties or shaken by personal storms. Given their misery, missing the karmic companion and feeling like *amputees lacking a leg* (or a hand or both of them – that sounds suspicious to me), they had one wish only (as hundreds of letters will prove and the lines of their poems, always drowning in the pain of separation every single day of their future lives in retrospect): to reunite with the lost half to be finally together, even if *more whole than holy* – surely a distressful wander between desire and regret with life-short effects (and maybe beyond as restless souls in search of lost time).

And if you may mock my musical taste, I hear another sweet ayre appropriately wafting in the ether. Let me quote a first verse of Dowland (a Jacobean composer who became famous both at the courts of James I and Kong Christian IV) that seems to recall all studies of Childe Ginny's Pilgrimage:

*Come again / sweet love doth now invite / thy graces that refrain / to do me due delight.  
To see, to hear / to touch, to kiss / to die ... with thee again / in sweetest sympathy.*



## II Photo credits for the second chapter

in this order: page by page, from top to bottom, from left to right.

All screenshots were taken from own DVDs respectively videos (unless otherwise stated).

Most of the press clippings were purchased from *The British Newspaper Archive* or private sellers in digital or analogue form (unless otherwise stated).

- 0 AVA at home
- 1 pic on location via FB group *Welcombe Chatter*, AVA on loc
- 2 net find (*Pandora*, Pre-Raphaelite painting), screenshots (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*), AVA on loc
- 3 pic courtesy of Rod, AVA at home
- 4 AVA collection (digital press clipping)
- 5 net find
- 6 bonus stills from the *Rank Collection Doctor* edition, net find (historical backyard in Copenhagen), net find (crashed car on a country road near Aylesbury in the mid '60s)
- 7, 8, 9 screenshots
- 10 screenshots, AVA collection (own post card: Risboro Parade in summer '66)
- 11 screenshot, AVA collection (excerpt of a Danish cinema programme), pic courtesy of Rod
- 12 net finds
- 13 DVD cover (Handel aka *The Charming Brute*), AVA on loc, AVA at home (original theatre programme of the premiere of *The Catalyst*, 25th March, 1958)
- 14 AVA on loc (poster in the Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, London), screenshot (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*), net finds
- 15 AVA on loc, net find (Richard Wagner seduces Santa Cecilia)
- 16 net finds
- 17 AVA collection (photo of Kathleen Ferrier from the book *How to make Enemies*), ebay lot, pic courtesy of Rod, AVA collection (three digital press clippings)
- 18 Althorp portrait of Sisi via *Wikipedia*, AVA collection (DVD cover of *Nordseelieder* by A. Malaparte; also available here as a download: <http://www.archivaria.de/malaparte/nordseelieder123.MP3>)
- 19 AVA on loc, pics on location via FB group *Welcombe Chatter*, pic courtesy of Rod
- 20 AVA collection (illustration of Stolberg's poems), AVA at home (book *Devon and Cornwall*)
- 21 screenshot, pic on location via FB group *Welcombe Chatter*, net find
- 22 net find, *Ladybird Books* FB group, AVA collection (poster of an art exhibition in Hamburg in 1996)
- 23 AVA collection (original photo from 1958)
- 24 pic courtesy of Rod, screenshots
- 25 ebay lot, screenshots
- 26 net find, AVA at home (book *A Tribute to Ronald Duncan*, *Agenda* Millennium issue, 2002),
- 27 wood pics via FB group *Britain's Ancient and Sacred Trees*, VA Museum FB page
- 28 AVA at home (book cover *Mr. and Mrs. Mouse* by R.M. and R. Duncan), screenshot
- 29 net find (Victorian cartoon of Suffragettes from a male perspective), screenshot
- 30 illustration of *The Monk: Agnes* in the dungeon holding her newborn, screenshot from *Jane Eyre: Bertha*, the suffering wife, locked up by her husband
- 31 screenshot (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*), Boudicca Monument in Westminster (via *Wikipedia*), net find, statue of Mother Julian of Norwich (via *Wikipedia*), net find
- 32 screenshot (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*), net find, screenshot
- 33, 34 screenshots
- 35 net find, AVA on loc, historical image of Scarsdale Villas (via <https://rbklocalstudies.wordpress.com>)
- 36 AVA on loc, historical image of Notting Hill Gate around 1960
- 37 screenshot, AVA on loc, historical image of Aubrey Walk in the 1960s, two screenshots

- 38 net find, screenshots
- 39 AVA on loc, pic from *Old Fishes Association* FB page, screenshot, confectionary advertisement
- 40 AVA on loc
- 41 screenshot (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*), net find, pic from *Old Fishes Association* FB page,
- 42 screenshot, historical drawing (Lady Isabel in a cage), historical image (Harrow Boys)
- 43 screenshot and bonus pic of DVD *IF...*
- 44 pic courtesy of Rod, pic from *Gamle København* FB page, bonus pic of DVD *The Devils*, screenshot
- 45 AVA at home (book *Fishy Tales*, acquired through <https://canonesses.co.uk>), AVA on loc
- 46 AVA on loc, AVA collection (digital press clipping), screenshots
- 47 AVA on loc
- 48 screenshot, net find, screenshot
- 49 AVA collection (book *Billeder af Danmarks historie: The Suffering Princess Leonora Cristina*), net find, screenshot, net find
- 50 screenshots (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*), net finds
- 51 AVA on loc, screenshot
- 52 net find, AVA collection (*Ladybird* book *The Nurse*), AVA collection (book *Obsessed*), net find (*Sweep* on a bone vehicle)
- 53 screenshot (*Kispus*), AVA collection (old post card), AVA on loc
- 54 AVA on loc, net find (V&A Museum), AVA collection (digital press clipping), AVA on loc
- 55 AVA at home, AVA on loc, net find
- 56 AVA collection (digital press clipping), screenshot, AVA on loc (poster in the Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, London)
- 57 historical drawing of a lunatic
- 58 screenshot
- 59 net find, historical photo of Aylesbury with the new built County Hall in the focus, net find
- 60 AVA on loc (remains of Stone Asylum), net find (historical air view of Stone), screenshot
- 61 lobby card of Dario Argento's film *Phenomena*, still of *Riget* aka *The Kingdom* (Danish TV series)
- 62 DVD cover of *Riget* aka *The Kingdom*, screenshot (Helle Virkner), net find
- 63 emblem of *The Prisoner* series (acquired through: <https://www.portmeiriononline.co.uk>)
- 64 screenshots of the *Midsomer Murders* episode *Written in Blood* (collage by AVA)
- 65 net find, screenshot (final sequence from *Mozart*, 1955), screenshot (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*)
- 66, 67 screenshots
- 68 screenshot, screen hot (Lee as *Dracula*), screenshot (Cushing et al in *Suspect*), screenshot (*Heavens Above*), screenshots
- 69 net find (*Abelard and Heloise*, Pre-Raphaelite book cover via *Wikipedia*)
- 70 AVA on loc, net find (French painting of a decent duel), cover T shirt (by several online-shops, via ebay)
- 71 AVA on loc
- 72 photo extract without permission of the Duncan Archive of the University of Exeter, pic courtesy of Rod, pic on location via FB group *Welcombe Chatter*
- 73 DVD cover (*Ballads of John Dowland and his contemporaries*, a German edition from Hamburg)
- 74 screenshot

Second revised version (February 2026)



Back to the roots: <http://www.archivaria.de/andersen/novel.html>