



# The Politics of Possession: Edwin Long's *Babylonian Marriage Market*

Imogen Hart

Connections between Edwin Long's history painting *The Babylonian Marriage Market* (plate 1) and Victorian society have been acknowledged both by nineteenth-century viewers and by recent scholars, yet such observations have not reached beyond a straightforward interpretation of the painting as an illustration of a classical narrative. By carrying out a close visual analysis of the painting, and by demonstrating how it both engages with and diverges from its sources, I will show that *The Babylonian Marriage Market* participates in Victorian debates in much more subtle and ambiguous ways than previous scholars have recognized. This new reading is important because a common critique of the painting rests on the argument that it represents and invites an exploitative male gaze. I will show that, while there are grounds to support such a view, the painting can be alternatively interpreted as a feminist intervention in a range of overlapping contemporaneous discussions surrounding the status of women. My argument is not based on evidence relating to the artist's conscious intention, but instead draws on the visual evidence contained within the painting itself and on the sources that survive relating to the painting's reception in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Bohrer has observed of *The Babylonian Marriage Market* that 'The primary subject of the work is the display of women, and of men gazing at them with an eye towards possession.'<sup>2</sup> While there are valid reasons for arguing that this painting endorses the identification of men with active looking and women with passive 'to-be-looked-at-ness', the subjects and objects of vision in the work cannot be reduced to this straightforward dichotomy.<sup>3</sup> It is a common assumption that the woman on the raised platform is the main focus of attention, and indeed most of the male figures look in her direction. Yet hers is not the only female body on display. Although they are not visible to most of the men in the picture, the women seated in the foreground confront the viewers of the painting. The artist chooses not to represent the scene from the perspective of the depicted crowd, but instead situates himself 'backstage'. I say 'himself' because Edwin Long was male, but I would like to suggest that the artist adopts a female viewing position. The area at the front is a distinctly female space and the women who occupy it are separated by a fence from the only male figure who attempts to cross the dividing line. I do not wish to suggest that 'the display of women, and of men gazing at them' is not a theme of the painting; rather, I aim to show that Long provides models for a variety of viewing positions and objects of vision.

**Detail from Jean-Léon  
Gérôme, *The Slave Market (A  
Vendre)*, 1871 (plate 8).**

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I Edwin Longsden Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 172.6 x 304.6 cm. Egham, Surrey: Royal Holloway, University of London.

### A 'Page from Ancient History'

*The Babylonian Marriage Market* was, and still is, usually interpreted as a faithful illustration of Herodotus's *Histories* of the fifth century BC.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, I explore how the image modifies and critiques Herodotus. Borrowing a helpful phrase from Mieke Bal's analysis of the relationship between word and image, I aim to demonstrate that the painting is 'not a retelling of the text but a use of it; not an illustration but, ultimately, a new text'.<sup>5</sup>

When the picture made its debut at the Royal Academy in 1875, the exhibition Catalogue featured an extract from George C. Swayne's *Herodotus*. First published in 1870, Swayne's book is not so much a translation as a liberal interpretation of Herodotus's text. Most of Swayne's version appears in the Catalogue, as follows:

Herodotus records one of [the Babylonians'] customs, which, whether in jest or earnest, he declares to be the wisest he ever heard of. This was their wife-auction, by which they managed to find husbands for all their young women. The greatest beauty was put up first, and knocked down to the highest bidder; then the next in the order of comeliness – and so on to the damsel who was equidistant between beauty and plainness, who was given away gratis. Then the least plain was put up, and knocked down to the gallant who would marry her for the smallest consideration, – and so on till even the plainest was got rid of to some cynical worthy, who decidedly preferred lucre to looks. By transferring to the scale of the ill-favoured the prices paid for the fair, beauty was made to endow ugliness, and the rich man's taste was the poor man's gain.<sup>6</sup>

Compare Swayne's version with Herodotus's, in a translation by George Rawlinson from 1858:

Of their customs, ... the following ... is the wisest in my judgment. Once a year in each village the maidens of age to marry were collected all together into one place; while the men stood round them in a circle. Then a herald called up the damsels one by one, and offered them for sale. He began with the most beautiful. When she was sold for no small sum of money, he offered for sale the one who came next to her in beauty. All of them were sold to be wives. The richest of the Babylonians who wished to wed bid against each other for the loveliest maidens, while the humbler wife-seekers, who were indifferent about beauty, took the more homely damsels with marriage-portions. For custom was that when the herald had gone through the whole number of the beautiful damsels, he should then call up the ugliest – a cripple, if there chanced to be one – and offer her to the men, asking who would agree to take her with the smallest marriage-portion. And the man who agreed to take the smallest sum had her assigned to him. The marriage-portions were furnished by the money paid for the beautiful damsels, and thus the fairer maidens portioned out the uglier.<sup>7</sup>

Both writers communicate the fundamental point of the story, namely that the ancient Babylonians provided marriage dowries for the plainest women by selling the most beautiful for the highest sums they would fetch at auction. Yet Swayne deviates from Herodotus in significant ways. Most importantly, Swayne revises the order in which the women were sold; while Herodotus moves straight from the ‘beautiful damsels’ to ‘the ugliest’, Swayne imagines a gradually decreasing scale of beauty from fairest to plainest. This system nicely accommodates the concept of ‘the damsel who was equidistant between beauty and plainness, who was given away gratis’, which is entirely Swayne’s invention. Whereas Herodotus specifies that ‘the men stood round them in a circle’, Swayne implies a more linear system of the kind depicted by Long. While Long may also have consulted a translation of Herodotus’s *Histories*, he must have borrowed his title from Swayne, who coins the phrase ‘The Babylonian Marriage Market’.<sup>8</sup> The full ‘explanation of the subject’ provided by the Catalogue led many viewers to consider the painting as a straightforward illustration.<sup>9</sup> ‘A humorous page from ancient history’, declared one critic, while another observed ‘an historic reality about the whole scene that will please the student of Herodotus’.<sup>10</sup>

Up to a point, Swayne’s text serves as a guide to the painting. His understanding of the auction process is reinforced by Long’s composition, in which the linear ordering of the women is foregrounded. The systematic logic of the text helps the viewer to map Swayne’s account onto the picture. The woman on the platform must be the ‘greatest beauty’ not only because she is the first to be displayed but also because of the effect that her face, invisible to the viewer, has on the crowd. A girl to the far left is being veiled, suggesting that that she is ‘next in the order of comeliness’. The figure towards the centre of the line, who looks straight out at the viewer, is usually interpreted as ‘the damsel who was equidistant between beauty and plainness, who was given away gratis’ (plate 2).<sup>11</sup> Finally, the girl covering her face with her hands ‘in abject shame’<sup>12</sup> to the far right is understood to be ‘the plainest’. Yet while the text provides a starting point for interpretation, the painting’s meaning cannot be summed up in the extract from Swayne’s *Herodotus*. As Bal has argued, the ‘recognition of what is already known is an indispensable step in the communication of a new, alternative propositional content that is not yet known.’<sup>13</sup> I will now assess what I suggest is the ‘new, alternative propositional content’ offered in *The Babylonian Marriage Market*.

**2 Detail of Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, showing the central foreground figure.**



### 'A New Text'

The painting reveals that the neatness of Swayne's auction process is also its weakness. As the *Spectator's* critic observes, the 'system' represented in the painting 'assumes that there is an ascertainable zero-point, on the right side of which the attraction is to be reckoned as of positive and on the wrong side as of negative value', and it is thanks to the fact that Long is 'following a modern commentator on Herodotus' that the painter 'assumes that there is such a boundary-line'.<sup>14</sup> Long's composition demonstrates clearly how this system, as described by Swayne, would rely on a perfect balance of beauty and ugliness. This desired result is symbolized by the central figure, who, being 'equidistant between beauty and plainness', achieves the equilibrium sought by the whole enterprise. If the distribution of beauty and ugliness amongst the marriageable women were to be unbalanced, the structure of the marriage market would collapse.

Long not only highlights the impracticality of the system described by Swayne, but also undermines the very premise of the Babylonian marriage market. Bohrer claims that 'Long's subject is the transformation of women into currency. The characteristic feature of this system is the hierarchical ranking and measurement of the women/commodities'.<sup>15</sup> Hierarchy and measurement are indeed fundamental to Herodotus's story. Yet the very idea that a picture of clearly defined levels of beauty could be painted rests on the assumption that beauty can be identified objectively. Contemporaries observed Long's 'touch of genius' in concealing the faces of the most and least beautiful, appealing to the notion that the imagination can better supply the features of beauty and ugliness than the brush.<sup>16</sup> The guiding voice of Swayne leads the viewer to believe that the women are arranged in order of beauty. Yet an examination of the painting reveals that attempts to 'rank' and 'measure' the brides-to-be are challenged in a number of ways. For example, the composition equalizes the women, rather than establishing a hierarchy. Apart from the figure at the far left, who begins to stand, the women in the foreground are all represented on a level. Their equivalence in this respect is emphasized by the strikingly horizontal composition. Like the frieze in the background, the painting divides visually into three bands, and the seated women are all contained within the lower band, implying their interchangeability.

Recent scholars have observed that Victorian standards of beauty seem to inform the arrangement of the women. Most importantly, the position of different racial types in the line has been seen as symbolic of the imperialist worldview.<sup>17</sup> Bohrer claims that 'From left to right, the progression from "beautiful" to "plain" is distinctly racialized. The lighter skin of the women at left gives way to darker skin tones, while facial features also metamorphose'.<sup>18</sup> The figure at the far right certainly seems to have the darkest skin while the mirror held by a girl on the left reflects light onto her face, emphasizing her paleness.<sup>19</sup> Yet these specific observations do not necessarily represent a general organizing principle in the line as a whole. The girl fifth from the right is paler than the girl immediately above her in the line, and the pallor of her skin tone is emphasized by the light that falls upon her (plate 3). If the ordering of the line were based on a prejudice towards pale skin, this girl's relatively low status would be difficult to explain. One contemporary viewer certainly did not perceive this to be the logic behind the women's arrangement. In an illustration of the painting from Henry Blackburn's *Academy Notes*, rough shading is employed to signify darker skin tones in the fifth, seventh and twelfth figures in the line, contradicting the idea that there is a gradual development from light to dark.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, there seems to be no clear guiding principle behind the arrangement.

**3 Detail of Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, showing the fifth female figure from the right.**







**4 Detail of Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, showing the central male figure with a chest.**

Had Long been concerned with communicating a distinct hierarchy or a discernible measurement of beauty, he could have provided a more caricatural array of beautiful and plain maidens. Instead, the faces and bodies of Long's figures frustrate attempts to explain their aesthetic ordering. The effect is to question the system described by Herodotus by helping to demonstrate the impracticality of making beauty an objective matter.

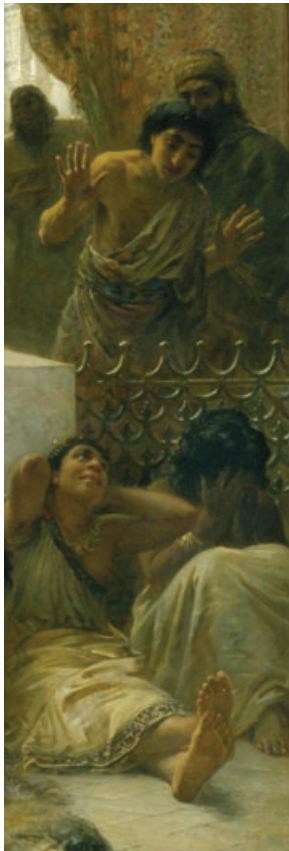
Another figure in the painting helps to dismantle the rational principles suggested in the text by displaying what appears to be disinterested rapture. The man holding a chest, and apparently mesmerized by the woman on display, casually hands over his worldly goods to the men behind him (plate 4). This surrender of wealth in the face of beauty, given central stage, helps to undermine the fundamental basis of the Babylonian marriage market. Unlike another figure with a chest, who gazes into it, presumably calculating his maximum price, this man is not carefully weighing up his financial situation and his desire for the woman. His attention completely absorbed by the sight before him, he abandons his wealth without even looking at it. With this action he seems to challenge the commodification of marriage – the equivalence of wife and price – that is central to the market system. Over the heads of these two men with chests, the frieze depicts a male lion standing over a submissive mate, while a rival male lion retreats, presumably overpowered. The successful male is paired with the man who looks up, entranced, whereas the man whose attention is fixed on his wealth stands beneath the defeated lion. This Darwinian reference wittily implies that careful calculation of financial value is not a winning strategy in natural selection.

Another deviation from the textual narrative occurs in the exchange taking place between a man and a woman to the right of the painting (plate 5). This vignette has prompted vastly different interpretations. According to Mary Cowling, 'The face of the plainest is ... concealed, but not before it has had its effect on another onlooker who throws up his hands in horror.'<sup>21</sup> Cowling thus sees this exchange as confirming the logic of the textual narrative, assuming that the aesthetic ordering holds firm, and that a potential husband cannot but be disgusted with those at the far end of the line.

Bohrer's interpretation, on the other hand, is diametrically opposed to Cowling's: 'The face of the man at right, and even more his gesture of raised hands (derived from Renaissance painting), testify to his being moved by the sight he sees.' Bohrer sees this mini-scene as confirmation of the imperialist superiority of the Victorian viewer, whose 'privileged perspective' exposes the folly of the man in the painting, who 'appears to have fallen in love with one of the least beautiful of the women.'<sup>22</sup> For Bohrer, the man's gesture is a sign of love; for Cowling, it is a sign of horror.

Bohrer's assumption that the viewer must necessarily mock this figure for choosing to bestow his affections on this woman – if that is what the man is doing – also takes for granted that Herodotus's system is a sound one, and that attention is more properly paid to women further up the line. Bohrer fails to acknowledge what the *Spectator's* critic perceived in 1875: 'Of course, the whole system depends on the theory, probably not quite true even in Babylon, that beauty is the one thing desirable in matrimony.'<sup>23</sup> As I have shown, Long's painting questions the logic of this theory by refusing to mark out clear gradations of beauty.

The art-historical precedents that Bohrer alludes to suggest another interpretation of this man's gesture. In works such as Carravaggio's *Deposition* (1600–04) and Raphael's tapestry cartoon *The Blinding of Elymas* (1515–16), raised arms denote shock, denial and a sense of loss.<sup>24</sup> As Bohrer observes, the figure's attitude reveals that the man is 'moved by the sight he sees', but Long's intention may be to suggest that the man is



5 Detail of Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, showing the figures at right.

moved to despair at seeing the woman he loves put up for auction. This seems to be how D. W. Griffith interpreted the picture in his film *Intolerance* (1916), which includes a seven-and-a-half-minute scene closely based on *The Babylonian Marriage Market*. During this scene, when the ‘incurable’ Mountain Girl is put up for sale on the stage, there are several shots of the Rhapsode, who is in love with her, reeling with anguish as he waits to see if she will be purchased.<sup>25</sup> In his separation from the crowd, and in his emotional response to the auctioning of a woman deemed by the majority to be undesirable as a wife – a response expressed in gestures rather than words due to the silent nature of the film – the Rhapsode echoes the man with raised hands in Long’s painting. Returning to the picture with this later interpretation in mind, the pair on the right may represent an allusion to pre-existing attachments, or even relationships, that threaten to upset the balance of the marriage market. In this passage of the painting the man and woman mirror one another: both chests are half exposed, both have their arms raised and bent at the elbows, while the man’s downward gaze is met by her upward one. This visual connection hints at a deeper bond between the two.

The introduction of this man, and his expressive (yet ambiguous) gesture, contributes to the process of undermining any straightforward narrative for the picture. Long not only makes it difficult to map physical features onto an objective hierarchy of beauty but also exposes the impracticality of allowing such a system to regulate marriage choices, by introducing a figure who neglects the discipline of the auction process, and initiates his own encounter with a woman at the ‘wrong’ end of the line. Both the mesmerized man who abandons his wealth and the man by the fence who holds up his hands suggest through their body language that they are driven more by emotion than by logic. Long’s decision not to transfer the rationality of the textual accounts into his painting can be read as a refusal to sanction the principles underlying the marriage market. The implied criticism in Long’s interpretation of Herodotus is a crucial aspect of the painting’s engagement with contemporary debates, as I will demonstrate shortly. First, I would like to explore how Long’s reworking of Herodotus involves an exploration of the visual aspects of the story, by asking who is being looked at and who is doing the looking.

### **Spectatorship in *The Babylonian Marriage Market***

As Peter Thomson observes, ‘The outstretched arm of the auctioneer ... openly invites the possessiveness of the male gaze.’<sup>26</sup> The gesture is echoed by another man near the centre of the picture, whose raised arms direct a third man’s attention towards the figure on the platform. This is a familiar scenario in which a judgemental gaze is aimed at the bodies of women, making the viewer active and the represented woman passive. Female objectification is undeniably an element of Herodotus’s (and Swayne’s) narrative, but, I will argue, Long’s painting sets up a range of potential subjects and objects of vision.

A comparison with Edward Poynter’s *Israel in Egypt* (1867), a picture of a similar size, emphasizes the intimate scale and low viewpoint of *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, whose perspectival arrangement denies viewers the opportunity to adopt an elevated, distanced position from which to look down on the scene. Instead, because of the way the floor slopes upwards, the viewer is, as I suggested earlier, positioned at the level of the seated women, sharing their enclosed space. Here, the only identity available to the viewer is that of a woman for sale. This is driven home by the fact that the figure in the centre of the line addresses the viewer directly (see plate 2).

Some critics have objected to the women ‘sitting with their backs to the scene of action’, yet Long’s composition indicates that the main ‘scene of action’ is in fact

the line of women in the foreground, not the auction, which, as a contemporary viewer observes, is 'cramped into the background'.<sup>27</sup> Other stylistic features support this claim. A stronger sense of depth and three-dimensionality is conveyed in the treatment of the foreground, whereas the background is comparatively shallow and flat. The figures at the front do not press up against the surface of the painting; instead, a few extra feet of floor between the viewer and the figures contributes to the illusion of receding space and allows the viewer to imagine joining the group. In contrast, the background figures seem squeezed into too small an area. The length of the wall to the left suggests that the room does not extend back far enough to accommodate several rows of crowd members plus the seated note-taker in front of them, while the platform on which the woman is displayed is very narrow, apparently the same width as the auctioneer's stand, which again reduces the sense of depth in this part of the picture.

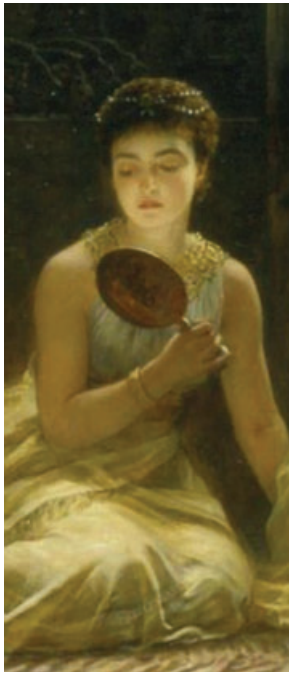
Meanwhile, the foreground figures are carefully modelled to create the impression of three-dimensionality. Light reflects off exposed limbs and the plain, white drapery is well suited to the moulding of rounded, sculptural forms. The background figures, in contrast, are not only too numerous to fit into the available space, but also seem much flatter than the figures in the foreground. Their multi-coloured, patterned clothing creates less play of light and shade, minimizing the sense of solid bodies beneath. As a result of these compositional and stylistic devices, the crowd seems almost as frieze-like as the mosaics on the walls, as though the women at the front were actors on a stage and everything behind them simply a backdrop. This stage-like impact was noticed by contemporaries, including J. E. Hodgson, who observed that 'Edwin Long is not only an artist of great ability; he is above and beyond all else a constructive genius. ... [H]is stage effects are unrivalled.'<sup>28</sup> These spatial effects emphasize the foreground as the main 'scene of action' and invite viewers to identify most closely with the more fully fleshed-out foreground figures who seem to share their space.<sup>29</sup> Long's composition thus complicates the gendering of vision in the painting.

As I have already explained, Herodotus declares that 'the men stood round them in a circle', whereas Swayne describes a linear process closer to Long's composition, where the future wives are lined up and displayed to the audience one by one.<sup>30</sup> Yet when the role of the painting's viewers is acknowledged, a rather different composition emerges. The women are indeed encircled, by 'the men gazing at them with an eye towards possession' behind them, and by the viewers before them. One critic observed that Long's composition 'enables the spectator to judge for himself as to the relative beauty of the women'.<sup>31</sup> In a sense, then, the painting's viewers make up the missing half of the 'circle' within which the Babylonian wives-to-be are contained.

Contemporary and more recent accounts, like those quoted above, have almost always assumed that both the viewers represented within the painting and those situated outside the painting are men: the auctioneer and members of the crowd wield 'the male gaze', while the spectator judges 'for himself'. Yet when the painting was first exhibited Scottish writer Margaret Oliphant witnessed or imagined the effect of the painting upon a female audience.

And if the spectator gazes around him after he has looked at the picture, he will see another picture scarcely less attractive in the curious glances of the living faces that crowd about. We should not wonder if the young women, flower of English youth, who gather round with a curiosity not unmixed





6 Detail of Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, showing the female figure holding a mirror.

with personal feelings, found something like a revelation in the picture. One sees them glance at each other with a half smile, half blush, sometimes with subdued awe or indignation. 'Is that how they think of us, these men, though they dare not look it?' the girls ask themselves.<sup>32</sup>

Oliphant thus encloses a single male viewer within a circle of women. Before him are the painted 'girls of marriageable age' and around him his fellow spectators, the (female) 'flower of English youth'. Oliphant's image reverses the composition described by Herodotus, in which 'the maidens of age to marry were collected all together into one place; while the men stood round them in a circle.'<sup>33</sup> By situating a male spectator in the centre of a circle, in the place of the brides, Oliphant refuses to split men and women into viewing subject and viewed object, respectively. Just as his position in the centre of the circle affords Oliphant's male spectator a good view of the women (painted and real) all around him, the painted women who find themselves encircled are also viewers.

Instead of assuming, as many critics do, that the painted woman on the stage is the obvious visual focus, Oliphant identifies multiple subjects and objects, both within and beyond the picture. Oliphant scrutinizes the male figures in the painting as much as the female figures. She observes, for example, that 'the expression of the crowd of faces all fixed' upon the central woman 'is wonderfully fine and full of variety'. Oliphant observes in the male figures, 'The lips parted with that smile of mingled vanity and admiration with which men (out of marriage markets) so often regard the women exposed to their gaze.'<sup>34</sup> The male gaze is thus exposed to judgement. At the same time, Oliphant imagines alternative viewing positions that have implications for the gender politics of the picture. For example, her commentary begins to explore how the painting might cause female viewers to become aware of the way they are seen and evaluated by others and how they might view themselves differently as a result.<sup>35</sup>

Oliphant's response points to the fact that Long offers a range of models of spectatorship in the picture. The woman holding a mirror on the left may potentially see a reflected image of the crowd behind her and thus be able to observe the men staring at the woman on the stage (plate 6). Meanwhile she, seeing her own image, is made self-conscious, like Oliphant's imagined female viewers. As Sophie Gilmartin observes, the direct stare of two women in the foreground makes the viewer's position less comfortable (see plate 2). It brings to the viewer 'a consciousness of his or her own gaze, which considering the theme of the painting, cannot help but be voyeuristic'.<sup>36</sup> According to this reading, these two female figures wield the 'returned gaze', causing the viewer to feel ashamed.<sup>37</sup> Yet, given Oliphant's suggestion of a female audience, the returned gaze may also represent a point of connection between the painted figures and the viewer, reinforcing the sense that the painting invites identification with the figures in the foreground rather than simply objectifying them. The painting is not 'a mirror held up to Victorian society', but instead engages in ongoing feminist debates by offering a range of ways of seeing, as I shall now go on to show.<sup>38</sup>

### Marriage as Slavery

Swayne acknowledged the implications of the subject for his own society in two final sentences that were not included in the Royal Academy Catalogue: 'The Babylonian marriage-market might perhaps be advantageously adopted in some modern countries where marriage is still made a commercial matter. It at least possesses

the merit of honesty and openness, and tends to a fair distribution of the gifts of fortune.’<sup>39</sup> Many of the painting’s earliest critics commented on its contemporary relevance. William Rossetti claimed that the picture combined ‘antique fact and modern innuendo’.<sup>40</sup> One aspect of its ‘modern innuendo’ may have stemmed from the fact that London was famously known as ‘modern Babylon’.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, *The Times* observed dryly that ‘Among us Westerns nowadays it will be said that the “pull” would have been on the side of well-dowered ugliness, against beauty that had to be paid for’.<sup>42</sup> For John Ruskin, the painting’s representation of the attitudes of both sexes to matrimony – woman’s ‘vanity and spite’ and man’s ‘avarice and animal passion’, as he put it – made it ‘a specific piece of the natural history of our own century’.<sup>43</sup> Ruskin went on to compare the painting’s subject more explicitly to Victorian England: ‘As the most beautiful and marvellous maidens were announced for literal sale by auction in Assyria, are not also the souls of our most beautiful and marvellous maidens announced annually for sale by auction in Paris and London ...?’<sup>44</sup> It is this specific parallel, between the Babylonian marriage market as represented in Long’s picture and the characteristics of Victorian marriage, that I would now like to consider.

The *Babylonian Marriage Market* was chosen as the subject of the satirical frontispiece in the annual *Punch’s Pocket Book* of 1876 (plate 7). The wood-engraving after a drawing by Charles Keene is entitled ‘The Modern Babylonian Marriage Mart’ and ‘respectfully dedicated to E. L. Long, Esq., the painter of the ancient one’.<sup>45</sup> The cartoon’s composition differs considerably from that of the painting. Instead of being a self-contained female space, the foreground area is flanked by male figures who subtly pass judgement on the women before them, giving additional power and voice to the male gaze, which is much more ambiguous and balanced in the painting. The women, meanwhile, are silenced and commodified by the signs hanging around their necks that employ commercial language such as ‘Sold’, ‘Paints in Watercolours’ and ‘Curate Preferred’, and the absence of a returned gaze makes the viewer less self-conscious and more distanced. There is no equivalent to the mesmerized man who abandons his wealth or the exchange between the man and

7 Joseph Swain after Charles Keene, ‘The Modern Babylonian Marriage Mart’, from *Mr. Punch’s Pocket Book*, 1876. Wood engraving coloured by hand, 12.1 x 22.9 cm. New Haven, CT: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



woman (see plate 5), elements that, as I have shown, contribute significantly to the painting's questioning of the principles underlying Herodotus's story. The cartoon thus graphically demonstrates how the painting can be interpreted as an image of patriarchal oppression.

In 1882 Thomas Holloway added *The Babylonian Marriage Market* to the art collection he was amassing for his women's college, Royal Holloway.<sup>46</sup> The same year marked a dramatic shift in Victorian marriage law in the form of the Married Women's Property Act.<sup>47</sup> The main issue addressed by the Act was the right of married women to own property instead of forfeiting everything they owned to their husbands. The association of marriage with the gain or loss of money, as represented in the painting, would, therefore, have seemed very familiar to the Victorians. Yet there is another aspect of Victorian marriage law that finds its parallel in the picture.

The financial 'property' that changes hands in the painting does not belong to the Babylonian women. The transaction takes place around them, but does not directly involve them, since the beautiful maidens do not receive the money that the purchasers pay to wed them; that money is instead turned over to the men who agree to marry those judged plainer. In the painting, then, what a Babylonian woman stands to lose is not her property, but her person. She herself becomes the possession of the man to whom she is 'knocked down'.<sup>48</sup>

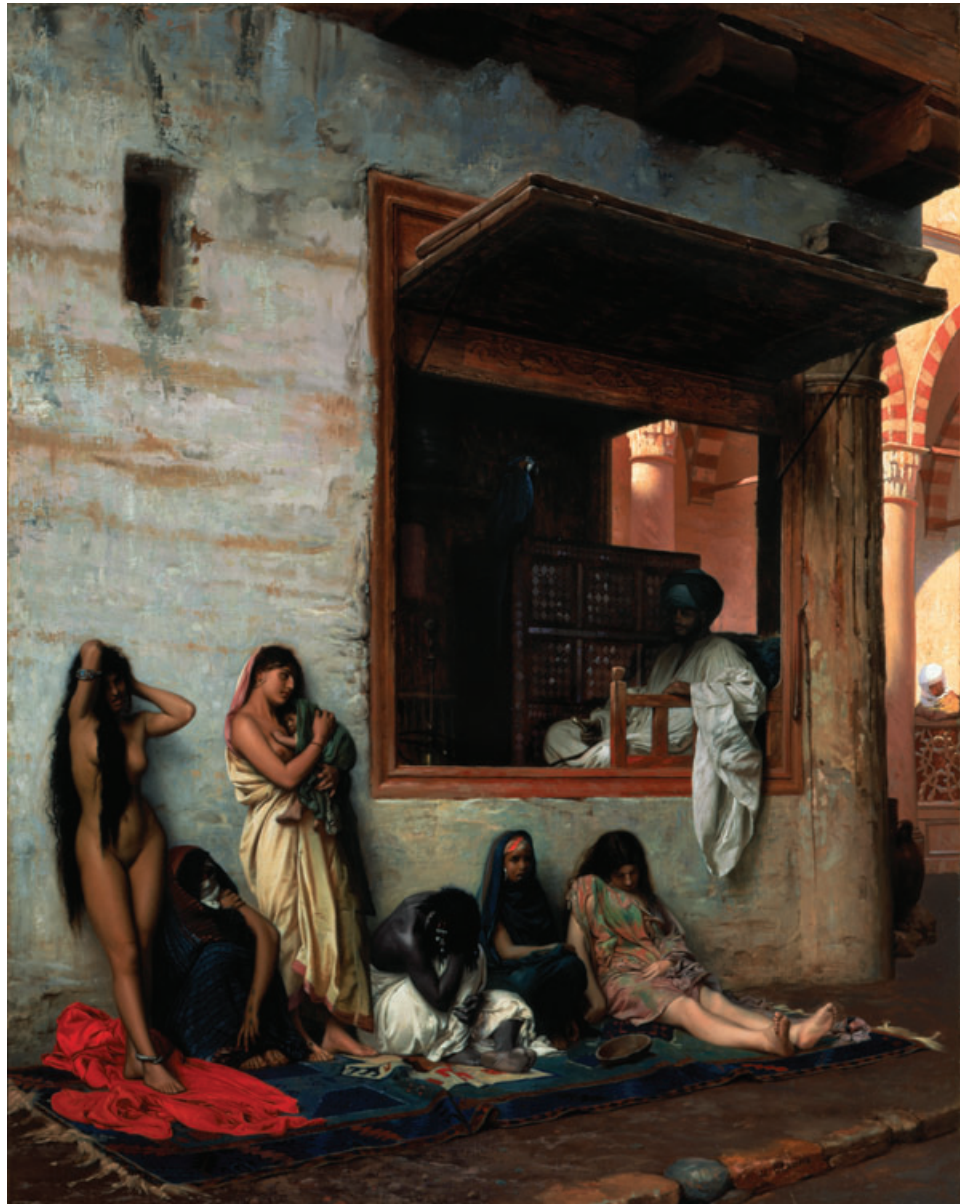
This too would have been familiar to Victorian audiences. When a woman married, not only did she hand over her personal property and her legal status, but her body also became the property of her husband. This issue was hotly debated in relation to the question of marital rape. One judge declared in 1889 that 'The wife submits to her husband's embraces, because at the time of marriage she gave him an irrevocable right to her person. . . . Consent is immaterial.'<sup>49</sup> In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill had declared that 'the wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband; no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so-called.'<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy asked as late as 1898, 'Does the English girl know, when a man asks her in marriage, that he asks her to become for life, not merely his unpaid household servant, but his sexual slave?'<sup>51</sup>

The notion that marriage was a form of slavery was one of the driving forces behind feminist activism in the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The Victorian reception of *The Babylonian Marriage Market* unfolded against this background. Though it was given its correct title in the Royal Academy Catalogue, and though its frame bears the title *The Marriage Market, Babylon*, the painting was frequently called *The Babylonian Slave Market*. Only two years after the painting was first displayed, *The Times* referred to it by this title, and numerous publications later made the same error.<sup>53</sup>

By the mid-1880s, the painting and its titles would almost certainly have also brought to mind controversies over a more literal type of slavery than the experience of Victorian wives. In 1885 the *Pall Mall Gazette* published an outraged exposé of child prostitution in London entitled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'.<sup>54</sup> The author, the journalist W. T. Stead, railed against the 'unnatural combination of slave trade, rape, and unnatural crime' he had uncovered in his investigations. His account, 'one of the most successful pieces of scandal journalism published in Britain during the 19th century',<sup>55</sup> provoked a sustained debate on the subject and was frequently abbreviated as 'Modern Babylon' in subsequent *Pall Mall Gazette* articles. Thereafter 'Modern Babylon' not only connoted contemporary London but also became shorthand for child prostitution, an association that may well have been present in the minds of the painting's viewers after 1885, including, perhaps, those who saw it at the Manchester Royal Jubilee exhibition in 1887 or at Royal Holloway College.<sup>56</sup>



8 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Slave Market (A Vendre)*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 74.9 × 59.7 cm. Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Art Museum (John J. Emery Fund). Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.



Combined, these high-profile debates about contemporary white slavery, which was widely understood both as a metaphor for wifehood and as a disturbing practice in London's brothels, make *The Babylonian Marriage Market*'s perceived relationship with slave markets particularly significant.

Perhaps the readiness with which contemporaries perceived a slave market, instead of a marriage market, was partly due to the proliferation of slave market pictures during the period. For Victorian critics, *The Babylonian Marriage Market* called to mind the paintings of Jean-Léon Gérôme, one of whose most famous subjects was the slave market. Yet, when they compared the work of the two artists, critics did not point to the fact that Long's market sold wives and Gérôme's slaves; instead, they were preoccupied with the absence of explicit nudity in Long's picture.<sup>57</sup> The *Saturday Review* remarked, 'M. Gérôme and other French artists would have sought a sensation somewhere between allurements and repulsion; here in this English picture we recognize a higher sentiment.'<sup>58</sup> The *Times*, meanwhile, observed that 'the painter has hit popular appreciation in his choice of a subject which a less restrained – or what

French critics would be apt to call less prudish – taste in treatment might have easily made cynical in the worst sense of the word.’ Going on to discuss the figure upon the platform, the author adds: ‘It is not difficult to fancy how Gérôme would have treated this part of the picture. Mr. Long has handled this ticklish part of his subject with a full sense of what is due to the British public.’<sup>59</sup>

As these comments suggest, Gérôme’s work elicited strong criticism in England, and this was particularly true of his representations of slave markets. Marion Henry Spielmann, looking back on Gérôme’s career in 1904, the year of the artist’s death, recalled how *A Vendre* (plate 8) had been ‘badly hung’ at the Royal Academy in 1871, in an inconspicuous location, because it was ‘too nude for English taste’.<sup>60</sup> At the time, the *Art Journal* had declared that ‘M. Gérôme’s *A Vendre* is another picture which it were better should not have been painted.’<sup>61</sup>

When Holloway purchased *The Babylonian Marriage Market* in 1882, thrusting it back into the public eye after its sensational debut at the Royal Academy in 1875, the English art world was in the midst of a heated debate surrounding the question of nudity that reached its peak in 1885, and some critics were full of praise for Long’s restraint.<sup>62</sup> One wrote in 1885 that ‘Mr. E. Long could not altogether avoid the nude in representing the subject taken from Mr. George Swayne’s “Herodotus”, “The Babylonish Marriage Market”, which was exhibited in London in 1875. It is marvellous, however, with what refinement of modesty this somewhat awkward theme is treated.’<sup>63</sup> Recalling his encounter with the painting in Long’s studio, Julian Hawthorne singles out the same issue for comment in his memoir of 1928, but shows less admiration for the artist’s approach. Discussing the painting’s subject, Hawthorne muses:

It was a situation which seemed to demand the Altogether; but nakedness was less allowable 1879 [sic] years after Christ than it may have been 3000 years before; none of the young women disclosed anything which could have brought the blush of shame to the cheek of modesty: even the one in the centre, just about to be knocked down to the highest bidder, was hardly explicit enough for the occasion.<sup>64</sup>

Hawthorne seems to have expected something rather more like a Gérôme.

Whatever critics may have said about ‘English taste’, Long’s decision not to incorporate the nude cannot simply be explained away as a symptom of his own, or his nation’s, prudishness. As many of Long’s other paintings demonstrate, the artist had no aversion to the nude. For example, in 1885 he created a pair of images – *The Search for Beauty* (Private Collection) and *The Chosen Five* (Russell-Cotes Museum and Art Gallery) – representing the mission of the artist Zeuxis to depict Helen of Troy using as models the most beautiful women he could find at Crotona.<sup>65</sup> Here, Long stays true to the classical source, which states that Zeuxis ‘was admitted to see their maidens nude, from whom he chose five, that he might render in his work the most admirable beauties of each.’<sup>66</sup> Long also includes the nude in other less obvious scenarios, for example in *An Egyptian Feast* (1877, Cartwright Hall, Bradford) and *Anno Domini* (1883, Russell-Cotes Museum and Art Gallery).

Long’s decision to avoid the nude in *The Babylonian Marriage Market* seems to reflect a need to distinguish the painting from slave market pictures. Herodotus was careful to emphasize that the women were not being bought as slaves, insisting that ‘all of them were sold to be wives.’<sup>67</sup> Given the ongoing debates about the relationship between marriage and slavery, Long’s efforts to distinguish the two can be read as a criticism

of forms of marriage that could be confused with slavery. Yet some contemporaries nevertheless interpreted the painting as a slave market. This may be explained by perceived connections between *The Babylonian Marriage Market* and another subject that was popular with contemporary artists and audiences, the harem.

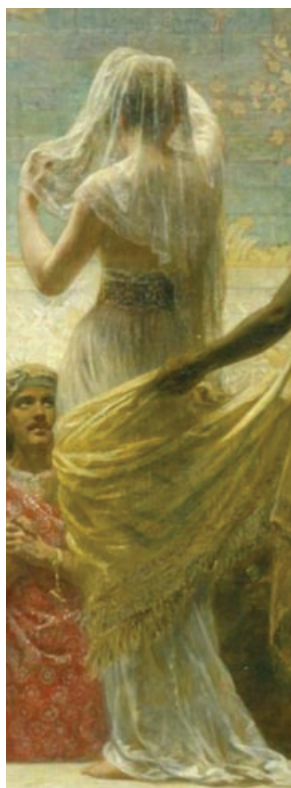
### The Fantasy of the Harem

In 1880 Wolstenholme Elmy lamented the degradation of 'every English wife to the legal position of the purchased slave of the harem'.<sup>68</sup> Victorian writers repeatedly used the concept of the Eastern harem to condemn Western society.<sup>69</sup> Long adopts this form of social critique in *The Babylonian Marriage Market*. Regardless of the painting's ostensible narrative, its content and composition may have appealed to Victorian fantasies of the harem. According to Reina Lewis, 'Harem women are traditionally stuck in a freeze-frame awaiting the husband's transforming presence/gaze',<sup>70</sup> and



9 Jean-Léon Gérôme,  
*The Slave Market (Marché  
d'esclaves)*, c. 1867. Oil  
on canvas, 84.3 × 63 cm.  
Williamstown, MA: Sterling &  
Francine Clark Art Institute.  
Photo: The Bridgeman Art  
Library.





**10 Detail of Long, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, showing the figure for sale on the stage.**

the Babylonian women experience a similar fate, each waiting passively to be transformed into a wife by the desiring gaze of a new husband (although, in some cases, the desire may be for her dowry). The tendency of contemporaries to compare the painting with Gérôme's slave markets makes it all the more likely that the harem would have been evoked by Long's picture. In *Marché d'esclaves*, as Ruth Yeazell observes, 'Gérôme's slave is obviously intended as a harem concubine' (plate 9).<sup>71</sup> Although *The Babylonian Marriage Market* is not set in the nineteenth century, and therefore displays a different kind of orientalism from that embodied in pictures like Gérôme's *Marché*, both paintings deal with the West's perception of the treatment of women in Eastern cultures, in which the harem played a crucial role.<sup>72</sup>

*The Babylonian Marriage Market* also evokes the exclusive space of the harem in its composition. Yeazell notes that in the harem women 'were of course free to enter where men were not'.<sup>73</sup> The foreground area of the painting could be seen as a kind of harem space that is accessible only to women. The fence at the far right marks the barrier between the women's area and the more public space occupied by the crowd. Indeed, the exchange between the man and woman that I discussed earlier could be interpreted as symbolizing a man's frustrated desire to enter the harem (see plate 5). The female viewers imagined by Oliphant thus join the painted women in this exclusively female space, and Oliphant's lone male viewer would then be implicated in the role of the harem's owner. Veils, which were firmly associated with the harem, play an important part in the painting's narrative.<sup>74</sup> It is as they leave the protected, informal space at the front to enter the public realm that the girls in the painting are veiled, only to unveil themselves for the men who will become their husbands.

Many images that represent the purchase of women for harem slavery communicate disapproval of the practice by suggesting the humiliation of the female slave. In Gérôme's *Roman Slave Market* (c. 1884) the slave hides her face, while his *Marché* (plate 9) shocked some viewers not only on account of its nudity but also because the female figure, being physically examined by a potential purchaser, is treated with a 'disrespect' that the *Magazine of Art* described as 'cynical'.<sup>75</sup> In Victor Giraud's *Slave Merchant* (1867), the woman bends at the waist, her head bowed and her hands limp, while the merchant holds her outstretched arms.<sup>76</sup> This posture underscores her physical helplessness and suggests that she has been dragged into position. In contrast, there is no suggestion in *The Babylonian Marriage Market* that the woman for sale is humiliated (plate 10). Her erect posture, reminiscent of the *Venus de Milo*, is confident. She removes her own veil, conveying the impression that she is in control, and the attendant beside her bows as though in reverence to her beauty and commanding presence. Indeed, the only woman for sale whose body language implies humiliation is the figure at the far right, whose face is buried in her hands. However, contemporary critics interpreted this gesture as a sign of her shame at being designated the least beautiful, rather than as a clue to her feelings about being sold.

Representing the women for sale as clothed and dignified, *The Babylonian Marriage Market* does not offer a clear judgement on the practice depicted. Long proposes an alternative kind of viewing to that practised by figures in Gérôme's slave markets. Discussing Gérôme's work in 1875, one journalist observes how the artist represents the purchase of a female slave as a transaction like any other:

If the old clothes do not tempt you, you will find in M. Gérôme's pictures another sort of merchandize, and he will exhibit before you his *Marché d'esclaves*. You will see that there are some young girls to be sold; and it appears that cheating is possible even in this kind of business, since the merchant

thinks it necessary to prove the good qualities of his merchandize by allowing an old sheik to examine it at leisure, and to inspect the teeth with as much gravity as if it were a valuable horse.<sup>77</sup>

When compared with this businesslike examination of valuable ‘merchandize’, the gaze of the mesmerized man in *The Babylonian Marriage Market* takes on additional significance. One contemporary critic declares that the figure on the platform ‘appeals not to passion, but simply to the sense of beauty’.<sup>78</sup> The object of desire, instead of being physically handled as in Gérôme’s *Marché*, is here contemplated from afar; she is possessed visually but not materially.<sup>79</sup>

Whatever the reality may have been, the fantasy of the harem exerted a powerful influence on the Western imagination. In terms of *The Babylonian Marriage Market*’s contribution to feminist debates, contemporary ideas about the harem could operate in two different yet coexisting ways. As Joyce Zonana has shown, ‘the harem came to function as a metaphor for the Western oppression of women’.<sup>80</sup> The painting represents marriage in such a way that it can be interpreted as an image of slavery, and it thus provides support for the widespread view that Western marriage was a form of slavery. Therefore, if the painting held resonance for Victorian marriage, its message was a critical one, suggesting as it did that slavery and the harem were appropriate metaphors for that institution. Insofar as harem slavery operated, in Western discourses, as a foil against which Victorian marriage failed to shine, *The Babylonian Marriage Market*’s ambiguous stance on the relationship between marriage and slavery takes on political significance.

The ambiguity is key here. The painting stops short of explicitly condemning marriage as slavery, instead keeping the question open. By avoiding the representation of overt nudity or physical manhandling to suggest the humiliation of the female figures, Long allows the painting to engage with both the negative perception of the harem outlined above and a more positive interpretation that existed alongside it in contemporary discourse. As scholars have shown, the harem was often invoked as preferable to Victorian gender relations, since its members were believed to enjoy comparative liberty and to wield ‘a wife’s power to refuse even her husband’, a privilege that Victorian marriage law withheld.<sup>81</sup>

The corporeal domination of women by men, as represented or suggested in Gérôme’s slave markets, and as sanctioned by Victorian marriage law, does not take place in Long’s picture. Instead, the women are physically connected with one another. As Gilmartin has observed, ‘the bodies of the girls in the painting are all touching, forming an unbroken line’ of ‘sensation’.<sup>82</sup> *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, I have argued, evokes the harem through its composition by foregrounding an exclusive female space, and the physical connection between the figures further emphasizes this sense of a harem-like area. It also hints at a kind of intimacy existing between the women that those who seek to possess them in a financial exchange can never hope to share. In joining the women to one another physically, Long not only makes a subtle reference to the lesbianism that Westerners frequently associated with the harem, but also works with the concept of the harem to suggest an alternative, female community.<sup>83</sup> Here the painting differs from Griffith’s interpretation in *Intolerance*, in which the camera lingers on one girl at a time, resulting in a much more overt objectification. In contrast, the picture shows the girls linked together so that they are seen in relation to one another, not in isolation. Their poses are very similar, sometimes mirroring each other closely, which reinforces the impression of a bond between them. It is this powerful sense of an intimate female community,

combined with the representation of an exclusive, protected female space, that makes *The Babylonian Marriage Market* a particularly appropriate, if controversial, choice for a women's college.

### ***The Babylonian Marriage Market at Royal Holloway College***

A photograph from 1937 captures the curator of the Royal Holloway College art collection lecturing in the picture gallery (plate 11). Behind him hangs *The Babylonian Marriage Market* and before him is a group of female students. In the picture gallery, the male educator's hand directs attention to the object of vision, the painting on the wall, and symbolizes his didactic role. In Long's painting, the hand of the auctioneer both singles out the object of vision, the woman's body, and orchestrates the marriage market. Both are images of connoisseurship, in which either works of art or brides are presented for evaluation.

Thomas Holloway's decision to purchase this work for the Royal Holloway collection still baffles historians. According to one scholar, it demonstrates that, 'while moved by the request of his wife to help women, he had little sympathy for or understanding of their plight',<sup>84</sup> and for another it indicates that 'Victorian female sensibilities were less delicate than those of some of their twentieth-century sisters.'<sup>85</sup> Dianne Sachko Macleod suggests an alternative reading of the painting:

To twenty-first century eyes, it is a textbook illustration of the objectification of the female body, a patriarchal attitude that seems to contradict the purpose of Royal Holloway College. To Holloway, however, it may have conveyed an entirely different message. Could he have included it in his collection as a deliberate contrast to the liberated future awaiting the young women he intended to educate at his college?<sup>86</sup>

In the painting, women wait for others to decide their fate. In contrast, the students of Royal Holloway were offered choices and opportunities that many Victorian women were denied, giving them a degree of control over their lives. Similarly, while the painted brides-to-be are defined by their perceived aesthetic value, the students were given the chance to distinguish themselves through academic achievement. Yet the painting's significance within the Royal Holloway Collection may have been more complex than this binary opposition suggests.

As I have argued, *The Babylonian Marriage Market* is not a transparent illustration of Herodotus and Swayne's story, which is much closer to 'a textbook illustration of the objectification of the female body' than the painting is. Thanks to Long's 'counterreading' of the text, the painting can be interpreted as a social commentary.<sup>87</sup> In its subversiveness, the work constitutes a challenge not only to the structure of ancient Babylonian society, but also to contemporary Victorian practices. As such, the painting contains within it the seeds of change. Instead of endorsing the 'patriarchal attitude' embodied in the narrative by enabling the viewer to revel undisturbed in the kind of 'picturesque delectation' that Linda Nochlin associates with Gérôme's viewers, the painting challenges spectators to engage critically with its social implications.<sup>88</sup>

In securing *The Babylonian Marriage Market* for generations of female students, Holloway established for the painting a distinctly gendered viewing position. Installed in the gallery at Royal Holloway, the picture would have confronted the audience of 'young women, [the] flower of English youth' that Oliphant had imagined years before. Oliphant's review not only invites a reading of the painting as a 'revelation'



11 William Davis, photograph of the Picture Gallery, Royal Holloway College, published in the *Illustrated London News*, 6 November 1937, page 786. Egham, Surrey: Archives, Royal Holloway, University of London.



for the college students, but also prompts a consideration of the ways in which the picture's meaning would have been transformed at Royal Holloway, which provided the audience necessary to recreate the circle of women evoked by Oliphant's account, as the photograph demonstrates.<sup>89</sup> Wrapped into this circle, the depicted women, far from being the objectified victims of a patriarchal system, become by extension part of the progressive female community fostered by Royal Holloway College.

*The Babylonian Marriage Market* may not have been a conscious feminist statement on the part of its maker. It may have appealed to critics who enjoyed the prospect of contemplating 'exotic girl beauty', and, in doing so, have bolstered a patriarchal attitude towards the possession of women's bodies.<sup>90</sup> Yet to overlook the painting solely on these grounds would require art historians to dismiss the majority of secular Western art. *The Babylonian Marriage Market* critiques the gender politics of its classical source and of its own time by foregrounding a female viewing position and setting up a variety of models of spectatorship, thereby avoiding a binary opposition of male observer and female object. In subject and composition the picture overlaps with the slave market and the harem, both popular themes in nineteenth-century painting, and offers a new perspective on these categories. Long chose not to echo Herodotus's tale of patriarchy and exploitation in visual form, but instead created a painting that could be a site where the various debates surrounding marriage and women's rights in the nineteenth century could converge. The complexity of this image suggests that Long's other history paintings, including *Anno Domini* (1883) and his pair of scenes depicting *Zeuxis*, *The Search for Beauty* and *The Chosen Five* (1885), would reward detailed consideration; these works similarly raise questions about gender, power, the nude, aesthetic judgement, and the reinterpretation of classical and religious sources. It may be the case that they, like *The Babylonian Marriage Market*, open up new approaches to apparently straightforward narratives, with important implications for our understanding of the relationship between history painting and aesthetic, political and social issues in the period.

Notes

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- 1 Little biographical information survives regarding Edwin Longsdon Long, who was reported to be 'reticent and retiring' (M. H. Spielmann, 'Painters in their Studios, II. – Mr. Edwin Long, R.A.', *Graphic*, 967, 9 June 1888, 612). There is also minimal evidence relating to the painting's patron, Edward Hermon. A Conservative MP for Preston, Hermon would certainly have been aware of the political context in which I situate the painting. For example, at a local meeting about women's suffrage in 1874, a resolution was passed to seek Hermon's support for 'the bill to remove the electoral disabilities of women', and the issue of married women's property, and a range of other issues relating to feminism, were also discussed ('Women's Suffrage. Meeting at Preston', *Preston Guardian*, Saturday, 19 December 1874, 3232). Little is known of Hermon's views on the painting other than that 'he could not part with the picture' to allow it to be engraved, according to Long (Letter from Long to Basil Field, 14 May 1888, RHC AR/500/219/3 Archives, Royal Holloway, University of London).
- 2 Frederick N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, 2003, 198.
- 3 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds, *Art in Theory 1900–2000*, Oxford, 2003, 986.
- 4 See *The History of Herodotus*, trans. George Rawlinson, London and Toronto, 1933, paragraph 196, 100–1.
- 5 Mieke Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word–Image Opposition: The Northrop Frye Lectures in Literary Theory*, Cambridge and New York, 1991, 34–5.
- 6 George C. Swayne, *Herodotus*, Edinburgh and London, 1870, 36–7. See Royal Academy Catalogue, London, 1875, 24.
- 7 *The History of Herodotus*, 100–1.
- 8 Swayne, *Herodotus*, 37.
- 9 C. W. Carey, 'The Royal Holloway College Collection – III', *Art Journal*, 1897, 310.
- 10 Walter Shaw-Sparrow, 'The Royal Holloway College Picture-Gallery', *Magazine of Art*, 1891, 270; and Anon., 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', *Art Journal*, 1875, 250.
- 11 W. M. Rossetti is unusual in suggesting that, instead of the central figure, it is the girl third from the right who is 'neither good-looking nor ill-looking' ('The Royal Academy Exhibition', *Academy*, 8 May 1875, 486).
- 12 *Illustrated London News*, 1 May 1875, 415.
- 13 Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt'*, 35.
- 14 *Spectator*, 22 May 1875, 661.
- 15 Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, 197.
- 16 Henry Blackburn, *Academy Notes*, London, 1875, 35. See also Anon., 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', 250.
- 17 See Mark Bills, *Edwin Longsdon Long RA*, London, 1998, 21; and Elizabeth Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis*, Minneapolis, MN, 2007, 161. For a contemporary view, see *The Times*, 24 May 1875, 5.
- 18 Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, 199.
- 19 Sander L. Gilman, 'Black bodies, white bodies: Toward an iconography of female sexuality in the late nineteenth century', in Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis, eds, *Development: A Cultural Studies Reader*, Oxford, 2002, 69.
- 20 Henry Blackburn, *Academy Notes*, London, 1875, 36.
- 21 Mary Cowling, [http://picture-gallery.rhul.ac.uk/admin/pop-up/pop-up\\_painting.php?id=57](http://picture-gallery.rhul.ac.uk/admin/pop-up/pop-up_painting.php?id=57), accessed 24 June 2010. See *The Times*, 24 May 1875, 5 for a similar view.
- 22 Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, 198.
- 23 *Spectator*, 22 May 1875, 661.
- 24 The tapestry cartoons were at the South Kensington Museum from 1865, so Long may well have seen them.
- 25 *Intolerance*, dir. D. W. Griffith, 1916.
- 26 Peter Thomson, 'Irving and Edwin Longsdon Long, RA', *First Knight: Journal of the Irving Society*, 8: 1, June 2004, 9.
- 27 A. G. Temple, *Painting in the Queen's Reign*, 1897, 292; and *Spectator*, 22 May 1875, 662.
- 28 J. E. Hodgson, *Fifty Years of British Art: As Illustrated by the Pictures and Drawings in the Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition, 1887*, Manchester, 1887, 82.
- 29 Long repeats this compositional strategy, which effectively combines a more intimate foreground scene with a grand, multi-figure background, in *Anno Domini* (1883). See Bills, *Edwin Longsdon Long RA*, 18; and *Art Journal*, 1884, 59.
- 30 *History of Herodotus*, 101.
- 31 Temple, *Painting in the Queen's Reign*, 292.
- 32 Margaret Oliphant, 'Art in May', *Blackwood's Magazine*, June 1875, 763.
- 33 *History of Herodotus*, 100–1.
- 34 Oliphant, 'Art in May', 763.
- 35 See Margaret Olin, 'The Gaze', in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds, *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago, IL, 2003, 326.
- 36 Sophie Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy*, Cambridge, 1998, 177.
- 37 Olin, 'The Gaze', 327.
- 38 Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, 177.
- 39 Swayne, *Herodotus*, 37.
- 40 Rossetti, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', 486.
- 41 See Shelley Wood Cordulack, 'Victorian caricature and classicism: Picturing the London water crisis', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 9: 4, Spring 2003, 536, note 2. See also Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*, New Haven, CT, 2000.
- 42 *The Times*, 24 May 1875, 5.
- 43 John Ruskin, *Academy Notes* (1875), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Cambridge, 1996, vol. 14, 275.
- 44 Ruskin, *Academy Notes*, 277.
- 45 Keene's original drawing is in the British Museum, London (ref. 1891.0617.20).
- 46 For more on Royal Holloway and its collection, see Jeannie Chapel, *Victorian Taste: The Complete Catalogue of Paintings at the Royal Holloway College*, London, 1982; Caroline Bingham, *The History of Royal Holloway College, 1886–1986*, London, 1987; and Mary Cowling, *Paintings from the Reign of Victoria: The Royal Holloway Collection*, London, Alexandria, VA, 2008.
- 47 See Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850–1895*, Princeton, NJ, 1989, 103. For a Royal Holloway student's recollection of the impact of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, see Marion Pick, 'Social Life at Royal Holloway College 1887–1939', manuscript, RHC RF 131/7 RHUL Archives, 3.
- 48 Julian Hawthorne, *Shapes that Pass: Memories of Old Days*, Boston, MA and New York, 1928, 252.
- 49 Justice Pollock and Justice Hawkins, cited in Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law*, 185.
- 50 J. S. Mill, cited in Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law*, 8.
- 51 Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, 'Judicial Sex Bias', *Westminster Review*, 149: 3, March 1898, 284–5.
- 52 See William Thompson, *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the other Half, Men, to retain them in political and thence in civil and domestic Slavery*, London, 1825; Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage and other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women*, London, 1897; Marie Corelli, *Lady Jeune, Flora Annie Steel, and Susan, Countess of Malmesbury, The Modern Marriage Market*, London, 1898; and Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law*, 156.
- 53 *The Times*, 5 May 1877, 12. See also Hawthorne, *Shapes that Pass*, 251; *Morning Post*, 16 May 1891, 3; and *Yorkshire Herald*, and *The York Herald*, 18 May 1891, 6.
- 54 W. T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', *Pall Mall Gazette*, July 1885.
- 55 Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Male vice and feminist virtue: Feminism and the politics of prostitution in nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop*, 13, Spring 1982, 83.
- 56 For reviews of the painting at Manchester, see Hodgson, *Fifty Years of British Art*, 82–3; and Walter Armstrong, *Fine Art at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887: Critical Notices Reprinted from the Manchester*

- Guardian, Manchester, 1887, 33–4. When at Royal Holloway, the painting's viewers would have included not only the students and staff of the College, but also members of the public. See Charles Carey, 'The Royal Holloway College Collection – I', *Art Journal*, May 1897, 129; and 'The Royal Holloway College Collection – IV', *Art Journal*, November 1897, 340.
- 57 For a comparison of the styles of Long and Gérôme, see Harry Quilter, *Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature*, London, 1892, 318.
- 58 'The Royal Academy', *Saturday Review*, 18 May 1875, 625. See also *Saturday Review*, 1 May 1875, 567.
- 59 *The Times*, 24 May 1875, 5.
- 60 M. H. Spielmann, 'Jean Léon Gérôme: 1824–1904. Recollections', *Magazine of Art*, January 1904, 208.
- 61 'The Royal Academy', *Art Journal*, July 1871, 173.
- 62 See Alison Smith, 'The "British Matron" and the body beautiful: the nude debate of 1885', in Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in England*, Manchester, 1999, 217–39.
- 63 Ernest Chesneau, *The English School of Painting*, London, etc., 1885, 268.
- 64 Hawthorne, *Shapes that Pass*, 252.
- 65 For more on these paintings, see Martin Postle and William Vaughan, *The Artist's Model: From Etty to Spencer*, London, 1999, 95; Alison Smith, 'Private Pleasures? Paintings of the Nude in the Russell-Cotes Collection', in Mark Bills, ed., *Art in the Age of Queen Victoria: A Wealth of Depictions*, Bournemouth, 2001, 61; and Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture*, 160.
- 66 Pliny the Younger, cited in Bills, *Edwin Longsdon Long RA*, 148.
- 67 *History of Herodotus*, 101. A more recent translation makes this point even more explicitly: 'They were being sold to be wives, not slaves' (Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford and New York, 1998, 86).
- 68 Wolstenholme Elmy, cited in Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law*, 184.
- 69 See Junius Redivivus, 'On the Condition of Women in England', *Monthly Repository*, 7: 73, January 1833, 217–18. For novelists' use of the harem, see Gilmartin, 'For Sale in London, Paris and Babylon: Edwin Long's *The Babylonian Marriage Market*', [http://pure.rhul.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/for-sale-in-london-paris-and-babylon-edwin-longs-the-babylonian-marriage-market\(a2ceb0df-8eee-475f-bd1c-e9fa133cb49b\).html](http://pure.rhul.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/for-sale-in-london-paris-and-babylon-edwin-longs-the-babylonian-marriage-market(a2ceb0df-8eee-475f-bd1c-e9fa133cb49b).html), accessed 10 June 2011, 3–4; and Ruth Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature*, New Haven, CT, 2000, 3. The concept of the harem functioned in a similar way in the United States; see Lauren Lessing, 'The ties that bind: Hiram Powers's Greek Slave and nineteenth-century marriage', *American Art*, 24: 1, Spring 2010, 61.
- 70 Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*, London and New York, 1996, 164.
- 71 Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind*, 63.
- 72 See Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind* for more on the West's perception of the harem.
- 73 Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind*, 6.
- 74 For more on the Western understanding of veils within the harem, see Joyce Zonana, 'The Sultan and the slave: Feminist orientalism and the structure of "Jane Eyre"', *Signs*, Spring 1993, 612.
- 75 Anon., 'Our Living Artists. Jean Léon Gérôme', *Magazine of Art*, January 1880, 455.
- 76 For a discussion of this painting, see Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art*, New York, 1984, 219–20.
- 77 Rene Menard, 'Gérôme', *Portfolio*, 6 January 1875, 84.
- 78 'The Royal Academy', *Saturday Review*, 18 May 1875, 625.
- 79 On the other hand, the mesmerized man's gaze could be considered inherently sexual, in the sense that by putting the object of desire at a distance, he is fetishizing it in the tradition of courtly love. By locating his pleasure in the act of looking itself, this man delays the satisfaction of his desire, which, according to Freud, is a fundamental aspect of 'the sexual instinct' (cited in Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, 1986, 55).
- 80 Zonana, 'The Sultan and the slave', 599.
- 81 For more on the representation of the harem as a positive alternative to Western society, see Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind*, 89–90; and Emily M. Weeks, 'Cultures crossed: John Frederick Lewis and the art of Orientalist painting', in Nicholas Tromans, ed., *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, London, 2008. See also Cowling, [http://picture-gallery.rhul.ac.uk/admin/pop-up/pop-up\\_painting.php?id=57](http://picture-gallery.rhul.ac.uk/admin/pop-up/pop-up_painting.php?id=57); and Zonana, 'The Sultan and the slave'.
- 82 Gilmartin, 'For Sale in London, Paris and Babylon', 6.
- 83 See Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind*, 128, 147 and chapter 11; Sarah Betzer, 'Afterimage of the eruption: An archaeology of Chasseriau's *Tepidarium* (1853)', *Art History*, 33: 3, June 2010, 478–9; and Joan DelPlato, *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800–1875*, Madison, NJ, 2002, 175–9.
- 84 Margaret Birney Vickery, *Buildings for Blue Stockings. The Architecture and Social History of Women's Colleges in Late Victorian England*, Newark, NJ, 1999, 148. See Jordanna Bailkin, *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain*, Chicago, IL and London, 2004, 135.
- 85 John Elliott, *Palaces, Patronage & Pills: Thomas Holloway, His Sanatorium, College & Picture Gallery*, Egham, Surrey, 1996, 52.
- 86 Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'A prodigious two-year spending spree: Thomas Holloway and the Victorian art market', in Cowling, *Paintings from the Reign of Victoria*, 11.
- 87 Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt'*, 37; and Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative*, 177.
- 88 Linda Nochlin, 'The imaginary Orient', in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*, New York, 1989, 35.
- 89 While the painting is mentioned occasionally in the materials held by the Royal Holloway archives, there are no surviving sources regarding female students' reactions to it in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. In a manuscript account, Marion Pick, a Royal Holloway student from 1903 to 1907 and a staff member from 1911 to 1946, recalls a tradition in which staff and students invited one another to be their dinner partners, and claims to have heard that First Years were at one time asked to assemble in front of *The Babylonian Marriage Market* and wait for senior students to invite them to dinner (Pick, 'Social Life at Royal Holloway College 1887–1939', 110–11 and 169–70).
- 90 Hawthorne, *Shapes that Pass*, 252.