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"Modern Sibyls and Sibylline Media"

Luisa Calè

In the third book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Cumaean Sibyl mediates the prophetic authority of supernatural knowledge in a paradigmatic scene of textual transmission:

> She sings the Fates, and, in her frantic Fitts,
> The Notes and Names inscrib'd, to Leafs commits.
> What she commits to Leafs, in order laid,
> Before the Caverns Entrance are display'd:
> Unmov'd they lie, but if a Blast of Wind
> Without, or Vapors issue from behind,
> The Leafs are borne aloft in liquid Air,
> And she resumes no more her Museful Care:
> Nor gathers from the Rocks her scatter'd Verse;
> Nor sets in order what the Winds disperse.[1]

'A version of this essay was presented at seminar 'Échanges, Transferts, Circulations: Mythes et Médias', convened by Evanghélia Stead at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris on 8 November 2019. I am very grateful to Professor Stead and her group for their feedback and a lively seminar discussion. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Eger and Lene Østermark Johansen for reading the essay, to Letizia Treves and Susanna Avery Quash at the National Gallery for advice on Guercino, and to Kathrin Luddecke for help with the German context.'

[1] *The Works of Virgil containing his Pastorals, Georgics and Aeneis: Translated into English Verse; By Mr. Dryden. Adorn'd with a Hundred Sculptures* (London: Tonson, 1697), 284, lines 565-74.

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In recording divine utterance on "leaves" ("foliis") and "tender branches" ("teneras frondes"), Virgil's ecology of prophetic writing is firmly rooted in trees. However, outside the world of the poem the Sibyl's leaves take on new forms as loose papers, scrolls, and scraps, which are scattered to the winds, stitched into bundles, gathered and bound into folios, kept in libraries and archives. As Virgil's writing supports become anachronistic, translation mediates and updates the Sibyl's leaves for different cultures, enhancing his intense focus on the changing materialities of writing and reading. In Dryden's English translation, the recalcitrance of the Sibyl to "gather" her papers can be read as resistance to or disavowal of the large paper folio edition in which her words are bound for the English public.[2] In articulating the tension between flying leaves and sibylline books, the figure of the Sibyl has become an allegory for the dynamics of the codex with which to claim, interrogate, or dispute the cultural and political authority of prophetic writing. But what is at stake in capturing the Sibyl's leaves in the medium of painting or engraving?

In his analysis of the iconography of reading, Garrett Stewart points out the paradoxical function of illegible text "in the frozen dramaturgy of painting."[3] As a form of contemplation reading suits the representational needs of portraiture because it stills the sitter in a scene of suspended action. Stewart does not have the figure of the Sibyl in mind when he argues that "the modest rectangle of the read book" foregrounds media difference at the center of the painting, but the Sibyl's recalcitrant ministry offers a powerful allegory for the

[2] Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier, "What is a Book?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 188-204.

[3] Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4.

survival of language as a "riddle at the painting's center."[4] As the still life of painting subsumes the book as a medium whose mode of operation has been subtracted by its transposition in paint, its rematerialization as a prop seems to be at odds with the dynamic verbal image of the Sibyl's flying leaves. How does the "frozen dramaturgy of painting" capture Virgil's "volitantia … carmina",[5] those "flying songs" that a sceptical Shaftesbury chose to present as "*fragil* and *volatil* Scripture"?[6] What is involved in appropriating such an anachronistic image of reading and writing in late eighteenth-century England? What gender dynamics are at play in redeploying the Sibyl? This essay traces visual lines of transmission for Sibyls and their prophetic media from frescoes to easel paintings and books of prints, from Old Master paintings encountered on the Grand Tour and acquired or copied for English collections to adaptations, appropriations, and impersonations in portraits of women as modern Sibyls, focusing on the works of Benjamin West, Angelica Kauffmann, Emma Hamilton, Friedrich Rehberg, and Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun.

The sibylline textual condition posited by Virgil is rearticulated in Dante's *Commedia*, which sets the terms for the commonplace of the Sibyl's leaves and the dynamic of the book as a divine medium bound in heaven and disbound or rebound on earth. In Canto XXXIII of Paradiso Dante compares his fragmentary and fading apprehension of divine vision to the Sibyl's leaves: "Thus in the winds on flitting leaves was lost / The Sibyl's sentence" ("Così al vento ne le foglie levi / si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla": Par. XXXIII, 65-6; Cary, 3:153). In contrast to Virgil's recalcitrant or disorderly Sibyl, Dante's sibylline

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[4] Stewart, *The Look of Reading*, 4, 8, 25, 149.

[5] *Virgil*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, ed. G. P. Goold, new ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2014), 1: 402.

[6] Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols (London, 1711), 3:234.

condition is one of memory impairment caused by excess of vision. As he attempts to see "bound with love in one volume what is scattered in the universe" ("legato con amore in un volume, / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna": *Par*. XXXIII, 86-7), Dante's divine book is defined by turning the noun "quaderno" — a quire of paper obtained by folding a sheet into four and stitching it into a "notebook" — into the verb "squadernare," which means leafing through, or opening the book onto a particular page.[7] Unlike the divine book, the privative s-prefix of "squadernare" evokes battered, disbound, scattered pages to be recollected at the moment of judgement, a self-reflexive allusion to the materiality of his own writing issued in notebooks, with the final canto left unbound at his death.[8]

While Dante's divine book is situated in paradise and remediated as Sibyl's leaves by his terrestrial memory impairment, Renaissance paintings stage a different scene of textual transmission gathered in books on earth. De-paganized as harbingers of Christianity, Renaissance Sibyls were co-opted to justify the religious and temporal power of Rome as the center of the Christian world. In Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel the Sibyls and the Prophets of the Old Testament are positioned just below the story of creation depicted in the ceiling, represented with their books. The Libyan Sibyl looks downward, her gaze averted from the book she holds up to receive the illumination emanating from above. The short-sighted Persian Sibyl holds a much smaller book up close to her eyes. The Cumaean Sibyl is bent on her open book in a pose of concentration. The Erythraean Sibyl turns the pages of a book

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[7] Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), 3:916, 919; *The Vision; or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise*, trans. H.F.Cary, 3 vols. (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1814), 3: 153; in the second quotation, the translation is my own.

[8] John Ahearn, "Binding the Book: Hermeneutics and Manuscript Production in Paradiso 33," *PMLA* 97, no. 5 (October 1982): 800-809.

placed almost vertically on a table, but only the rubricated initial is legible. The Delphic Sibyl holds up a scroll, but looks elsewhere, while two putti read a blank book behind her. The text is absent, suggested, too far away to be legible, or devolved to the viewer's memory.

By contrast, writing is clearly spelt out in enlarged capital letters in a fresco painted by Raphael in Santa Maria della Pace in Rome, where the Sibyls hold books on their laps, but their attention is redirected upwards as they receive prophetic utterances delivered by angels on flying leaves. The first Sibyl on the left points her left arm theatrically towards the first of a number of angels hovering above, bridging the space between the sky and the earth, and holding scrolls with enlarged readable Greek text announcing the resurrection of the dead and the coming of light. Another Sibyl writes on a tablet about Christ's dying. A putto rests on a stone slab inscribed in Latin with a line from Virgil's fourth eclogue containing the Cumaean Sibyl's prophecy. Widely read as an allusion to the arrival of Christ, this eclogue marked a turning point in the Sibyls' transformation into Christian prophetesses. While their first pagan books had justified the imperial power of Rome, their Renaissance reinvention supported the temporal power of the popes.

In the cosmopolitan culture of the Grand Tour the de-paganized Sibyls deployed in Renaissance Christian art underwent a further transformation. Abstracted from their complex iconographical programmes, Renaissance frescoes were reproduced in series of prints that isolated individual figures as secularized subjects for painters, while painters captured figures, groups, and details as 'mementoes of costumes and attitudes' in their sketchbooks.[9] Raphael's Sibyl was reproduced in Jan de Bisschop's *Paradigmata Graphices* (1671), which

[9] Giovanna Perini, "Sir Joshua Reynolds and Italian Art and Art Literature. A Study of the Sketchbooks in the British Museum and Sir John Soane's Museum," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988): 141-168, 145.

was "in every young Artist's hands" according to Joshua Reynolds.[10] Raphael's overall composition at Santa Maria della Pace was reproduced in Gavin Hamilton's 1773 print collection *Schola Italica*.[11] Sibyls became iconographical references for fancy portraits and allegories of reading, writing, and inspiration.

Seventeenth-century Sibyls painted on canvas also enjoyed a new lease of life in eighteenth-century visual culture. In 1752 Sir Joshua Reynolds noted Domenichino's Sibyl from the Ratta collection in Bologna in one of his Italian sketchbooks as "the very same figure as our St Cecilia in the Borghese at Rome, only instead of music this has tablets."[12] For Reynolds the identity of the subject is defined by the reading tool. However, early seventeenth-century evidence identifies Domenichino's Galleria Borghese subject as a Cumaean Sibyl, her viola da gamba, music score, and parted lips alluding to the inspired song of the priestess of Apollo.[13] The iconographical convergence of the Cumaean Sibyl of the

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[10] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on art*, ed. Robert R.Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 274.

[11] *Schola Italica Picturae sive Selectae quedam summorum e schola italica pictorum tabulae aere incisae cura et impensis Gavini Hamilton Pictoris* (Rome, 1773), plate 11.

[12] Charles Robert Leslie, *Life and times of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (London: John Murray, 1865), 478.

[13] Receipt for the cost of the picture frame in 1617 mentions a Sibyl, see 'Sibilla Cumana', in Richard E. Spear, *Domenichino 1581-1641* (Milan: Electa, c1996), 422, no. 25.

Borghese Gallery with Santa Caecilia is confirmed by Benjamin West, who copied her as a Santa Caecilia in 1761.[14]

The 1760s also see the acquisition of Sibyls by Guercino in aristocratic collections. His *Libyan Sibyl* entered the Royal Collection, while the *Samian Sibyl* and *King David* were acquired for the South wall of the Great Room at Spencer House in London. Seen as a pair, the *Samian Sibyl* and *King David* are witnesses to the promise of the arrival of Christ. The Samian Sibyl is seated, absorbed by an open book in her right hand, which the viewer cannot read, while her left elbow rests on a larger closed tome. Another book placed in a vertical position to her right is inscribed with small handwritten text that cannot be deciphered either. By contrast, to her left a putto looking at the viewer holds up a scroll inscribed in large legible capital letters with the words "SALVE CASTA | SYON PER | MULTAQUE | PASSA PVELLA | SIBYLLA SAMIA" ("Hail, chaste Sion, much suffering young woman. Samian Sibyl".) These words are the text of the Sibyl's prophecy: an address to the Virgin Mary, which clarifies her role in predicting the nativity. Another Samian Sibyl painted by Guercino, of which there is a copy in the Tribuna at the Uffizi in Florence and another at Osterley Park, looks up to heaven holding up an open book in which her prophecy is written in large and legible capital letters, but in Guercino's Spencer House Sibyl the Christian text is manifested through a scroll. To her right, anachronistically clad in royal ermine, Guercino's King David, the author of the psalms, looks down redirecting the eyes of the viewer towards a tablet that he holds up with his right hand, where a similarly large capital letter type reads "GLORIOSA | DICTA SUNT | DE TE CIVITAS DEI || PSALM 86" ("Glorious things are spoken of thee,

[14] Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), nos 506 and 510, both now at the Ferens Art Gallery, Kingston upon Hull.

O city of God".) Taken together, the two paintings articulate Christian authority through a hierarchy of media: the Christian message is revealed in Latin through the scroll and the tablet, while the codex is closed or reticent; its contents not shared with the viewer. Guercino's *Cumaean Sibyl*, which is juxtaposed to the *Samian Sibyl* as an alternative pairing to King David in the current display at the National Gallery in London, shows a putto redirecting the Sibyl's attention away from the open book that she is leafing through, towards the Christian prophecy inscribed in capital letters on a tablet. By contrast, the Samian Sibyl bought by Earl Spencer is absorbed by her book, ignoring both Christian putto and Christian prophecy. Seen in context, one might wonder whether she is being re-paganized as an oracle from the Greek island of Samos. Reclaiming her Greekness suits the décor of Spencer House, a monumental building built for John, first Earl Spencer, between 1756 and 1766 with a Palladian exterior and neoclassical and Greek style interiors by James "Athenian" Stuart. The Great Room was where the Spencers held their banquets and balls.[15] New frames built by Stuart integrate the Guercinos with the mouldings, doors, and windows in the room. Above the paintings was a frieze inspired by the Temple of Rome and Augustus at Pola, the coving of the ceiling referencing Maxentius's Basilica in Rome, while the circular relief placed above the door between the two Guercinos represented Apollo playing the lyre and being crowned by Victory.[16] In this context, Apollo might be reminding viewers that the Samian Sibyl is in his power. Was the baroque putto trying to pass his scroll as a sibylline prophecy sufficient to relay the Christian message in the bacchanalian atmosphere of the Great Room?

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[15] David Irwin, "Gavin Hamilton: Archaeologist, Painter, and Dealer," *The Art Bulletin* 44, no.2 (June 1962): 87-102; Joseph Friedman, *Spencer House: Chronicle of a Great London Mansion* (London: Zwemmer, 1993), 142-54, and 254, fig.227.

[16] Friedman, *Spencer House*, 144, fig.122.

While originals and copies of old master paintings of the Sibyls made their way to English collections, the iconography of the pre-Christian prophetess was adapted to the needs of an eighteenth-century aristocratic household. Her turban and other props became fashion accessories, indispensable attributes with which to identify a new generation of modern Sibyls. Copying was an intermediate step for painters to capture sibylline attitudes and develop allegories of the female form to deploy in portraits "painted in the Historical Style."[17] About a decade after copying Domenichino's Borghese Sibyl, West was commissioned to paint portraits of Sir John Griffin Griffin, Baron de Walden and his deceased and current wives for the family seat at Audley End in 1772. While West's receipt refers to them only as "kit-kats,"[18] an early history of the house references "the costumes of the Sibyls of Domenichino and Guercino."[19] West reverses the orientation of Domenichino's Cumaean Sibyl probably because he is working from an engraving, rather than the original, but this change also shows how the Old Master source is adapted to the new social and architectonic features of the house. Within the elaborate classical décor of the library designed by Robert Adam, the portraits of the current and the deceased ladies of the house as Sibyls identify their accomplishments as musicians and readers.[20] To the

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[17] Reynolds, *Discourses*, 88.

[18] Erffa Staley, 512. Kit Kat indicated a portrait size smaller than a half-length, including the sitter's hands (OED).

[19] Richard Neville, Third Baron Braybrooke, *The History of Audley End and Saffron Walden* (London, 1836), 118.

[20] J.D.Williams, *Audley End: the Restoration of 1762-1797* (Chelmsford: Clarke, 1966), 30, 33-34, and plate IX, reproducing Adam's design from the Audley End Scrapbook; Neville, *The History of Audley End and Saffron Walden*, 118.

right, the late Anna Maria Schutz, Lady Griffin, points her left finger to a line in a music score, just as the Cumaean Sibyl did, while her other hand holds up a scroll. To the left, Katherine Clayton, Lady Howard de Walden, is caught in the act of writing. Her elbow rests on a book, whose fore edge does not identify her as "Sibilla Persica" as does Guercino's. While captioning the Sibyl was essential to make sure that Guercino's beautiful women were appreciated as religious rather than prophane subjects, Clayton's identity is defined by her place in the house. Since the two Sibyl portraits are situated above the doors, neither the manuscript, nor the book, nor the musical score are identifiable or legible; their function as attributes is allegorical. Digital enlargement confirms that the writing consists in striations; it is suggested rather than actual. By contrast, closer inspection of Schutz's music score reveals the words "Domine Confide" at the top of a carefully drawn pentagram populated with real notes. While Old Master Sibyls look down on their papers, away, or up to divine inspiration, the Ladies of the house stare in front of them, although their attitudes are oriented towards their husband's portrait at the center of the wall above the chimney piece. Prophetic writing often channels the Sibyls through male authorship, but to turn these pagan and Christian prophetesses into exemplary aristocratic wives is to domesticate a wild model of female independence.

How did women reclaim the figure of the Sibyl? Her prophetic role offered a model for women's identities as readers, writers, musicians, and painters. In a letter to Elizabeth Carter, the bluestocking Catherine Talbot contrasted reading and writing folios to "bills of fare, messages, letters of mere business," which "are sibyl's leaves dispersed to the breeze of everyday."[21] One year later, Carter applied the metaphor to the uncertain circulation of

[21] Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 25 June 1765, in *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from 1741 to 1770: To which are Added, Letters*

letters: "But pray, take notice, though I am as old as a Sibyl, I am not so wise, and I hope you will not insist upon my composing either verses or oracles" (3:269), a classical reference indicating the author's identity as a classicist translator and philosopher. In 1774 Lady Amabel Polwarth, daughter of Talbot's friend Jemima de Grey, used the term "Sibyl's leaves" to refer to drawings cut out from her sketchbook and sent through the post, a self-deprecating reference perhaps, but endowed with a powerful female genealogy. Kim Sloan points out Amabel's allusion to the flying leaves of Virgil's Sibyl. As the classical prophetess helps Aeneas establish a home and a nation, Amabel's drawings of Wrest and Wimpole Hall establish her family seats as British landmarks reproduced on a Wedgwood china service for Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia.[22] These references suggest the role of the Sibyl as a figure for women's intellectual power.

Like West, the Swiss painter Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807) also copied Domenichino's Cumaean Sibyl from the Borghese Gallery during her stay in Rome in the early 1760s,[23] before becoming one of the two founding women members of the Royal Academy in London in 1769. Like West, her copying practice is part of an apprenticeship

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from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Vesey, Between 1763 and 1787, Published from the Original Manuscripts in the Possession of the Rev. Montagu Pennington (London: Rivington, 1809), 3: 114.

[22] Kim Sloan, *'A Noble Art': Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters c 1600-1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), 149-52, 157-8; David Adshead, "Wedgwood, Wimpole and Wrest: The Landscape Drawings of Lady Amabel Polwarth," *Apollo* (April 1996): 31-36, on 34.

[23] *Angelika Kauffmann*, ed. Bettina Baumgärtel, ex. cat. Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, 15 Nov 1998-24 Jan 1999 (Düsseldorf: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998), 144.

shaped by the dialogue with the Old Masters. Kauffmann's copying included Sibyls by Domenichino and Guercino, alongside paintings by Raphael and Titian.[24] Kauffmann returned to the subject of the Sibyl throughout her career. As Bettina Baumgärtel notes, she represented women captured in the act of reading or writing as a series of "prophane variants of Domenichino's Sibyls."[25] The iconography of the turbaned seated Sibyl had a particularly symbolic function as a model for the portrait of the woman artist as a prophetess. Kauffmann's portrait of the amateur watercolour artist and miniaturist Margaret Bingham, Lady Lucan, sporting the identifying turban hangs in the drawing room of her son in law, Earl Spencer, at Althorp (Figure 1). Her torso is twisted and her face averted from the book she is leafing through, which is sufficiently held up for us to identify it as a book of prints alluding to the artistic endeavors of this modern counterpart to the Old Master Sibyl at Spencer House in London.[26]

The iconographic boundary between Sibyls and muses was blurred, but Sibyls offered greater visionary agency and authorship, whereas the muses were more subjected to male forms of mediation and appropriation. Kauffmann features as a painter at the center of Richard Samuel's painting of the *Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*, which was engraved and published in *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket-Book Memorandum* in 1778, showing how these influential women excelling in different branches of the arts acted as models for the intellectual ambitions of women readers. One of the muses, the historian Catharine Macaulay, holds a scroll and wears a turban, two indications of her status as a

[24] Frances A. Gerard, *Angelica Kauffmann: A Biography* (London: Ward, 1893), 378.

[25] *Angelika Kauffmann*, 148.

[26] Sloan, "Muses and Sibyls," *"A Noble Art,"* 212-218, 247-8, esp. 217.

Sibyl.[27] In the *Portrait of A Lady as a Sibyl* acquired by Dresden's Gemälde Galerie in 1782 the eyes of the sitter meet the viewer's, her head is framed by a turban, her elbow rests on a table while with her other hand she unrolls a scroll, identifying herself through the Greek word "Sibylla" (Figure 2).[28] After turbaned self-portraits in which the artist looks at the viewer while holding closed portfolios indicating her profession,[29] the most symbolic deployment of the turbaned type is Kauffmann's self-portrait commissioned for the self-portraits' gallery at the Uffizi in 1787. In this crowning moment of recognition for a painter she takes on the attitude of the Borghese Sibyl that she had copied in the early 1760s, but while the Sibyl looks up to receive supernatural inspiration, Kauffmann looks sideways. The position of her right hand replicates the Sibyl's, but instead of unfurling a music scroll she holds a closed portfolio; a paint-brush in her left hand completes her identification as a painter.[30] Her flowing classical robe is tied by a belt bearing a classical cameo that is replicated in a later portrait of her friend, the salon virtuosa Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici

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[27] Richard Samuel's *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo (The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain)*, now at the National Portrait Gallery in London, see Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women: Eighteenth-Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008), 57-64.

[28] Gerard points out Kauffmann's fancy self-portraits as a Sibyl, a Muse, a Vestal, Urania, Clio, Sappho, Una (354); and identifies the Dresden Sibyl as a self-portrait (370).

[29] *Kauffmann*, 231 no.108 (ca 1780); 233 no.110 (ca 1784); see also 247 no.116 for the drawing of a sibyl writing on a scroll.

[30] Kauffmann's self-portrait and Domenichino's Borghese sibyl are reproduced in Joseph Baillio, Katharine Baetjer, Paul Lang, *Vigée Le Brun* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 48-49.

depicted looking at the viewer, her arms up indicating her role as a performer, while a scroll inscribed with a handwritten text in Italian to her right identifies her as a poetess (1792, Florence, Palazzo Pitti). For Baumgärtel, Kauffmann's depiction of Sulgher Fantastici follows the type of the muse, but the combination of the turban and the scroll clearly marks her out for the stronger agency of a Sibyl.[31] While Sulgher Fantastici used an engraved oval turbaned portrait as a frontispiece to her collection of poems in 1794, in 1815 she donated Kauffmann's oil painting to the Uffizi.

On the other hand, a voyeuristic type of the young woman as Sibyl is articulated in two companion paintings attributed to Kauffmann. Probably purchased by Count Giacomo Durazzo, Ambassador to Venice for the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1764 to 1784, they are attested in the Salon of Peace at Palazzo Durazzo in Genoa in 1788.[32] *Reading Sibyl* shows a scantily dressed young woman seen in profile (Figure 3). The light illuminating her neck, decolleté and arm is reflected in a very large open book that she holds in her hands. Since it is slightly inclined and seen from above, the viewer should be able to peer into it too, but the text is not legible. What appear to be lines designed to convey the impression of

[31] *Kauffmann*, 261-2, no.130.

[32] *Description des beautés de Gênes et ses environs* (Geneva: Gravier, 1788), 156-7. The paintings were acquired by Carlo Felice, King of Sardinia in 1823-4, and transferred to Turin in 1833, see *Catalogo della Regia pinacoteca di Torino* (Torino: Bona, 1899), 313 and 318; *Da Tintoretto a Rubens. Capolavori della Collezione Durazzo*, ed. by Luca Leoncini (Genova-Milano: Skira, 2004), 294. In her 'Memorandum of Paintings', Kauffman records selling 'a small oval half-length representing a Muse playing the lyre' to Count Durazzo in 1782, see Victoria Manners and G. C. Williamson, *Angelica Kauffmann: R.A.: Her Life and her Work* (New York: Brentano's, 1900), 141.

written text from a distance turn out to be abstract striations. While this intense scene of absorbed reading is made vulnerable by the sensual allure of exposed flesh offered up to a voyeuristic viewer, the sibylline subject is more explicitly erotically inflected in the companion painting entitled *Sibyl revealing herself*, in which the Sibyl stares out at the viewer while playing with a veil, perhaps a shawl or a turban that she has unwrapped from her headdress.

The motif of the veil as a flying leaf became a central feature of the performances of Emma Hart, later Lady Hamilton (1765-1815), who pioneered a series of classical attitudes when she worked as a model for George Romney's fancy pictures in London, including one depicting her as a Sibyl.[33] Her performances look back to classical monodrama, a theatrical genre inaugurated by Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (1770) and criticized by the *Mercure de France* in 1781 for producing one picture where one wants to see a gallery.[34] While oil portraits immortalized modern Sibyls in individual pictures, such as Gavin Hamilton's depiction of Emma as a seventeenth-century Sibyl with a scroll in her lap,[35] Goethe recorded Emma's ability to metamorphose from one classical attitude to another in

[33] Alex Kidson, *George Romney: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 3:692-3, no. 1501.

[34] Kirsten Gram Hölstrom, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on Some Trends of Theatrical Fashion 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 51-2.

[35] Private Collection. The painting hung in Hamilton's Palazzo Sessa in Naples with a companion piece depicting her as Hebe; it was sold in 1801, see Sotheby's, *Trafalgar: Nelson and the Napoleonic Wars, including the Matcham collection* (London, Wednesday 5 October 2005), 214 no. 153.

such a way as to make viewers see what a thousand painters would wish to capture in paint.[36] Around 1789-90 Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (1751-1829), director of the Royal Academy of Painting in Naples, painted Emma as a Sibyl in profile, shrouded by a shawl, which half-conceals a book whose rectangular features can be made out through the folds of her shawl. The painting had been commissioned by Anna Amalia, Duchess of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach (1739–1807), whom Tischbein represented as a profile sphynx-like figure sitting with the ruins of Pompei in the background,[37] Tischbein's portrait of Emma documents the appeal of the Sibyl as part of the cultivation of a living classical ideal within the German expatriate community.

Friedrich Rehberg (1758-1835), Professor at the Prussian Academy of Art from 1787, settled in Naples in 1791, and published a series of twelve outline engravings of Emma Hamilton's attitudes under the title *Drawings Faithfully copied from Nature at Naples* (1794).[38] A flowing shawl functions as a key prop supporting her metamorphoses from one

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[36] Dated 16 March 1787, but first published in 1817 in *Aus Meinem Leben*, see Waltraud Maierhofer, "Goethe on Emma Hamilton's 'Attitudes': Can Classicist Art Be Fun?," *Goethe Yearbook* 9 (1999): 226.

[37] Christina K. Lindeman, "Tischbein's 'Anna Amalia, Duchess of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach:' Friendship, Sociability, and 'Heimat' in Eighteenth-Century Naples," *Notes in the History of Art* 33, no. 1 (2013): 25-30.

[38] *Drawings faithfully copied from nature at Naples and with permission dedicated to the Right Honourable Sir William Hamilton. His Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary at the court of Naples by his most humble servant Frederick Rehberg. Historical painter in His Prussian Majesty's service at Rome Engrav'd by Thomas Piroli*

figure to another. The first outline presents Emma as a Sibyl identified by a scroll in one hand, while the other shapes the flow of the shawl as a turban, draping it around the other side of her body (Figure 4). As August Schlegel indicated, outlines have a hieroglyphic power: like poetry, they provide a sketch that engages the viewer's imagination in developing the initial stimulation and completing the picture, rather than enjoying the passive reception of "a completely worked out painting."[39] While painted portraits convey the different textures of skin, turban, book, or scroll that make up Emma's attitudes, line engravings define forms by their outer boundaries, but the metamorphic power of the line opens up other interpretive possibilities. Through the medium of painting Emma's bent arm and the folds of the shawl would evoke the texture and luminous colour of her turban. Such texture is what stops one form from being taken for another and pre-empts the viewer from associating the fall of drapery with falling water, and Emma's posture with personifications of rivers. In the world of outlines, what establishes her iconography is the association with the scroll in her other hand. Otherwise, outlines facilitate the flow of one form into another.

Schlegel's thoughts on outlines are prompted by the works of John Flaxman, who chose to have his classical drawings engraved in outline by Tommaso Piroli in Rome. Rehberg's choice of the same engraver indicates the Piroli's role as chief engraver of

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(Rome, 1794), Plate I; described in A. Hirt, "Kunstanzeige," *Der neue Teutsche Merkur* 2 (1794): 415-9.

[39] "Ihre Zeichen werden fast hieroglyphen, wie die des Dichters; die Phantasie wird aufgefordert zu ergänzen, und nach der emphfangenen Anregung selbständig fortzubilden, statt daß das ausgeführte Gemählde sie durch entgegen kommende Befriedigung gefangen nimmt," [August Schlegel], "Über Zeichnungen zu Gedichten und John Flaxman's Umrisse," *Athenaeum* 2 (1799): 193-246, 205.

classical antiquities.[40] While Flaxman's outlines show how art and poetry can complement and complete each other, Rehberg's outlines capture the metamorphic enactment of classical art into modern performance. Emma's attitudes were compared to pantomime, but their remediation inscribe her work within a particular genre of classical commodities among other classical figures pressed on paper such as Flaxman's outlines from Homer or the second collection of vases from Sir William Hamilton's Collection published by Tischbein.[41] While Tischbein embodied Emma in oils on canvas, distinguishing her from the outlines chosen for the representation of Hamilton's vases, in the world of paper galleries Rehberg's Emma and Tischbein's vases share the same medium.

Printed as separate plates, engravings are mobile book parts that can be assembled in different sequences, inserted or taken out of books according to a sibylline logic of mutability and dispersal. Rehberg's *Drawings* acquired further associations when they were reissued in 1797 by S. W. Fores. In 1801 Fores issued *A second part to Lady Hamilton's Attitudes, containing Outlines of Figures and Drapery, collected with great care from Antient Statues, Monuments, Bas Relievos, &c. Forming an useful and necessary Study for Amateurs in*

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[40] Antony Griffiths and Frances Carey, *German Printmaking in the Age of Goethe* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 130, no.81.

[41] *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases mostly of pure Greek Workmanship discovered in Sepulchres in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies but chiefly in the Neighbourhood of Naples during the Course of the Years MDCCLXXXIX and MDCCLXXXX. Now in the Possession of Sir Wm Hamilton his Britannic Majestati's Envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary at the Court of Naples with Remarks on Each Vase by the Collector. Volume I. Published by Mr Wm Tischbein Director of the Royal Academy of Painting at Naples.* 1791.

Drawing: from the most correct and chaste Models of Grecian and Roman Sculpture, while also advertising his publication of "Lady Hamilton's Attitudes" and identifying his premises as "where Prints and Drawings are lent to Copy, by the Year, Quarter, Month, &c. | N.B. Folios of Caricatures lent out for the Evening."[42] These advertisements show how the reissue disseminates Hamilton's Attitudes within a wider range of commodities aimed at amateur artists, using modes of circulation including the lending model of circulating libraries and the overnight loan associated with caricatures.

This potential for dissemination is also reflected in the hybrid form that "Lady Hamilton's Attitudes" and its sequel take in a bound volume in the Sackler Library in Oxford. In this copy the title page of *Drawings* is followed by "Agrippina," a dramatic character seen from below, sitting by a neoclassical table on which scrolls unfurl down the side inviting the viewer to identify the infamous Roman character with the figure of the Sibyl. By contrast, Emma's impersonation of the Sibyl comes in first position in the same bound volume after an illustrated title page for the second publication: *Outlines of Figures and Drapery Collected with great care from Antient Statues, Monuments Basreleivos &c Representing the principle Characters in the Plays of Racine, in their proper Costume forming an Useful Study for Amateurs in Drawing from the most Correct & Chaste Models of Grecian and Roman Sculpture*.[43] The drawing above the title represents a turbaned female artist with fascicles entitled *Lady Hamiltons Attitudes*, *Metz's Drawing Book*, and *Heads for Studies* lying on the floor in the bottom right corner, while two winged putti point her to *Fores's Correct Costume of Several Nations or Antiquit*[*y*]. In the arrangement of the volume the two sets of prints form a material chiasmus, as each is placed after the wrong title page. This bookish disorder

[42] University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Johnson c.345.

[43] University of Oxford, Sackler Library, 925.9 Reh.

is possible because of the sibylline materiality of the book of prints as a collection of separate leaves. Placing Emma's Sibyl in that context indicates how her impersonation might be recycled as a visual model for Agrippina in Jean Racine's play *Britannicus.* Adapting the past tense of historical writing and the future tense of the *Sibylline Oracles* to the needs of tragedy, Racine represents the black legend of Rome through the tragic present of Agrippina. While Nero's matricide features in the Cumaean Sibyl's millenarian prediction of Roman terror in the *Sibylline Oracles*,[44] Racine's Agrippina appropriates the prophetic mode of the Sibyl as an instrument of power to regain control over Nero by foreseeing his future retribution and fall.[45] Through reproduction, once Emma's sibylline attitude is captured as an outline on paper it becomes part of a series that is opened up to other classical recreations. If the outline has the metamorphic power to transform one character into another and to support forms flowing in and out of different media instead of stabilizing a work as a unit of sense identifiable through a print run of identical copies, the bound book of prints reveals its potential for sibylline transpositions.

Back in Germany, in 1798 Jacob Ludwig Römer described Tischbein's "paintings endowed with a more secret sense, allegorical leaves, phantasies, as the poetry-writing painter himself names them, *Phantasies for the mute book and a few remainders of the sibylline books collected in front of the cave of Cuma*." ("Gemaelde mit einem geheimeren Sinne, allegorische Blaetter, Phantasieen, wie der dichtende Kuenstler sie selbst zu nennen

[44] *The Sibylline Oracles translated from the best Greek copies*, trans. John Floyer (London: printed by R.Bruges, for J. Nicholson, 1713), Book 4, 95-96; with explanatory notes on xvii-xviii, 87, 89.

[45] Tony Gheraert, "Voix de Dieu, voix des dieux: oracles, visions et prophéties chez Jean Racine," *Études Epistème* 12 (2007), esp paras. 7-14.

beliebt, Phantasieen fuers stumme Buch und einige Ueberbleibsel der sibyllinischen Buecher vor der Grotte von Cuma gesammelt.”) [46] For Römer they constitute “a book of wisdom in speaking images and paintings, clear and intelligible to all who recognize and worship what is beautiful in the spirit and truth” (“ein Buch der Weisheit in redenden Bildern und Gemaelden, deutlich und verstaendlich fuer alle, die das Schoene im Geist und in der Wahrheit erkennen und anbeten”). The artist, he adds, sees pictures as books for those who cannot read. Yet this allusion to the popularizing tradition of the *Biblia pauperum* is not supported by the medium and mode of circulation of the work, a book of watercolours that was sibylline in the sense of an unstable collection of loose leaves that vary from copy to copy and because of its restricted circulation in six copies, including one for Goethe and one for Anna Amalia of Sachsen-Weimar, and shared within small circles in Weimar, Hamburg, Oldenburg, and Eutin.[47] The “allegorical leaves” that Römer describes include Italian landscapes, scenes, and a portrait of Klopstock, each accompanied by poetic lines. Römer addresses Goethe, Wieland, and in particular “Angelika,” “who felt the meaning of his allegorical leaves so truly and profoundly” (“die den Sinn seiner allegorischen Blaetter so wahr und so innig empfand”), inviting them to promote the collection in Germany (258-9).

The figure of the Sibyl was also crucial to the self-fashioning of the French ancien regime court painter Elizabeth Vigée Lebrun (1755 –1842), who alluded to Domenichino in

[46] Jacob Ludwig Römer, “Über Wilhelm Tischbeins Phantasien,” *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* 8 (1806): 254-79, on 258-9.

[47] Silke Köhn, *Lady Hamilton und Tischbein: Der Künstler und sein Modell* (Oldenburg: Isensee, 1999), 53-58; Hermann Mildenberger, “ ‘Der Dichter mit der Palette’. Goethe-Tischbein zwischen Bild und Wort,” *Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein: Aquarelle, Gouachen und Zeichnungen* (Weimar-Berlin, 2006), 22.

her turbaned self-portrait with her daughter, a composition that expands the range of the Sibyl to include a bold expression of maternal tenderness (1786, Louvre). Vigée Le Brun also paints Emma wearing a long shawl wrapped around her head as a turban and flowing behind and over her left shoulder (Figure 5). The eyes raised upwards allude to Domenichino's Persian Sibyl, who rests her hand on a closed book just as Emma's does on a rectangular writing support. However, a scroll folded backwards over it reveals her message handwritten in Greek. The words can be deciphered as "nea genea" and "ek ouranou" ("a new generation or a new family from heaven"), a modern Greek translation of the Cumaean prophecy from Virgil's fourth eclogue.[48] While Raphael had quoted it in the original Latin, Vigée Le Brun choice to translate the words into Greek aligns Virgil's Cumaean prophecy to the *Oracula Sibyllina*. What political affiliations did the Sibyl articulate in Revolutionary Europe?

Vigée Le Brun's royalist affiliation was unmistakeable. After leaving revolutionary Paris in 1789, in Florence she was invited to contribute her self-portrait to the gallery of modern painters' self-portraits at the Uffizi, where she notes that of Kauffmann, "one of the glories of our sex."[49] Unlike Kauffmann, she does not choose the pose of the Sibyl, but her choice of composition is endowed with a prophetic power of interpellation: holding her

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[48] "Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto" ("now a new generation descends from the sky on high"), see Andrew D. Hottle, "More Than 'a preposterous neo-classic rehash:' Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's Sibyl and its Virgilian Connotations, *Aurora: The Journal of the History of Art* 11 (2011): 127; Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases & Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his Collection*, exhibition catalogue (London: British Museum, 1996), 120-146, on 271.

[49] Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Vigée Le Brun*, 2 vols (Paris: Charpentier, 1869), 1:149-50. The self-portrait is reproduced and discussed in Baillio, *Vigée Le Brun*, 141-3, no. 42.

paintbrushes and palette in one hand, she traces the face of Marie Antoinette on canvas while she stares at the viewer, sharing her pride as the queen's portrait painter. In 1789, the reciprocation of the gaze makes the viewer exchange position with the sitter, lured by the promise of an equally powerful portrait. Yet with the passage of time the aristocrat sitting for her portrait may feel the danger of the queen's fate falling upon herself.

Vigée Le Brun's portrait of Emma as a Sibyl had been commissioned by the Duc du Brissac (1:194). In Spring 1792 Le Brun was travelling back north with the intention of taking the Sibyl back to France (1: 240, 256). En route she showed her Sibyl in Parma and Venice, where Vivant Denon insisted on showing the painting to his acquaintances (1:249). After hearing news of the assault on the Tuileries and the deposition of the King in August she decided not to return to France (1: 259-61). Brissac was guillotined on 9 September 1792. In her memoirs, Vigée Le Brun records his head being offered to his lover, the Comtesse du Barry, who was also executed during the Terror in 1793 (1: 112). Le Brun's Sibyl went on what might be seen as a counter-revolutionary tour of Europe. En route to Vienna, she exhibited the Sibyl in the palace of the Austrian governor Johann Joseph count of Wilczeck in Milan. In Vienna Wenzel Anton Prince Kaunitz-Rietberg invited her to exhibit her Sibyl in his salon for fifteen days (1: 272-3). Vigée Le Brun attributed to her Sibyl the number of portrait commissions she obtained during her time there (1: 281-2). At the suggestion of the Russian Ambassador in Spring 1795 she decided to move to St Petersburg and meet Catherine the Great (1:292). On her way she visited the Great Gallery in Dresden, which she considered the most beautiful in Europe, where the elector of Saxony invited her to exhibit her Sibyl for fifteen days (1: 298-300). The painting was finally acquired by the Duc Du Berry in Paris in 1819 (2:236). While Renaissance frescoes and seventeenth-century paintings had harnessed the Sibyl as a Christian witness, Vigée Lebrun exhibits the mobile possibilities

of painting on canvas as a medium that can carry Emma's scroll announcing a new order on a counterrevolutionary one-painting show through ancien régime Europe.

To women, the Sibyl fleshed out possibilities that evaded traditional patriarchal trajectories. The figure of the Sibyl was critical to Germaine de Stael's development as a writer. A visitor to the salon of Madame Necker praised the poetic performance of the twenty-year old Germaine for a command of inspiration that differed from the disabling fury associated with the pythian and Cumaean Sibyls.[50] Following Kauffmann and Emma Hamilton, De Staël adopts a sibylline persona, sporting turbans and scrolls, as Geneviève Gennari points out (127). In the third person narrative of *Corinne ou L'Italie* (1807), the heroine adopts the persona of Domenichino's Cumaean Sibyl when she delivers her poetic improvisation at the Capitol, takes a residence facing the Cumaean Temple at Tivoli, and shows her admirer Lord Nelvil a painting in her gallery featuring Aeneas led by the Sibyl through the Elysian Fields.[51] In Marie Claire Vallois's Kristevan reading, *Corinne* articulates the "euphoric space of another history" in which the child who cannot speak points towards "the voices of the sibyl" (186-7). For Madeline Gutwirth De Staël's choice to contrast Domenichino's Sibyl as an emblem of Corinne to Correggio's Madonna della Scala embodies "an internal schism, aspects of a woman's nature seen as a diptych, the divided parts of what

[50] Marie-Claire Vallois, *Fictions féminines: Mme de Staël et les voix de la Sibylle* (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1987), 3-5; Geneviève Gennari, *Le premier voyage de Madame de Staël en Italie et la genèse de Corinne* (Paris: Boivin, 1947), 126-7.

[51] Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, ou, l'Italie*, 3 vols. (Paris: H.Nicolle, 1807), 1:56, 2:64-5; on the improvisation context, see Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and improvisation, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 78-103.

ought to be a unity."[52] Writing elides the difference between church fresco and gallery picture, so that the comparison between paintings can resolve the plot through a final scene of recognition modelled after the choice of Hercules. Confronting Domenichino's Sibyl in the gallery after Corinne's death, Lord Nelvil observes that "La Sibylle ne rend plus d'oracles; son génie, son talent, tout est fini: mais l'angelique figure du Corrège n'a rien perdu de se charmes" (3:382).[53] In Nelvil's patriarchal economy, the Sibyl's prophecy is subsumed under the visual format of the diptych, a visual pairing that offers a tool of self-knowledge in presenting an alternative between woman as prophetess or angel of the house. But, as Gutwirth suggests, for the woman reader Corinne's appropriation of Domenichino's Sibyl exceeds domestication. Her oracular power points elsewhere, leading the way as a "symbol of the woman who commands matter … a future-oriented prophetess." (309).

Visual lines of transmission redeploy the figure of the Sibyl as a means of interrogation of the possibilities of different media. From Old Master frescoes to easel paintings and eighteenth-century interiors, the Sibyl offered iconographies for the accomplishments of a wife or the alternative agency for women of letters, performers, and artists. The Sibyl's scattered leaves became emblematic of the uncertain trajectories and temporalities of correspondence, of detached drawings and prints arranged in albums and of printed paper galleries bound in the form of the codex. The uncertain composite nature of the sibylline books is reflected in the permutations of the book of prints, while the oracular qualities of the Sibyl's ministry suggested the power of interpretation required to mediate the

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[52] Madeleine Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 241.

[53] For Lord Nelvil's comparison of Lucile with Correggio's Madonna della Scala, see 3:374-5.

prophetic meaning of a hermetic book of watercolours produced in a limited number of copies arranged in different orders and addressed to a restricted coterie. For a woman artist to paint the Sibyl is to activate women's prophetic genealogy, with scrolls, tablets, and books inflecting degrees of illegibility or theatrical revelation in which painting negotiated its ancillary or independent relation to writing. As the Sibyl's ministry changes depending on what arrangement the leaves take when they fall on the ground, their mutability can be compared to painting's play with its exhibitionary context. Vigée Le Brun's counterrevolutionary tour through Europe shows how prophetic painting worked as a mobile medium, which functioned as a catalyst for the self-identification of painter and sitter, while also taking on oracular functions for different publics within specific contexts of display. So too does the Sibyl's prophecy change depending on how she enters into dialogue with other subjects produced in the same format such as Guercino's Samian Sibyl paired with King David or the Cumaean Sibyl. De Staël's writing reflects the painted Sibyl's tendency to take on significance as part of a diptych by abstracting two subjects from their respective places and media, establishing a comparison between the Sibyl and the Madonna as ultimate alternative legends of woman.

Birkbeck College, University of London

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