

Appendix I

An Anecdote Concerning the Parianware Sculpture of Hebe Once Owned by William Bradshaw

In 1924, Elliot's antiques shop (near Wynyard, Sydney) was home to a Parianware statue of the goddess of youth, Hebe (Ἥβη) (Zeus's daughter and cup-bearer to the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus). The words of the thirteenth-century English cleric and university magister Gregorius (Master Gregory) of Oxford are apposite: the statue had been made 'with such wonderful and intricate skill that' it seemed 'more like a living creature than a statue'.¹

In mid-June 1924, the diva Dame Nellie Melba (1861–1931) gave a triumphant Australian tour with the nearly 60 performers comprising the Melba–Williamson² opera company. (Dame Nellie 'never had the slightest doubt that many thousands of Australians wanted to hear her sing, and on the evidence she was right.' Two years earlier, in 1922, '35,000 people heard her in fifteen Melbourne concerts and more than 36,000 in ... fourteen Sydney concerts'.)³ Melba 'had scarcely arrived in Sydney'—having travelled from Melbourne by train—'when she developed bronchitis and was unable to sing. For four weeks she coughed in her apartment at 52 Macleay Street', Potts Point.⁴ The building within which Dame Nellie languished has recently been redesigned and rebuilt as a high-end apartment development; the elegant and inviting street-level entrance foyer once familiar to Melba has been converted into two retail outlets: the Grass Roots Urban Butchery, a butcher's shop, and Paws Point Pet Deli and Boutique, purveyors of designer accessories for dogs and cats.

Just prior to her return to Melbourne from Sydney, and having recovered from her illness, Melba entered the antiques shop of her friend Mr Elliot, who, upon recognising the famous singer, showed his delight in her presence by greeting her with a flamboyant arm-waving bow (Dame Nellie may have become friends with Elliot through Tom Patterson, the auctioneer and businessman husband of her sister Belle).⁵

1 Magister Gregorius, *Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Romae* [*The Marvels of Rome*]. See G. McN. Rushforth, 'Magister Gregorius de Mirabilibus Urbis Romae: A New Description of Rome in the Twelfth Century', in *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 9 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1919), p. 26.

2 Between 1874 and 1907, James Cassius Williamson (1845–1913) was Australia's foremost impresario.

3 J. Hetherington, *Melba: A Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), p. 219.

4 A. Blainey, *I Am Melba* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2008), p. 320.

5 See *ibid.*, p. 195.

Dame Nellie, forgetting that she was holding her furled parasol, responded to Elliot's theatrical gesture with an even deeper and more flamboyant bow. In the process, and amidst the ensuing flurry of parasol and taffeta, she accidentally knocked the statue of Hebe to the floor. The statue's left arm broke off near the shoulder, and Hebe's pitcher—containing the ambrosia served at the heavenly feast—shattered into a multitude of un-mendable fragments. Hebe's right hand still holds all that remains of the pitcher's handle (Plate 401).

Elliot refused Dame Nellie's offer to pay for the damage, insisting that he would instead keep and treasure the statue as a memento of her visit. He glued the arm back onto the statue, and for many years 'dined out' on the story of Melba's visit to his shop.

When Elliot went out of business, William Bradshaw⁶—fully aware of the statue's connection with the illustrious diva—bought the piece at the clearance sale with the intention that it should function as his shop mascot (Plates 401–3).

Bradshaw had the good taste to place the statue on the top of a square piano made in 1830 by the Zürich-based piano maker Heinrich Huni (1798–1866). This instrument (serial number 292) had belonged to a Swedish family who fled to Australia during the horrors of the 1940s, and who returned to their home country after World War II; Bradshaw acquired the piano from the family (at auction) in 1946.

The piano was permanently located in the drawing room (in the corner near the entrance) in Bradshaw's home at 96 Queen Street, Woollahra (Plates 2 and 3). The instrument made a perfect location upon which to display Hebe's beauty: the piano was veneered in olivewood, and had four columnar legs with beautiful brass capitals; each leg sat on an individual square block base; with its fallboard closed, the instrument functioned as an attractive side table.⁷ The beauty of the piano's cabinetwork matched the exquisite beauty of the statue of Hebe.

Stewart Symonds, having been informed by Bradshaw of the statue's noteworthy history,⁸ purchased it at Bradshaw's estate auction.

The statue now resides in Symonds' single-storey sandstone Georgian home, in Ermington, Sydney, where the sculpture has been known to make a fleeting appearance on the dining room table, for the delectation of a certain visiting researcher into the history of the First Fleet piano.

6 See 'Discovery', in the Introduction, Volume 1 of this publication.

7 This piano is listed in Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano*, Vol. 2, p. 195.

8 I am indebted to Stewart Symonds for the anecdotal information presented in this appendix.

Symonds' Parianware statue is identical to Bertel Thorvaldsen's (1770–1844) Biedermeier-style⁹ marble sculpture *Hebe* (1816)¹⁰ (being one of many reduced-size copies of Thorvaldsen's masterpiece that were mass-produced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries):

1. In eighteenth and nineteenth-century art, Hebe is usually depicted wearing a sleeveless dress;¹¹ this is the case with both Thorvaldsen's *Hebe* and Symonds' statue.
2. The garment of Symonds' Parianware figure is indistinguishable from that of Thorvaldsen's sculpture. With its high neckline—an early nineteenth-century conscious reduction of the potential for sensual appeal—the garment comprises voluminous folds that completely conceal the load-bearing leg.
3. As with Thorvaldsen's statue, the corporeality of Symonds' Parianware sculpture is diminished by the drapery's planar extension: adjacent to the outside of the statue's unseen right leg (all that is visible of the right leg are the toes), the cloth appears to 'stand' on the floor like a solid wall.
4. The arms of Thorvaldsen's *Hebe* and of Symonds' statue lie close to the torso; their curve is echoed by drapery folds. In true Biedermeier fashion, nothing projects beyond, or disturbs, the tranquil, closed overall contour.
5. The poses of Thorvaldsen's sculpture and of Symonds' Parianware statue are the same: both figures are serene, lacking a certain spontaneity.¹²

Not ostentatious, status enhancing, heroic, innocuous or sentimental, both Thorvaldsen's *Hebe* and Symonds' Parianware statue are suffused with the beauty, restraint and rigorous simplicity of the Biedermeier aesthetic.¹³

9 See 'Biedermeier Style', in Appendix Q.

10 See photograph in G. Himmelheber, *Biedermeier 1815–1835: Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, Fashion* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1989), Figure 29, 'Bertel Thorvaldsen, Hebe, 1816. Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen', p. 23.

11 See 'Hebe (Mythology)', in *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (Last modified 25 August 2012).

12 See Himmelheber, *Biedermeier 1815–1835*, p. 23.

13 See *ibid.*, p. 7.



Left: Plate 401 William Bradshaw's Parianware statue of Hebe, the goddess of youth.

Right: Plate 402 William Bradshaw's Parianware statue of the goddess Hebe (detail).

Source: Stewart Symonds Collection, Sydney. Photos by the author.



Plate 403 William Bradshaw's Parianware statue of the goddess Hebe: a broken arm mended (detail).

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