

2019

Scandals and Sculpture

Anne-Taylor Cahill
Old Dominion University, acahill@odu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/philosophy_fac_pubs



Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Other Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Original Publication Citation

Cahill, A.-T. (2019). Scandals and sculpture. *Nineteenth Century*, 39(2), 47. <http://victoriansociety.org/upload/NC-39-2.pdf>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy & Religious Studies at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@odu.edu.

Milestones

Scandals and Sculpture

Anne-Taylor Cahill

Capricious, rebellious and highly artistic, Princess Louise, the sixth child of Queen Victoria, was a conundrum to the Royal family. She wished not to be “royal” but rather to be “ordinary.” She supported women’s suffrage, education and health reform. She sought to break into the very masculine world of sculpture, and she did it. Princess Louise was a woman ahead of her time. Yet in many ways her life is veiled in mystery as her papers in the Royal Archives remain closed to the public. Queen Victoria described her as “odd” and “difficult.”

Louise had her first art lesson at age 3 and as her talent developed, she became a recognized artist. Joining the Pre-Raphaelites, Louise was part of the London “artsy” set and dressed artistically as opposed to dressing royally. The Queen felt Louise “needed watching.” In 1866, at age 18, Louise completed her first sculpture and was slowly loosening the royal bonds. It was around this time that mysterious events occurred. In the late 1860s a rumor circulated that Louise had given birth to an illegitimate child. The father was said to be Lt. Walter Stirling, her brother Leopold’s tutor. Handsome and charming, Stirling spent a great deal of time with inseparable Leopold and Louise. Suddenly, he was dismissed after 4 months, much to the rage and grief of Louise and Leopold. Oddly, Stirling was given the title of Royal Groom and received an annuity. Was this hush money?

During this time, Louise made few public appearances; usually seated in a carriage. Her manner of dress was a departure from her usual artistic style and was “unusually decorated with lots of pleats, ribbons and bows.” She wore huge crinolines and capes that were quite convenient for concealing a pregnancy. However, in early 1867 Louise was in the public eye again, attending the opening of Parliament and other events.

And what about the child? The story is that Queen Victoria’s gynecologist, Sir Charles Locock, arranged for the child to be adopted by his son Frederick. There is no record available for this birth. Frederick was then given a Royal Grace and Favor cottage from the Queen. The tale gets murkier as later this alleged son, Henry, traveled to Canada to meet with Stirling in an attempt to discover his true paternity. Mysteriously, Henry’s body was found beside train tracks many miles short of his destination. The claim was that he was drunk and fell off the train. After Henry’s death his wife and children inexplicably came into approximately eight million dollars. Inexplicable indeed!

Two years later, sculptor Jacob Edgar Boehm was in residence at Balmoral, commissioned to do a statue of Queen Victoria, while tutoring Louise in her sculpting. Enamored with his work, Queen Victoria enjoined many commissions for his work, including a sculpture of John Brown. Daily contact with the Royal family, especially Louise, entrenched their friendship, with a mutual love of art and similar ideas drawing them close. It should be noted that Boehm was quite handsome and known to have many women friends. Eventually Louise and Boehm were found “in a



Princess Louise, 1881.

compromising position” by none other than John Brown. The Queen was furious and decided Louise needed a husband. Louise refused every candidate...all foreign royal princes. Finally, she accepted Lord John Campbell Lorne of Scotland. Except for Queen Victoria, the Royal family were outraged by her choice, since Louise would be the first Royal to marry a commoner since 1516. However, Queen Victoria deemed her announcement of the marriage “the most popular act of my reign.” She believed new non-royal blood was the order of the day and that the public would love the idea of a “Britisher” marrying into the Royal family. She was correct. The public embraced the marriage enthusiastically. It was hoped that marriage would settle Louise down, but it did not. Louise kept on being her capricious self. At her wedding, she was anything but the usual bride, “demure and overcome with nerves and emotion.” Instead, Louise “laughed and talked with her friends, often ignoring royal protocol.” The relationship with Boehm continued. All their friends knew about it, but of course, the public did not.

In 1887 Louise began sculpting a statue of Queen Victoria, now on public view at Kensington Palace on the Broadwalk. It was unveiled on June 28, 1893, the anniversary of Queen Victoria’s coronation. In her opening speech Queen Victoria commented “It gives me great pleasure to...witness the unveiling of this fine statue so admirably designed and executed by my daughter.”

And what about Boehm? In 1890 Boehm died suddenly in his studio. Louise was said to have discovered his body. The rumor that Boehm died in Louise’s arms as they were making love gave much fodder to the national and international press. Curiously his private papers were quickly destroyed, and at Louise’s insistence, Boehm was buried in St. Paul’s Cathedral. The newspapers made much of Louise “breaking Royal protocol” by attending Boehm’s funeral. Louise herself lived to age ninety-one—capricious as ever.



Anne-Taylor Cahill is a professor of philosophy at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and serves on the national board of the Victorian Society in America. She is also founding member and former president of the Eloise Hunter Chapter of the VSA.

For further reading:

David Duff, *The Life Story of HRH Princess Louise*, (Bath, England: Cidric Chivers, 1971).

Lucinda Hawksley, *Queen Victoria’s Mysterious Daughter*, (London: St. Martin’s Press, 2013).

Robert Stamp, *Royal Rebels*, (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 1988).