

The Morning After the Night Before: a Light-Hearted Interpretation of the Portland Vase

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Fig. 1: Side 1. From left: Figures A (male), B (Cupid), C (female), D (male)



Fig. 2: Side 2. From left: Figures E (male), F (female), G (female).

The figured scenes on the Portland Vase have been subject to much speculation for what they might represent since the vase's discovery about 1592.¹ This paper reviews some of the more popular interpretations, the unresolved problems around them, and offers a light-hearted interpretation based on the vase as a work of art carrying a cautionary tale.

The ambiguity of the figured scenes on the Portland Vase has allowed for publication of many papers and books offering a huge variety of interpretations of the scenes; in the

late '90s Whitehouse counted more than 50 in print.² Titles include *The Portland Vase*, *Die Portlandvase*, *De Portlandvaas*, *On the Portland Vase*, *The Portland Vase again*, *The Portland Vase, a Reply*, *A new interpretation of the Portland Vase*, and so on.³ Most, but not all, of these interpretations offer solemn readings of the scenes based on classical knowledge. Robin Brooks notes an exception in the late 1770s when a self-styled Baron, Pierre d'Hancarville, published a paper that included a parody of previous scholarly interpretations based on the Adam and Eve story and leading to the (facetious) conclusion that the Portland Vase was created either in the time of Adam or of Oliver Cromwell.⁴ D'Hancarville's own interpretation of the vase scenes, based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, is noted by Brooks as no more satisfactory than any other, especially d'Hancarville's attempted synthesis of the two sides, and inclusion of the Heavenly

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1 British Museum GR 1945.9-27.1 (Gems 4036). Images courtesy of British Museum. Brown (1972), 379: discovered in 1592; Whitehouse (1997), 189 summarises the journey of the vase through various owners to its current home in the British Museum, and cites de Grummond (1974) 6 for the earliest written record being by Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc who saw it in Rome during the winter of 1600-1601. Whitehouse (1997) 190: There is a general agreement that the vase was made between the first century BCE, when glassblowing was invented, and the late first century CE, when use of coloured glass went out of fashion.

2 Whitehouse (1997), 6.

3 Bastet (1967); Haynes (1964; 1968; 1995); Simon (1957); Millingan (1829); Haynes (1968); Ashmole (1967).

4 See discussion in Brooks (2004) 104-6 on d'Hancarville's *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et les progrès des arts de la Grèce*.

Twins, Castor and Pollux, one of whom is represented by a pillar.⁵

The problem for many interpretations (including d'Hancarville's) is creating a synthesis between the two sides of the vase, in particular explaining the contrasting emotions of the central female figure on each side. On one side she is welcoming and appears happy while on the other side she is dejected and downcast with an appearance of mourning.

The continuing discussion over what the figures, labelled A-G on Sides 1 and 2 shown above, might represent ranges from particular divinities, to personifications, to historical people or combinations of all three. The only figure identified with any certainty is B, the winged Cupid, who carries a smoking torch in one hand and a bow in the other. His presence, above the female Figure C, suggests a mythological interpretation to the scene but does not exclude interpretations involving either personifications or historical figures, for example, famous lovers such as Antony and Cleopatra, or a divine conception scene for an historical figure (e.g. Alexander the Great, Scipio Africanus or Augustus). There are a number of examples in ancient art where historical or unidentified human figures are depicted in scenes that include recognisable divinities and/or mythological figures.⁶ For the purposes of this paper Cupid's presence represents a rather more profane idea than romanticised love or divine conception.

Cupid looks back to the young male Figure A entering the scene. Ashmole argues that the position of Cupid's wings suggests that Cupid has come to a stop above the woman and is looking back to check that the young man has followed. Thus, in his interpretation (and many others), the woman seated on the

ground and clasping the arm of the Figure A is the young man's final destination.⁷ Not everyone, including this author, agrees with this interpretation of which there is more below, but, for the moment, in respect of Cupid, his kicking legs suggests that he may still be moving and his right wing is opened out as if in a flying position; the left wing is concealed by smoke from the torch. In addition, Cupid can be a mischievous figure, sometimes with a hint of cruelty, and not entirely trustworthy.⁸ Interpretations of the two figured sides of the vase should take into account whether they comprise a single scene, or whether they are two unrelated scenes. If the two scenes are considered to be related in some way, then the relationship needs explanation.⁹ In this paper the two scenes are considered to be related but with a temporal separation in which the Cupid scene is the earlier of the two, but to be read second. The central female figure is thought to be the same person in each scene but the other figures are different people.

The likelihood that the two scenes are related is indicated by a number of parallels in composition and design. Both scenes feature three adult figures similarly arranged with a centrally placed seated or semi-reclining semi-nude woman framed by either a pair of standing nude males (in the Cupid scene) or pair of seated semi-nude figures, one male and one female, in the other scene. Both scenes are located outdoors in a garden or park-like environment, partially framed by architectural structures and plants; in the Cupid scene the

7 Ashmole (1967), 5.

8 E.g. Cupid using a torch to burn a butterfly's wings; red jasper, intaglio (1st Century CE; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Cat. No. CG296).

9 Single scene, or thematically linked: Polacco (1958) 132-41; Haynes (1964) 16-27 argues that the male entering on the side with Cupid is heading to the reclining woman on the other side of the vase, not the one holding his arm; Skalsky (2010) 12; Erasmus Darwin (1791) 321-340 read the scenes as an allegory of man's passage from life to death. Whitehouse, (1997), 2; Brown (1972), 380. Contra Ashmole (1967), 2-3; Harrison (1997) 150.

5 Brooks (2004) 106 rightly comments that d'Hancarville's Castor, 'being invisible and represented by the pillar' is as lunatic as anything that has gone before.

6 E.g. The Ara Pacis; Trajan's Column; the Gemma Augustea; the Farnese Cup.

architecture is in place but in the other scene it is destroyed.¹⁰

The scenes are physically linked by a plant that grows out from behind the column and portico structure that frames Figure A and reaches across into the space of the other scene. In addition, the left foot from Figure E and the toes of Figure G's right foot slightly graze the other scene. These links support one of the more popular theories about the two scenes: that each one has its own compositional unity but there is a thematic link between them. A considerable variety of thematic links have been offered over the years as there is sufficient ambiguity to allow for multiple interpretations. The scenes are also connected by the common feature of a torch, which is often considered symbolic of Roman marriage ceremonies. In one scene it is held upright in Cupid's right hand, alight with wisps of smoke trailing out behind. In the other scene it is burned out and downcast in the hands of the female Figure F. In this paper it is considered significant that the torch held by Cupid is smoking, not blazing with flames as might be expected for a marriage ceremony (given the remarkable skill of the artist, it is considered that the wispy smoke is intentional). The wispy smoke add to the sultry air of the female figure beneath and may also suggest that events to follow will not necessarily lead to marriage. Indeed, any resemblance to a wedding or betrothal scene is abstract at best, and given the position of the central female figure seated on the ground, seduction seems more likely. If the artist intended to represent a marriage or forthcoming wedding, it might be expected that the woman would be treated more formally and possibly with some traditional wedding attire, such as the veil, a well-attested bridal garment.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

¹⁰ Contra Walker (2004): interprets the setting as the 'wild' outdoors. Cf. Hayes (1968) 59: a rustic distyle shrine to Aphrodite.

Directly beneath the handles on each side is a bearded male mask. They reflect the mood of each figured scene in that the expression on one side appears happy with a slight smile (Figure 3), but on the other side it seems more distressed without the smile (Figure 4). Identification of the masks is controversial because they appear to have horns rising up either side of the base of the vase handle; they have been variously described as Pan, Capricorn, Neptune or Dionysus.¹¹ While it is likely that these structures also form part of the glassware to strengthen an area of weakness around the handle, the arrangement of the hair around them suggests that they are an integral part of the mask beneath. When viewed from a distance they are reasonably effective, but not everyone accepts them as horns.¹² They are not sharply defined and do not have the curvature or striations normally associated with goat-horns. Nonetheless, the masks slightly resemble the goat-like Pan with a long facial structure, accentuated by the styling of the beard. Furthermore, the plant life beneath also suggests a land-based deity in preference to a water deity such as Oceanus or Neptune.

A comparable piece of ancient Roman glassware, the Blue Vase (Pompeian, Cat. No.13521, National Archaeological Museum, Naples), features a Dionysiac styled head that has vines apparently growing out from the same point as the putative horns on the masks under the handles on the Portland Vase.¹³ The main point of design difference between the two vases is that the head on the

Blue Vase is not under the handles but on the main face and the vines form part of the decoration while the action scenes featuring cupid figures are located in the area beneath the handles. Nevertheless, the treatment of the masks on both vases with vines or horns apparently growing from them is a striking design similarity.

On another piece of comparable glassware, the Auldjo Jug in the British Museum (BM1859, 0216.1), the decoration of acanthus and birds is not of the same standard as on the Portland Vase, indicating that there were other artists producing similar glassware. Given the quality of the artwork on the figured scenes of the Portland Vase, the masks under the handles do not seem finished to the same standard as the figured scenes, particularly in respect of the area or 'horns' either side of the handles.

The most enduring mythological interpretation for the side with Cupid is that it represents the marriage between Peleus and Thetis with Peleus as Figure A¹⁴; Thetis, or her mother, or grandmother, or Venus, as Figure C¹⁵ and various options suggested for Figure D. These options include Thetis' father, Nereus, giving his approval at her betrothal or marriage, or Zeus, or Neptune or Poseidon, looking on as an observer.¹⁶ The interpretations that read Zeus, Neptune or Poseidon, usually relate to a prophecy that Thetis' son (Achilles) would be more powerful than his father; hence Zeus would not seduce Thetis but arranged with Poseidon that she would marry a mortal. The circular base that used to be fixed to the

11 Pan: Bastet (1967), 28-29; Brown (1972), 12; Haynes (1972), 12. Simon (1957), 28: personification of Capricorn, the birth-sign of Augustus. Millingan (1829), 99-105: Neptune.

12 Ashmole (1967), 3-4: they are not horns but an essential part of the vase construction to support the handle; he argues for the water-deity, Oceanus, grandfather of Thetis.

13 Ashmole (1967), 3-4: compares the areas beneath the handles of the Portland Vase and Blue Vase but the features beneath the handles on the Blue Vase have no resemblance to horns and are not physically connected to the decoration.

14 Winckelmann, (1767); Haynes (1964), 28, Ashmole (1967), 5: Peleus has passed through the gateway to the gods; dropping his cloak on his way.

15 Ashmole (1967), 6; contra Haynes (1964), 58-72: Figure C is Doris, future mother-in-law of Peleus, or Tethys, his future grandmother-in-law; Wedgwood: argues for Venus as Figure C.

16 Ashmole (1967), 6: Poseidon's gesture indicates deep thought or disquiet. Haynes (1964): Poseidon, one-time suitor of Thetis, was conversing with the woman (Doris) prior to the entry of the young man.

Portland Vase features a male head in profile wearing a Phrygian cap; a feature which suggests that someone from the vase's early history believed the scenes were from the Trojan cycle.¹⁷

Keeping to Trojan mythology, another scholar, Brown, suggested that the vase depicts scenes from the life of Achilles.¹⁸ One scene captures the moment when Achilles decides to reveal his masculinity when on Skyros, while the scene with Cupid represents Achilles' marriage to Lycomedes' daughter, Deidamia. One difficulty with this interpretation is that male A is physically different from male E as he is thinner and has different hair, suggesting two different people. In addition there was a popular legend that Achilles revealed his masculinity on Skyros by jumping up and grabbing his armour in response to a war trumpet; a number of wall-paintings and mosaics in Pompeii depicting this story include the elements of the shield and spear, both of these attributes are missing on the Vase scene.¹⁹

In addition to these interpretations, the male entering the Cupid scene has been variously argued to represent Alexander the Great, Paris, Orpheus, Adonis, Pluto, Bacchus, a ghost, a soul, Pylades, Theseus, Apollo, Marcellus, Dionysus, and Alexander Severus.²⁰ This scene

has also been suggested to be introductory, such as Achilles being introduced by his mother, Thetis, to his benefactor, Poseidon. However the overall sense of the scene does not seem introductory; nor do the introductory types of interpretation take Cupid into account very satisfactorily.

Interpreting this scene as an allegory for the conception of an historical figure, such as Alexander the Great, Scipio Africanus or Augustus/Octavian, apart from the presence of Cupid, also involves reading the snake-like creature as an allusion to the conception story. For example, Apollo is in the guise of a snake approaching Atia (Octavian's mother), or Olympia (Alexander's mother), or Pomponia (Scipio Africanus' mother).²¹ Similarly, reading the scene as the seduction of Mark Antony by Cleopatra interprets the snake as an allusion to the asp that killed her.²² However Haynes argued a good case, based on comparisons in Roman art that the creature on the vase is not a land-snake, but a bearded sea-snake, or *ketos*.²³ There are instances in Roman art where sea creatures, such as dolphins, appear in architectural or land-based settings.²⁴ Apart from the *ketos*, a further argument against Cleopatra as the woman in the Cupid scene is that she was declared an enemy of Rome by Augustus. As such she was generally treated as a figure of notoriety, not favourably treated or celebrated in Augustan art and literature whereas the figure on the vase is attractive and romanticised. In respect of Antony, the male Figure A bears little resemblance to the

17 Venuti (1756) related the scenes to the story of Paris; his paper shows that the vase had the base with the figure in the Phrygian cap at that time. Today the base is on separate display in the British Museum as it is no longer considered part of the original vase.

18 Brown (1972), 4-7.

19 House of Apollo, House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii (*Achilles at Skyros*, National Archaeological Museum Naples, Inv. no. 9110). See also Beard, Henderson (2001), 28-30.

20 Alexander Severus connection: see Bartoli (1697); Wedgwood (1788), 17: the vase was reputedly found in Severus' tomb and Count Caylus, without evidence, claimed it contained his ashes. Winckelmann (1767) argues against Severus appearing on the vase scenes. Mobius: Theseus visiting Amphitrite and Poseidon to recover the ring of Minos.

21 Simon (1957) 8-29: Octavian/Augustus; De La Chauffe (1746): Alexander with Jupiter and Olympias. Wedgwood (1788)16.

22 Walker (2004): Mark Antony, Cleopatra and Anton, the son of Hercules (with whom Antony identified), looking on.

23 Haynes (1995) 146-9; Skalsky (2010), reads the *ketos* shaped as the letter Omega.

24 E.g. Dolphin at the right leg of the Augustus of Prima Porta, c 14 CE, Vatican Museum; the 'lap counters' at the Circus Maximus were dolphin-shaped bronzes.

portraits on coins or cameos that have been identified as Antony; he is also far too young because Antony was a mature adult at the time of his love affair with Cleopatra. The reading on the other side of the vase to pair with the Antony and Cleopatra theme interpreted the centrally-placed woman as Octavia mourning her desertion by Antony; the male as Augustus preparing to avenge his sister's shame, and the other woman as Venus Genetrix who guarded over Augustus, looking at him reassuringly.²⁵

An interesting interpretation that supports the Peleus and Thetis theme has been to relate the scenes on the vase to the poetic treatments of the myth by the late Roman Republican or Augustan-era poets, Ovid and Catullus.²⁶ Figure F is compared to Ovid's Thetis (*Metamorphosis* 11.229-237; 257-259) in her cave dreaming at the end of the day watched over by Hermes and Aphrodite. Apart from the problem that neither scene concurs with Ovid's more violent version of events in which Thetis resisted and tried various transformations before she was captured by Peleus, the problem with Figure F is that the framing column and plant-life indicate an outdoor scene, not a cave scene and the female Figure C on the vase is mutually holding, possibly pulling, the male Figure A down toward her.

Haynes²⁷ turned to Catullus 64 to interpret the first scene as a visual depiction of the mutual attraction between Peleus and Thetis. Part of his argument for Peleus as Figure A rests on Catullus' description of Peleus as a *Pillar of Thessaly* as Figure A partially covers or even 'replaces' a faint outline of a column. Skalsky takes this a step further by reading the shape of the architecture depicting the Greek capital Pi, for Peleus.²⁸ Wedgewood had previously

observed, from the more practical glass-maker's point of view, that the column behind this figure has to be faint otherwise it 'would have interfered too much with the outline of the figure.'²⁹ The faint column also gives a sense of depth to the scene.

Unfortunately, the possible relationship with Catullus has a similar problem to the one that tried relating the vase scenes to Ovid's text. While one side appears to be a visual representation of one part of the poet's text, the other side of the vase does not fit any verse by either poet quite so neatly. Catullus goes on to describe the deserted Ariadne with her hair down (no longer tied in a fillet) and the wedding veil fallen down around her. This imagery does not match the vase scene with the woman with the downcast torch in one hand and the other hand to her head as if in pain, grief or mourning. Haynes interpreted her as Thetis, tired after her marriage, finding a rocky couch to lie on with the two figures either side being Hermes and Venus³⁰ or possibly Aphrodite.

The side of the vase with the despondent or grieving woman has been subject to a wider variety of interpretations than the scene with Cupid. Suggestions include the marriage of Paris and Helen³¹; Dido sitting among the ruins of Carthage, about to be deserted by Aeneas, watched by Venus; Ariadne languishing on Naxos; Achilles/Helen/Aphrodite³²; Thetis grieving for her son Achilles, or grieving for her marriage in her desire to return to the sea; Theseus on the point of abandoning Ariadne. Other combinations include Paris,

25 Walker, (2004).

26 Ovid see Ashmole (1967) 1 Haynes (1968) 62; Catullus: Haynes (1964), (1995) 150; Skalsky (1992) 93, (2010) 13. Ovid: Ashmole (1967) 6. Contra Brown (1972) 76.

27 Haynes (1964) 19.

28 Skalsky (1992) 45; (2010) 3.

29 Wedgewood (1788), 10.

30 Haynes (1995) 150 picks these two because Hermes frequently helps Venus in her matchmaking.

31 Harrison (1997) 151 with Aphrodite; n.4 cites examples of works depicting Paris with Helen seated and semi-nude.

32 Ashmole (1967) because Helen married Achilles on his remote island.

Helen, Aphrodite³³ and Peleus, Thetis, Zeus. Painter and Whitehouse also turned to myth, specifically relating to the birth of Paris, with Hecuba and Venus sitting among the ruins of Troy as a contrast to the previous scene which is said to represent the construction of Rome. Hecuba is dreaming of giving birth to the firebrand (Paris) and the subsequent destruction of Troy,³⁴ another curious interpretation where a figure is present in a scene about their birth. In addition, as Haynes³⁵ has pointed out, the torch is looking rather spent, and there is no suggestion of a pyromaniac here.

Simon argues that vase scenes refer to events associated with the conception of Augustus and interpreted it as part of Augustan ideology to legitimise his rule.³⁶ In her interpretation the male Figure A is Apollo approaching Atia (Figure C) and also Apollo in the guise of a serpent between her legs; Figure D is Chronos, the prophet of good times to come under Augustus. On the other side of the vase, Apollo reappears as E about to depart; F is Atia falling asleep and G is Venus. According to Simon the masks between the handles feature Capricorn, Augustus' birth sign.³⁷

Kenneth Painter and David Whitehouse³⁸ reworked Simon's interpretation, reading the scenes slightly differently. Instead of Apollo being both Figure A and the snake, they argued for a celebration of the conception of Augustus on the basis that Figure A is Octavian himself, C is his mother, Atia, D is Neptune and the snake is Apollo. One problem with this interpretation (apart from Octavian being present at his own conception) is the position of the woman seated on the ground apparently

pulling the arm of the young man toward her (the young man is unlikely to be pulling the woman up because his arm and hand rest over hers). It could hardly be Octavian (or Achilles, or any son for that matter) being pulled down by his mother in anticipation of his conception. Furthermore, a dutiful son is more likely to be looking at his parent, not at Cupid.

The historical interpretations involving Augustus locate him as either or both Figures A or E, but the chances for a viewer misinterpreting an image of Augustus being led either by his mother or by Cupid, make it very unlikely that he features in this scene, and the same argument applies to the image of Augustus sitting amongst ruins in the other scene. Neither scene creates a good impression and they are quite unlike Augustus' other carefully stage-managed portraits; the conformity of style across Augustus' busts, statues and gems elsewhere, but not on this vase, suggests that he does not feature in either scene. An artwork depicting Augustus about to be seduced is unlikely to be an imperial commission and also argues against Augustus himself appearing on the vase. This is not to say that the artwork is not the classicising style of the Augustan era - just that it does not feature Augustus and that the decoration on the Portland Vase is not linked to Augustan or Julio-Claudian ideology.

One of the more dramatic statements on the vase was made in 2003, when Jerome Eisenberg suggested the Portland Vase was a fake.³⁹ He postulated that it was the work of a seventeenth century engraver working for a wealthy family such as the Medici or Borghese. His paper prompted analysis tests on some glass fragments from the vase kept in storage in the British Museum (from the time when the vase had been broken). The results indicated that the chemical content of the glass is consistent with ancient Roman glass making

33 Harrison (1997) 152.

34 Painter and Whitehouse (1990) 130-6.

35 Haynes (1964) 149.

36 Simon, (1957).

37 Simon (1957). Cf Haynes (1995) 151.

38 Painter and Whitehouse (1990) 130-6. Contra Haynes (1995) 146-7.

39 Eisenberg (2003).

technology.⁴⁰

The Blue Vase is reasonably well attested as having been found at Pompeii and is shaped as an amphora; the technique of its decorative programme of plants and cupids is similar to the Portland Vase.⁴¹ It also features broken architecture in what appears to be an overturned column capital displaying a dowel hole under the foot of one of the cupids, a remarkable similarity to the object under the foot of Figure F on the Portland Vase. There has been speculation that, given its truncated shape, the Portland Vase was once similarly amphora-shaped including a lower frieze-band that is now missing. The base that was attached to the Portland Vase on its discovery is accepted today as not original. Whether or not this was the case, for this paper both vases are considered works of art for display and admiration.

The amphora was the traditional vessel for transporting goods, including vast quantities of wine, around the ancient Mediterranean world. In this respect, assuming the Portland Vase was once an amphora shape, the shapes and decoration of both the Portland Vase and the Blue Vase make decorative allusions to their more mundane counterparts in the world of commerce. Possibly the owners or commissioners of the Vases had connections to, or derived wealth from, such commercial activities, thus they were wealthy but not necessarily associated with the imperial family. The cupids on the Blue Vase harvesting their bumper crop might be interpreted as representing the good times of peace and fecundity. On the other hand, the ruined architecture on which they stand may represent a warning of the outcome for someone who over-indulges in the contents of the amphora. The viewer was at risk of becoming like a cupid not caring about the ruins beneath.

40 Brooks (2004), 224. For manufacturing theory see also Roberts, Gudenrath, Tatton-Brown and Whitehouse (2010).

41 Whitehouse 221.

The message on the Portland Vase is equally mixed.

Reading the seduction scene first, Cupid's torch is smoking, not burning with flames as might be expected for a marriage ceremony. The smoking torch and sultry woman indicates a seduction, perhaps a short-term liaison but not a marriage ceremony. This interpretation is also supported by the treatment of the semi-nude female figure seated on the ground and grasping the arm of the male Figure A; she is not being honoured as a bride.

Observing the sightlines of the figures supports the view that Cupid may have ideas other than heterosexual love; the reclining female figure clasping the arm of the young man and looking at him might be making an error of judgement. Cupid is looking back at the young man who is looking at the Cupid figure, not the woman although she is clasping his arm. Furthermore his hand is on her arm but not grasping it. The other older male is also looking at Cupid. Thus the two male figures are linked through Cupid; one male is young, the other older, which is a common thread to ancient homosexuality.⁴²

The two central female figures in each scene, C and F, could be the same person as the mouth and lips are very similar. The hair is styled in the same way, a heavy coil across the forehead with wisps round her neck and shoulders; it is slightly more undone in C than F.

There is a story that connects the two scenes, and it is story that carries resonances for the 21st century as much as for the ancient world, in this case a warning against over-indulgence. The ancient equivalent of text messages and FaceBook posts have been sent across town by those left at home: "the *Paterfamilias* and his good lady have gone away for the weekend to their villa in Baiae. We are left alone and want company. So we're throwing a 'heroes and nymphs' party in the gardens tonight. All

42 Miller (1986) 165 n.56 lists representations of Eros symbolizing and encouraging homosexual love.

welcome.”

The young male A drops his cloak at the entrance to the party scene. The female figure, C, is seated on the ground with her hair and garments loosed, ready for a fun night, has taken his arm; she is a sea-nymph preparing to seduce him, and, in case it was not explicit enough, a perky sea-snake rises out provocatively from between her legs.

Given her body position, our nymph had been in conversation with the older bearded man, Figure D, before the younger man walked in, but she is not interested in him. Her father? Not very likely. Her husband? Brother? Uncle? Friend? Any are possible for a voyeuristic older male. Maybe he was the one who sent out the invitations.

Moving around to the next scene on the Vase. It is the next day. The party got out of control and the garden décor, including the colonnade, were wrecked. The torch says it all. It is downcast and spent. As for the semi-reclining nymph, Figure F, Oh dear... was the young man was a bit of a disappointment? Was he all youthful good looks but sadly lacking in the satisfaction department? Or indeed, was he more interested in another kind of love and went off into the night with the older male? Neither of them has been seen since.

To return to the sea-nymph holding her head, what kind of hangover is she nursing at the same time as all that disappointment... oh... and look at the place... we have to get the columns back up before the *paterfamilias* arrives home, and he is on his way because he sent the household slaves on ahead to warm the bath; Figure G has her travelling staff. The slaves won't lift a finger to help and they will need a bribe to keep quiet....Female G looks at Male E who looks at the nymph with the sore head. Is it sympathy or are they scheming...? Thus the Portland Vase remains open to many interpretations, and in this case, may be read from either side as an amusing warning against over-indulgence.

The Morning After the Night Before.

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