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Anna Bilińska's *Portrait of Sculptor George Grey Barnard in His Atelier*, or the Struggle of Two Natures

"Posed 4 days last week for that portrait which you may imagine is hard to give time to. But have to do it. The Group is far from finished but is in the mood and coming out of the dark like a spring bud. The portrait is really a picture, 6 feet by 11 so build a house for it. Against my desires it goes to the Salon. Not but what it is to be a good work," the American sculptor George Grey Barnard wrote his family from Paris on 24th January 1890.[1] The letter concerned his portrait painted by Anna Bilińska and exhibited several months later at the Salon of the Société des artistes français.

The painting, currently kept at the State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg, shows Barnard in his studio, sitting on a large wooden platform (**fig. 1**). Seemingly at ease, his pose is in fact studied. The sculptor has luxuriant dark hair and his handsome face, with a puckered forehead and focused gaze, is turned towards the viewer. His muscular forearms are exposed and his hands, reddened from work, highlighted. In one of them, he holds a lump of clay. The sitter perched himself on the edge of the wooden platform (the arrangement of his legs, set wide apart, and colour contrasts between the black trousers and clay-soiled wood direct the viewer's gaze to this point in the composition). Barnard's clothes – the yellowy brown shirt with one button done and the undershirt showing, the dark, tight trousers and shoes tied around the calves – are soiled with the sculpting material, just like his hands. Behind him looms part of the giant clay model for *The Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*, which he finished in marble in 1894: the powerfully built back of the reclining male figure and the foot and hand of the standing figure propped upon it. The latter is covered with a folded beige fabric, which slides off the sculpture, revealing certain fragments while obscuring others (**fig. 2**).

Apart from Barnard's letters, the circumstances of creating the portrait may be inferred from Bilińska's notebooks kept at the Tykocin Museum: one containing lists of sold works and awards won, plus notes on income, expenses and investments, and one with addresses of her clients and friends.[2] The painting was commissioned by Alfred Corning Clark,[3] an American

[1] Philadelphia Museum of Art Library & Archives, Daniel Williams Biographical Collection of George Grey Barnard, box 2, folder 3, Barnard's letter to his family of 24th January [1889], MS.

[2] Podlaskie Museum in Białystok, Division of the Museum in Tykocin (further: MPB, MT), Anna Bilińska's notebook, inv. no. MT/H/D 221, MS, and Anna Bilińska's address book, inv. no. MT/H/D 165, MS.

[3] MPB, MT, Anna Bilińska's notebook, inv. no. MT/H/D 221, MS, p. 12.

millionaire from New York, heir to the Singer Manufacturing Company fortune.[4] This industrialist and art collector, distinguished philanthropist and patron of artists, including Barnard, ordered a surprisingly large-format portrait – the largest Bilińska had painted thus far. The painter, who moved to Paris in 1882, had already made a name for herself in portraiture. Her customers included French aristocrats and bourgeoisie as well as Poles, Britons and Americans. Since 1887, she had exhibited her portraits at the Salon while taking part in local and international exhibitions in various French cities and European capitals, winning several medals and awards.[5]

Bilińska met Clark – who regularly visited Paris – in 1889, as testified by an entry in her address book.[6] We do not know why the millionaire approached the Polish artist with a commission to paint his protégé. Perhaps he saw and appreciated her works exhibited in Paris at the time: *Portrait of Countess Angèle de Vauréal* (1889, private collection) at the Salon[7] and the award-winning *Self-Portrait* (**fig. 3**) at the Exposition Universelle. At the same time, Bilińska jotted down Barnard's address in her notebook: his atelier, depicted in the portrait, was located at 12 rue de Boissonade, just one kilometre away from her own studio at 27 rue de Fleurus.[8] Work on the painting began in 1889, and it was exhibited at the Palais de l'Industrie the following May – against the wishes of the model but most likely in line with the commissioner's intention. After the exhibition, Bilińska continued painting. "The Salon is over," Barnard wrote in another letter, "but the portrait has still something to be done to it."[9] According to Bilińska's notes, she worked on it for 275 hours and did not send it to the buyer until 30 September 1890. For this work, the artist received a fee of 5,000 francs,[10] the second largest in her career – topped just by her pay for *Portrait of a Young Pianist, Józef Hofmann*, made towards the end of the same year also for Clark (private collection, deposited at the Musikinstrumenten-Museum, Berlin).[11] According to the letter cited at the beginning of this paper, the collector did not order Barnard's portrait for himself but for the artists' parents, who lived in Madison, Indiana, where the painting was eventually sent.

The Sculptor and the Millionaire

Born in 1863 in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, to a Presbyterian pastor's family, George Grey Barnard grew up in several small towns in the American Midwest because of his father's itinerant work. In 1880, equipped with a small sum, he left his family home and joined the Art Institute of Chicago. There, he first came in contact with casts of Michelangelo's sculptures, which he

[4] See the Clark family monograph: Nicholas Fox Weber, *The Clarks of Cooperstown* (New York, 2007). This was my source of information on the life and work of Alfred Corning Clark.

[5] See Agnieszka Bagińska, Renata Higersberger, "Timeline of Anna Bilińska's Life and Work," in eaedem, eds, *The Artist. Anna Bilińska 1854–1893*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 2021 (Warsaw, 2021), pp. 63–95.

[6] MPB, MT, Anna Bilińska's notebook, inv. no. MT/H/D 165, MS, p. 14.

[7] For information on the painting, see *The Artist*..., op. cit., p. 280 (Renata Higersberger).

[8] MPB, MT, Anna Bilińska's address book, inv. no. MT/H/D 165, MS, p. 6.

[9] As cited in Harold E. Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece. Barnard's 'The Struggle of the Two Natures of Man,'" *Art Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1961), p. 142.

[10] MPB, MT, Anna Bilińska's notebook, inv. no. MT/H/D 221, MS, p. 12.

[11] Since 1887, Józef Hofmann had also held a scholarship from Alfred Corning Clark. For information on the painting, see *The Artist*..., op. cit., p. 239 (Agnieszka Bagińska).

copied. In 1883, he left for Paris to study at the École des beaux-arts in the studio of sculptor Pierre-Jules Cavelier. In the first years of his studies, he lived in abject poverty and dedicated all his time to improving his skills, not exhibiting or selling any of his works.[12]

Barnard's fate turned 180 degrees when he met Clark. The American millionaire had been coming to Europe for years, leading an alternative life. Clark, who initially did not intend to inherit his family's fortune, was a lover of art, music and literature fluent in several languages. In New York, he was the paragon of a business and family man.[13] In Europe, he maintained a long-term relationship with the Norwegian opera singer Lorentz Severin Skougaard, with whom he travelled around the continent. After the sudden death of his beloved in 1885, grief brought Clark to Paris. In 1886, he visited Barnard's atelier, leaving fascinated with the young sculptor – whom the millionaire saw as his complete opposite. This talented, uncouth boy, a real-life Huckleberry Finn type, was oblivious to life's hardships and focused on art alone. Clark, who spent substantial amounts on charity, not only gave him a scholarship but also paid for his new apartment with a studio, funded his sculpting materials and trips, hosted him in New York and supported his parents. He bought Barnard's works and, more importantly, commissioned sculptures from him, proposing their subjects – thus taking part in the creative process. One such composition is *Brotherly Love* from 1887, meant to decorate Skougaard's grave in Langesund, Norway.[14] Clark and Barnard remained close for ten years, and their relationship – as may be inferred from the sculptor's letters – was based on the patron's obsessive admiration and protective love, to which the artist's reacted with pride and gratitude.[15]

The Struggle of the Two Natures in Man was also purchased by the generous benefactor. Barnard started working on the sculpture in 1888, creating its first small-format studies. In the same year, he completed the clay model in its final, superhuman scale. It is this stage of work that we see in Bilińska's portrait. From then on, progress stalled for two years due to Barnard's illness and the partial destruction of the colossal model. The plaster cast was made in 1891. Between 1892 and 1894, the sculptor worked on a marble version, having purchased the material in Carrara with Clark's money. In 1894, the sculpture was presented at the Salon on Champ de Mars alongside five of Barnard's smaller works.[16] This was the first exhibition of the 31-year-old artist. The monumental group, which he titled *Je sens deux hommes en moi*, brought him instant success. The sculptor was accepted to the Société nationale des beaux-arts, becoming the "man of the hour," a celebrity visited by journalists and invited to parties.[17]

After his sensational triumph, that very summer – contrary to Clark's advice – Barnard returned to the States, where he got married and settled in New York. The artist explained his sudden departure with patriotic motives: "America, with its vastness of reach, its great rugged

[12] The basic facts from George Grey Barnard's life are here cited after Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit.

[13] One of his sons, Robert Sterling Clark, who shared his father's passion for collecting, in 1950 established the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, currently known as The Clark.

[14] The sculpture was allegedly modelled after the figures of Emperor Hadrian and his lover Antinous from the *San Ildefonso Group*, Museo Nacional del Prado. See Weber, *The Clarks...*, op. cit., pp. 62–67.

[15] For more information on Barnard and Clark's professional and personal relationship, see ibid., pp. 59–95.

[16] *Catalogue illustré des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, dessins, gravure, objets d'art et architecture exposés au Champ-de-Mars le 25 avril 1894* (Paris, 1894), p. XLIII.

[17] The facts concerning the stages of work on the sculpture and its reception at the Salon are quoted after Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., pp. 140–43.

and virile spirit, would yield an art more hardy and adventurous than any before known in the world. All Americans are needed in America. I am needed. We must build a great national art."[18] *The Struggle of the Two Natures*... also ended up in the U.S. and, after the sudden death of its owner in 1896, in line with his wishes, it was bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Even after his return to the country, Barnard kept working for Clark, for whom he made the sculpture of the Greek god Pan, cast in bronze in 1898.[19] His greatest work, created during another stay in France, was a group of allegorical figures intended to decorate the Pennsylvania State Capitol (completed in 1911). Meanwhile, Barnard also collected remains of Gothic sculpture and architecture from French provinces, which he then transported to America. His collection, purchased by John D. Rockefeller Jr., was transferred to the Metropolitan Museum, creating the Cloisters division in 1938.[20]

In the first years of Barnard's activity in America, the story of his life greatly interested the local press. Articles published at the time, collected in a clippings scrapbook kept at the Smithsonian Institution,[21] contributed to the artist's legend built around the phenomenon of the "American sculptor." This construct, quite new at the time, contained elements of the founding myth of a national culture regarded as devoid of a past or tradition.[22]

Journalists highlighted how Barnard's childhood and adolescent years were tied with nature. As a child, he was allegedly "[...] living a free, untrammelled life in Illinois, in Iowa, and on the Mississippi, wandering through woods and swamps and becoming intimately acquainted with all phases of geology and animal life."[23] The boy not only lived close to nature but also carefully analysed it. A ship captain he befriended showed him a collection of curios, shells and minerals acquired during his travels, which encouraged Barnard to start collecting similar samples on his own. "The birds and small animals attracted him. He had played in brick-yards and discovered that under his fingers clay took on strange shapes. He began to model the 'birds' from nature. He would shoot them and stuff them like his clay models. He soon had over a thousand specimens."[24] As a 16-year-old, Barnard was a professional taxidermist, and later referred to these methods when describing work on his sculptures.[25] Therefore, his art was said to be rooted in nature, and the creative process, to reflect the brutal games of his boyhood.

While Barnard's early years were identified with freedom and an unhindered exploration of nature, the time of his studies in Chicago and Paris was described as an arduous struggle with fate. The narrative about overcoming obstacles is part and parcel of the universal, romantic myth of an underestimated, rejected artist – yet in Barnard's case, it was transformed

[18] As cited in Weber, *The Clarks*..., op. cit., p. 88.

[19] The sculpture is located at the Columbia University campus.

[20] For more information on the Barnard collection and The Cloisters, see Jack L. Schrader, "George Grey Barnard: The Cloisters and The Abbaye," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1979), pp. 3–52.

[21] Archives of American Art, George Grey Barnard Papers (further AAA, GGBP), box 7, folder 15, Clippings Scrapbook, c. 1887–1921.

[22] Emily C. Burns, "'A baby's unconsciousness' in sculpture: modernism, nationalism, Frederick MacMonnies and George Grey Barnard in fin-de-siècle Paris," *Sculpture Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2018), p. 91.

[23] "Letters and Art. A Symbolist in Stone," *The Literary Digest*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1903), p. 43.

[24] AAA, GGBP, box 7, folder 15, Clippings Scrapbook, c. 1887–1921, p. 7 (clipping: "George Grey Barnard, Sculptor," article from an unknown magazine [1894]).

[25] Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 141.

into a story of success and fame built upon hard work. According to articles and interviews, the sculptor lived in poverty and survived his first three and a half years in Paris on 700 dollars. He lived in a cold studio far away from his school, to which he went on foot. He could not afford fuel or firewood, and covered his clay models with his own bedsheets. He often lacked money for food. He slept little, devoting every moment to study and work.[26] Barnard's dedication to art and determination to continuously improve his skills finally yielded a magnificent exhibition debut. It happened late, in 1894, but brought the artist long-awaited success. What most of these accounts overlook is the fact that– apart from his persistence and hard work – Barnard owed his success to Alfred Corning Clark.

The Struggle of the Two Natures in Man

The sculpture in the background of Bilińska's portrait is Barnard's breakthrough work, which fully embodied his individual style: the heroic scale, dynamic composition and exquisite stone craftsmanship, combining coarse and smooth parts. It depicts two nude men of similar appearance. The reclining figure has a twisted body and tense muscles. The standing, forward-bending figure is also in motion, resting his foot on the lying man. His musculature is highlighted, though slightly softer than in the bottom figure. Both men's half-open eyes are fixed on one distant, unspecified point. In the place where their bodies join is a little fantastical creature with round eyes, bared fangs and bristled fur.

To this day, the sculpture remains enigmatic to its viewers and interpreters. Barnard's ambiguous forms can be inscribed into a dual relationship of opposites: the soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil.[27] Even the sculptor's own interpretation of his magnum opus changed at different stages of the work. Originally meant to depict "liberty," Barnard later said it symbolized "victory," formulating what he believed to be a new definition of the term. In 1888, he wrote to his parents about the dynamic opposition between the victor and the vanquished, with the former being exposed to suffering and always at risk of taking the latter's place.[28] This unstable relationship between triumph and failure that Barnard discovered at the time may refer to verses from the Book of Ecclesiastes: "[...] the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (9:11). This fragment appeared in interpretations of Bilińska's portrait written before the sculpture was shown to the public.[29]

This struggle between opposites manifested itself in the French title of the work, under which it was exhibited at the Salon: *Je sens deux hommes en moi.* Numerous reviews attributed it to a poem by Victor Hugo, but this has to be refuted as his oeuvre includes no such sentence.[30] However, the passage may well come from *Aurélia* (1855), a short story by Gérard de Nerval, who was popular among Symbolist artists: "A terrible idea struck me: 'Man is dual,'

[26] AAA, GGBP, op. cit., p. 12 [clipping: "Hard Climb to Fame," article in *Chicago Evening Post* (24 April 1897)]; p. 23 (clipping: "Is a Great Genius," article in *Muscantine Journal* [1897]).

[27] Burns, "'A baby's unconsciousness'...," op. cit., p. 98.

[28] Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 141.

[29] Jagiellonian Library, *Mémorial of the artist-painter Anna Bilińska* (further BJ, Mémorial), ref. no. Rkp. BJ Przyb 15/78, p. 68 (clipping: M. Sears Brooks's poem *The Young Sculptor* from an unknown magazine, 1890), p. 69 (clipping: Bessie H. Woolford's article "A Masterpiece" from an unknown Chicago magazine, 1890).

[30] Information on the source of this title is provided in other monographs after Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 142.

I said to myself. – 'I feel two men within myself,' [in the original: *Je sens deux hommes en moi*] wrote a certain Father of the Church. The coming together of two souls has deposited its composite seed inside a body, whose duality of origin is visibly evident in every organic element of its structure. In each man there is a spectator and an actor, a speaker and a responder. The Orientals have seen in this two enemies: the good and the evil genius. 'Am I the good one? Or am I the evil one?' I asked myself. 'In either case, the *other one* is hostile to me... Who knows whether, under certain circumstances or at a certain age, these two spirits separate from each other? Both of them being bound by a material affinity to the same body, perhaps the one is destined for glory and happiness, the other for annihilation or eternal torment?'"[31]

The above passage on the duality of the human soul, the internal struggle and an existence oscillating between passivity and action, good and evil, happiness and suffering, fits in with Barnard's original concept about the fluid nature of victory and failure, yet attributes a new meaning thereto. This universal, oft-recurring theme had already been analysed in art and literature, for instance in the famed fragment of Goethe's *Faust*: "Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast, / each seeks to rule without the other. / The one with robust love's desires / clings to the world with all its might, / the other fiercely rises from the dust / to reach sublime ancestral regions. / Oh, should there be spirits roaming through the air / which rule between the earth and heaven, / let them leave their golden haze and come to me, / let them escort me to a new and bright-hued life!"[32] For Barnard, it could also carry personal meaning. Commenting on the work during the Salon, the sculptor was meant to admit that it illustrated his own struggle. Nicholas Fox Weber suggests that this internal conflict could refer to Barnard's sexuality, alluding he may have been involved in an erotic relationship with his patron.[33] At the same time, the sculptor declared sexual abstinence, justifying it with a theory on bodily energy being transformed into the creation of art.[34]

While the meaning behind the sculpture, currently known as *The Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*, may be interpreted in multiple ways, its composition and form indicate specific sources of inspiration. The colossal figures, the expression of their bodies and highlighted musculature reference Michelangelo's oeuvre, particularly his *Slave* sculptures (c. 1513–16), which the American artist may have seen in the Louvre,[35] and whose casts he had copied while still in Chicago. This grew to become a key element of Barnard's biography: almost all texts on his art compare his output to the Florentine master.[36] The artist also employed new, non-classical formal solutions, introduced to French sculpture by Auguste Rodin. The composition is twisted and split into parts, while the combination of raw and smooth stone surfaces renders the shapes smoother, highlighting the properties of the sculpting material.

[31] Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia*, translated by Kendall E. Lappin (Santa Maria, CA, 1991), pp. 54–55.

[32] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust. Part I*, lines 1112–21, translated by Peter Salm (New York, 1988), pp. 69–71.

[33] Weber, *The Clarks...*, op. cit., pp. 79, 82.

[34] Ibid., pp. 70–71.

[35] Michelangelo, *Rebellious Slave* and *Dying Slave*, c. 1513–16, the Louvre, Paris.

[36] Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 141. See also "Letters and Art...," op. cit., p. 43; J. Nilsen Laurvik, "George Grey Barnard," *The International Studio*, vol. 36, no. 142 (1908), p. 44; Thayer Tolles, "The elephant in the room: George Grey Barnard's 'Struggle of the Two Natures in Man' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York," in Christopher R. Marshall, ed., *Sculpture and the Museum* (Farnham, 2011), p. 117; Burns, "'A baby's unconsciousness'...," op. cit., pp. 98–99.

According to Barnard himself, who did not mention Rodin as an influence on his art, the French master held his sculpture exhibited at the Salon in high esteem.[37]

The arrangement of figures in *The Struggle of the Two Natures*... refers to the oeuvre of Jean-Léon Gérôme. In 1972, he painted a gladiators' fight in a Roman circus during the reign of Nero. The work, titled *Pollice Verso* (**fig. 4**), is among his most renowned creations. As Weber rightly notes, the positions of both men – one lying vanquished, the other standing with his foot on the other's throat – may have inspired the arrangement of Barnard's figures. Importantly, the sculptor's patron – who admired Gérôme and owned several of his works – purchased this painting in the United States after 1887.[38] The artist may have seen the canvas during one of his stays at Clark's New York home or again followed the millionaire's suggestions concerning the subject of his work. Equally likely is that Barnard was inspired by *The Gladiators*, Gérôme's sculpture showing the same two men and made in bronze in 1878. The work was kept in the painter's Parisian studio (**fig. 5**), and in 1905 became part of his statue made by Aimé Morot (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).[39] The three-dimensional form and monumental scale of the work featuring the two warriors may have stirred Barnard's imagination more forcefully than the painting. Comparing both sculptures emphasizes the meaning of the American artist's composition. While the scale and arrangement of the depicted figures are similar, the struggle that befell them is completely different. Gérôme builds the victor and vanquished narrative using impetuous gestures, tense muscles, expressive facial features and details of the soldiers' armour and equipment. The result of the duel is obvious. On the other hand, Barnard's figures have no similarly clear-cut roles. Their dynamically rendered bodies seem suspended in motion, as if in a state of lethargy. There are no attributes or gestures of power. The standing figure seems to be propped up on the reclining man rather than crushing him. The latter, in turn, seems to be in the process of moving up, striking the standing man off balance. Owing to this ambiguity of the poses and roles of his protagonists, Barnard expressed the dramatic nature of internal human struggles, where there is no victor or vanquished, as victory and failure are never final.

The Struggle of the Two Natures... was commented in the art press of the late 19th and early 20th century as not just Barnard's breakthrough, but an epochal work in the history of American sculpture. In 1908, J. Nilsen Laurvik wrote: "I say epoch-making deliberately, using the term in relation to American art, for up to this time we had produced in sculpture little more than a superrefined dilettantism that ingloriously played the sedulous ape to this and that past period with no eyes for the eternal and ever-present truth and beauty inherent in life itself."[40] Even though by then Barnard's work had provoked ambivalent reactions from critics, who found fault with its obscure message while noting the exquisite form, the composition was regarded as the founding work of American sculpture.[41]

[37] Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 39.

[38] Weber, *The Clarks*..., op. cit., p. 83. For the story behind the painting, see Laurence des Cars et al., eds, *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). L'Histoire en spectacle*, exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay, Paris; The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2010–11 (Paris, 2010), pp. 126–28 (Laurence des Cars).

[39] Ibid., pp. 130–32 (Édouard Papet).

[40] Laurvik, "George Grey Barnard...," op. cit., p. 39.

[41] For the varied reception of the sculpture c. 1900, see Tolles, "The elephant...," op. cit., pp. 119–20.

The Sculptor and His Work in the Painting

Bilińska depicted Barnard during the creative process. The artist holds a lump of clay in his reddened hand, the sleeves of his shirt are rolled up; his body and clothes soiled. In this respect, the painting is unique. The sculptor's representation takes account of the physical aspects of his work: effort and dirt, which – unlike the traditional iconography of the artist in his studio – are emphasized rather than obscured. The sculpture behind Barnard's back is also "in the process" of creation, although giant masses of the grey-blue matter had already been formed. Bilińska depicted the interim stage: the clay model in the final scale, a living idea of the work that precedes its further transformations, leading up to the final form immortalized in stone. The American often spoke of his creative process, mythologizing it to varying extents. For instance, he was wont to quote the well-known motto of 19th-century sculptors: "clay means life, plaster death, and marble resurrection," which attributed separate meanings to each stage of work on his sculpture.[42] In letters to his family, Barnard described his personal struggles with sculpting materials, emphasizing his physical strength: "I modelled up over two tons of clay in two days every bit alone – commenced half past 3 in the morning, stopped 9:30 at night – all thrown up second night."[43] In terms of working with stone, he wrote: "I find marble cutting easy as all things when force is employed."[44]

Barnard's creative process was crucial in building his myth as an American sculptor. His supposed trademarks were naïveté and authenticity, referring to the cultural construct of the United States: a country without a history. Emily C. Burns analyses the "innocent eye" principle visible in his works. In Barnard's case, the act of creation was a primaeval one, based on direct experience and a rejection of established models. In line with this assumption, what made his sculpture American was naïve innovation, free from the restrictive patterns of tradition.[45] Laurvik noted the epoch-making character of *The Struggle of the Two Natures*... for national art, yet called Barnard "a primitive in his way of looking at and interpreting life."[46] The sculptor modelled clay in a dimly lit studio with his eyes half shut. What follows is that he shaped his sculptures solely through their outlines, their "essential form," which is the source of their simplicity and strength. The artist kept adding and subtracting clay "until the figure under his hands grew into the image of a living, breathing figure before him." The sculptor's creative method, based on a direct imitation of life, recalled the "childlike truth of a simple man."[47] A reference to carefree childhood years – the time of freedom, closeness to nature and individual explorations free from cultural determinants – was crucial for this interpretation.

Reviewers of the portrait underlined the model's physical beauty: his regular features, luxuriant hair and muscular body, partially freed from the close-fitting clothes. These elements, along with Barnard's pose, give his image erotic overtones. The man's figure oozes youthfulness, vigour and vital energy. Perhaps such a depiction was influenced by the commissioner, whose fascination with the man was not purely artistic but also sexual. Barnard's

[42] Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 139.

[43] Ibid., p. 141.

[44] Ibid., p. 142.

[45] Burns, "'A baby's unconsciousness'...," op. cit., pp. 100–1.

[46] Laurvik, "George Grey Barnard...," op. cit., p. 39.

[47] Ibid., p. 40.

figure can also be seen to embody the American canon of masculinity. The sculptor's physique, emphasized in the work, was described by journalist Olive Sanxay, who saw the portrait in Barnard's parents' home in 1898: "Here is life; here is virility! Not even the tawny leather of the blouse can dim these inspired features – the beautiful head, the glow of the firm flesh, the flashing eye, the terrible energy and power and youth of the bright figure, that are almost prophetic in significance."[48] The sculptor's athletic figure corresponds to the monumental work behind his back, "in which the moulding of muscles, the impression of instruments, the shavings and roughness of drying clay are portrayed."[49] Another reviewer saw the artist's physical strength as a harbinger of the establishment of a national art. "The sculptor, who looks like a sort of artistic gladiator, and his big unfinished Idea looming up behind [...] represent the young American school before the *ébauche* of American art."[50]

Barnard's clothes, particularly the shoes tied high over his ankles, are rather striking in the portrait. Thus far, reviews and interpretations of the work described them as sandals, slippers, or even traditional Norwegian shoes.[51] However, their form is most reminiscent of mediaeval crakowes, and the tight trousers are similar to those worn in the 15th century.[52] In turn, the shirt with rolled up sleeves, whose pulled up cuffs create a ruffled shape on the sculptor's shoulders, brings to mind the doublet – a male garment from the Renaissance. Such references may suggest an analogy between Barnard and a historical sculptor – in this case, Michelangelo. This hypothesis seems justified if one takes note of the latter's significance for the American artist's oeuvre. Barnard started learning sculpture by copying casts of Buonarotti's works, and the breakthrough *Struggle of the Two Natures...* reveals plenty of similarities with the master's monumental, austere style. In a letter to his parents, Barnard admitted that admirers of his sculptural group dubbed him the "Young Giant Michelangelo."[53] Both worked marble with astonishing ease; both obtained their challenging sculptural material from Carrara. One may also assume that this identification of the model in the painting was influenced by Clark, who saw Barnard as an eminent sculptor and whose role in the American artist's life was not unlike that of Lorenzo de' Medici for the Florentine master.

Michelangelo's youth is missing from 19th-century iconography of the Italian artist. The two most famous paintings: Eugène Delacroix's *Michelangelo in His Studio* from 1849–50 (Musée Fabre, Montpellier) and Gérôme's *Michelangelo* (1849, Dahesh Museum of Art), depict Buonarotti as a mature or senile man, respectively. It is unclear whether they may have inspired Bilińska. For the contemporary viewer, her painting and Delacroix's work enter into a relationship that involves reversing the figures' significance, with Barnard becoming Michelangelo's opposite. In Delacroix's painting, the mature sculptor is depicted in a contemplative pose surrounded by his finished works, while Bilińska's portrait shows the active, young sculptor, whose work is still at the stage of a clay design. Where the former embodies intellectual activity, the latter glorifies physical agency. The contrast between these figures

48 Olive Sanxay, "Parentage of Genius," *The Indianapolis News*, vol. 29, no. 259 (1898), p. 5.

49 Ibid.

50 "French News," *Galignani's Messenger*, no. 23563 (1890), p. 6.

51 Weber, *The Clarks...*, op. cit., p. 84.

52 The author would like to thank Anna Straszewska for her contribution to deciphering the historical references of Barnard's dress.

53 As cited in Dickson, "Log of a Masterpiece...," op. cit., p. 141.

demonstrates Bilińska's (or Clark's or Barnard's) invention in drawing parallels between this image of an American sculptor and a historical artist. When painting this portrait of the "Young Michelangelo," the artist formulated the ethos of a new national art based on virility and strength, and informed by tradition.

Painting or Sculpture?

Another interpretive trope concerning Barnard's portrait is the *paragone*, a debate on the specific nature and competition between the arts that emerged in the Renaissance and lived on in the 19th century.[54] In Bilińska's rendition, it concerned the rivalry between painting and sculpture. Reviews of the painting – which the artist, like in Barnard's case, collected in clippings scrapbooks[55] – praised the painter's technical prowess in accurately conveying reality. "There is such warmth, such internal life, such energy in this portrait by Miss A. Bilińska that it is hard to tear one's gaze from it. The subject is interesting and captivating, and some thought is required to realize the technique and method, which evoke similarly poignant emotions. [...] There is nothing more delicate than the range of greys; the painter's triumph and snag at the same time. [...] We admire the poetic composition, the tasteful arrangement, the harmonious colouring, emerging against the vigorous, yet painstaking sketch; we admire the full palette, rich yet able to make discreet choices between colours and rejuvenate the well-known scale of supplementary colours; and finally, we admire the subtle lighting of the entire painting, its translucency of tone."[56]

The description, which contains traditional elements of 19th-century criticism, such as composition, sketch and palette, takes particular note of the colours. The painting is dominated by greys combined with blues and browns, the use of which resulted from the depicted object – a clay sculpture. Harmonizing with the colour scheme is a wide scale of chiaroscuro, ranging from the luminous points closest to the viewer to distant, almost completely darkened parts. The palette, narrowed down to shades of grey, was allegedly challenging for the artist, although it enabled her to showcase her painting skills. Using a limited number of colours and smooth transitions between light and shade, Bilińska created a three-dimensional image of the sculpture that brought out its unique features: spatiality, weight and texture of the material. Thus, the image approximated the original to the maximum possible extent, with the painting gaining sculptural qualities, which may be interpreted as a declaration of rivalry with this discipline of art.

Bilińska's work was often seen as an imitation of real life: "The head seems to live; the artist has seen beneath the Surface and gives us a portrait of mind and soul. You lose the idea of paint and look upon the picture as a living being."[57] Here it is worth recalling the circumstances of the portrait's creation. Bilińska painted the sculptor at work, as is suggested by the clay in his hands and soiled clothes. The atelier bears witness to two creative processes at once, which may be seen as a competition as to which medium is best suited to convey life. Moulding clay was a "living" stage of working on a sculpture, both in 19th-century theory and

[54] See Sarah J. Lippert, *The Paragone in Nineteenth-Century Art* (New York–London, 2021).

[55] BJ, Bilińska's Mémorial, see p. 29.

[56] [Mścisław Edgar] Nekanda Trepka, "Artyści polscy w Salonie paryskim," *Czas*, no. 116 (1890), p. 2.

[57] BJ, Bilińska's Mémorial, p. 69 [clipping: Bessie H. Woolford's "A Masterpiece," article from an unknown magazine (1890)].

Barnard's workshop practice. The *paragone* is the subject of a poem by the American writer M. Sears Brooks, inspired by this portrait. The author describes a beautiful sculptor waiting for inspiration as he creates his work and a woman painter who simultaneously engages in the difficult task of capturing his creative process on canvas.[58] The piece ends with an insoluble juxtaposition: "O, arts twin born! Painting and sculpture rare! / To you is shown. / The morning tints impalpable as air. / To you is given the angel in the stone."[59]

Bilińska's most famous work – her *Self-Portrait* from 1887 (fig. 3) – depicts the painter in a similar situation to that described by Brooks. The painting visually corresponds to Barnard's portrait. In it, the woman is depicted during the creative process. Seemingly at ease, her pose is also defiant, as she exposes her hands and tools of her trade: the palette and brushes. She is modestly dressed, so elements such as a flower bouquet behind her belt, shiny bracelets and kitchen apron, are all the more surprising. The painting she is working on is not shown, and yet it is right before the viewer's eyes. Bilińska emphasized her model's physique: irregular features and dishevelled hair. According to the critics of the time, the realistic depiction of the figure and impeccable painting technique led to the creation of an image that evokes strength and truth, an image that defined a phenomenon as new in the 19th-century art world as the American sculptor: a professional woman artist.[60]

The Painter and the Sculptor

The creation of Barnard's portrait was most likely arduous for both Bilińska and her model. The painter regularly visited the artist in his studio. Although she usually finished paintings in her own atelier, she was prevented from doing so here by the work's dimensions. In the late 19th century, an unmarried woman visiting a young man represented a deviation from the social norms of the time. Bilińska may have attracted criticism from her peers, although as a portrait artist (who painted at her commissioners' houses), she enjoyed much greater freedom of movement and meetings than women from the middle or upper classes.[61] At the time, other artists from her generation also painted sculptors in their studios. In 1887, Bilińska herself made the *Portrait of Władysław Marcinkowski* (The National Museum in Poznań), while posing for him for a bust. Another example is the *Portrait of Jean Carriès in His Studio* from 1886 or 1887 by the Swiss painter Louise Catherine Breslau, who studied with the Pole at the Académie Julian (**fig. 6**). The painting shows the model surrounded by his sculptures and tools of his trade, wearing everyday clothes and a hat, which identify him as belonging to the Parisian bohemia. Carriès's image has little in common with the beautiful, robust man with bare arms and an unbuttoned shirt from Bilińska's portrait. This comparison additionally highlights the erotic undertones of the work, which shows the man as an object of desire.

There are no grounds to speculate on any relationship between Bilińska and Barnard. One may wonder to what extent her view of the artist overlapped with how the commissioner

[58] Ibid., p. 68 [clipping: M. Sears Brooks's poem *The Young Sculptor* from an unknown magazine (1890)].

[59] Translated into Polish by Antoni Bohdanowicz, in id., *Anna Bilińska podług jej dziennika, listów i recenzji wszechświatowej prasy* (Warsaw, [1928]), p. 118.

[60] For information on the painting, see *The Artist...*, op. cit., p. 252–53 (Renata Higersberger).

[61] See the canonical text by Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the space of femininity," in ead., *Vision and Difference. Feminism, femininity and the histories of art* (London–New York, 2003), pp. 70–127. See also Agnieszka Morawińska, "Are Women Artists Allowed to Look?," in *The Artist...*, op. cit., pp. 52–60.

saw him, or whether she may even have adopted this perspective from him. Emphasizing Barnard's youth, virility and strength served to build the American ideal of a sculptor and his work but may have also resulted from Bilińska's erotic fascination. To conclude, it is worth returning to the circumstances of creating the work. One cannot help feeling that the whole situation must have carried a tremendous emotional load for both the painter and the model. Barnard was reluctant to pose for the portrait and did not wish it exhibited at the Salon, as he wrote in the letter quoted at the beginning of this paper. This attitude seems strange, as he often hosted journalists and let pictures be taken of himself in the atelier. In this context, it seems that Bilińska was an unwanted guest at the sculptor's studio, and the portrait she painted could be seen as an act of violence inflicted on a man by a woman. The roles of the female model as an object and the artist as the subject of representation – sanctioned through centuries of art history – have been reversed here. What is more, the fact this painting was created in a manner described as masculine[62] obscures the traditional understanding of gender dispositions and competence in the creative process. The opposition between woman and man, artist and model, painting and sculpture forms part of an incessant conflict, like in *The Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*.

Translated by Aleksandra Szkudłapska

[62] "Polacy w Salonie paryskim," *Kurier Lwowski*, no. 130 (1890), p. 3.