

Cock and balls

Peter Hill

BREAKFAST WITH LUCIAN:
A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST
by Geordie Greig

Jonathan Cape
\$59.99 hb, 272 pp, 9780224096850

He painted Kate Moss naked. The Kray twins threatened to cut off his painting hand over bad gambling debts. He was officially recognised as father to fourteen children by numerous partners, but the unofficial tally could be as high as forty (three were born to different mothers within a few months). He is Lucian Freud, grandson of Sigmund Freud, born in Berlin on 8 December 1922. All of his gambling disasters came from using his 'lucky' birth number, eight. Fittingly, he died at the age of eighty-eight in 2011.

Freud said of Kate Moss that he was 'very aware of all kinds of spectacular things to do with her size, like amazing craters and things one's never seen before'. He had many, many models. Some were thin as whippets, some were *actual* whippets, there was a brace of Lords of the Realm, an assortment of bookmakers (painted in lieu of debts that sometimes reached as high as \$5 million), a gorilla, the queen, Harold Pinter, Freud's many children (naked and clothed), lovers, and fellow painters. Robert Hughes described Freud's portrait of Francis Bacon as 'a grenade a fraction of a second before it explodes'. But it was another Australian, Leigh Bowery, who was inadvertently the key to Freud's aesthetic and financial success.

All of these anecdotes and more are recounted in Geordie Greig's *Breakfast with Lucian*. It is a page-turner of a book, part tabloid journalism, part overview of the world of gangsters, art dealers, and the aristocracy. Freud wal-

lowed in society's extremes and did not have much time for the middle classes. Ostensibly, this biography is about a small group of friends who would, usually individually, breakfast with Freud at Clarke's restaurant on Kensington Church Street. The author, a former *Tatler* editor and a man of great tenacity, was one of this group. He first saw an exhibition of Lucian Freud's paintings as a schoolboy, at Anthony d'Offay's gallery in London. The painting that shocked him into becoming a lifelong fan was *Naked man with rat*. He immediately wrote to the artist and received no reply. He continued to be rebuffed for another twenty-five years

breakfasts were initiated: 'Lucian had first started going to the tiny front café in Clarke's in 1989 with Leigh Bowery, the flamboyant Australian performance artist whose pierced cheeks and blond wig or bald pate made Lucian fade into anonymity beside him.'

Freud was always unconventional. Rather than work across the whole canvas with washes of colour or underpainting, he would start with one tiny point, an eyeball or a testicle, and paint that to a 'finish', before slowly and painstakingly working outwards until the whole canvas was complete. He would then demand payment upfront for it from whoever was his dealer at the time. 'Lucian had fallen out with and left six dealers,' Greig writes, 'prior to joining [John] Acquavella's stable in 1992.' For much of his career, especially in comparison to his friend and rival Francis Bacon 'he seemed an artist in the second division'.

Acquavella's New York gallery, which is on East 79th Street, specialises in blue-chip modern – whole exhibitions by Monet, Degas, Cézanne, Picasso, and Léger. When Freud started painting the enormous figure of Leigh Bowery, it was too much for his then dealer, James Kirkman. 'Who on earth will buy it?' he asked in despair, while Freud's ex-wife Caroline observed, 'His penis was like a slug.' Bowery's own description of himself was as 'an unusually big heifer carting around sixteen or seventeen stone'. Freud met Acquavella and his wife over an arranged lunch at an upmarket London restaurant.

'How we gonna get out of this gracefully if he wants us to go back to the studio?' Greig reports Acquavella saying to his wife. But they did, and the first thing Freud pulled out was a Bowery portrait with a leg raised. 'Man, this is different from what I had in mind,' the dealer mused.

Acquavella offered the picture called *Nude with leg up* to the Hirshhorn



Lucian Freud (left) with Lady Rothermere and Frederick Ashton, 1950s

– often, when phoning, with an abrupt 'Fuck off'. Eventually, using the ruse of wanting to photograph the painter Frank Auerbach, he persuaded Freud to sit in on the portrait. Throughout his life it was Auerbach's judgement more than anyone else's that Freud most trusted about his own work.

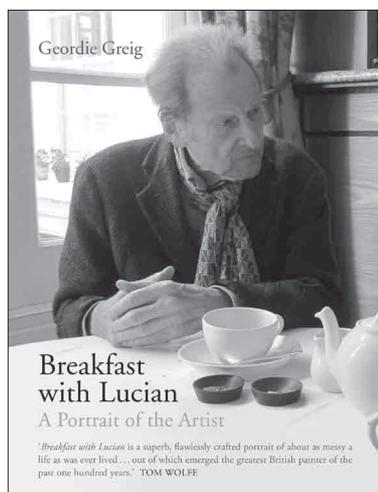
Elsewhere, Greig describes how the

Museum in Washington, DC for \$800,000. Suddenly everyone was buying Lucian Freud paintings, from Roman Abramovich (\$25 million for *Benefits supervisor*) to the Art Gallery of Western Australia's purchase of *Naked portrait* (1999). This deal was brokered by London's leading gallerist Jay Jopling, famous for his stable of young British artists and his trademark 'Joe 90' glasses. When the Australian deal was complete, Freud sent him 'a close-up of Leigh Bowery's cock and balls'.

Robert Hughes, quoted in the book, wrote passionately about Freud:

Every inch of the surface has to be won, must be argued through, bares the traces of curiosity and inquisition ... Nothing of this kind with Warhol or Gilbert and George or any of the other image-scavengers and recyclers who infest the wretchedly stylish woods of an already decayed, pulped-out post-modernism.

If you like informed gossip, you will enjoy this book and the many photographs of Lucian Freud at work. If you are more interested in process and artistic practice, you will enjoy Chapter Eight, simply called 'Paint'. In the end, this is simply what obsessed Freud. ■



Peter Hill is an artist, writer, and independent curator. He is employed by RMIT University, Melbourne, and Goldsmiths College, London. He is currently completing a book called *Sixty Contemporary Artists*.

Bloomsbury jam

Virginia Woolf in the kitchen

Gay Bilson

THE BLOOMSBURY COOKBOOK:
RECIPES FOR LIFE, LOVE AND ART

by Jans Ondaatje Rolls

Thames & Hudson, \$49.95 hb, 384 pp, 9780500517307

In the first volume of Virginia Woolf's diary (1915–19), an entry in June 1919 mentions England's possibly ruined strawberry crop. 'This is a serious matter for us as we have just bought 60 lbs. of sugar, & had arranged a great jam making. Strawberries are 2/ a lb. at this moment. Asparagus 6d & 7d, & yesterday at Ray's I ate my first green peas.'

I have always wondered who made the jam. In 1916 Nellie Boxall began cooking in the Woolf household and stayed there for eighteen fraught years (Alison's Light's book *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* [2009] is illuminating). Woolf's diary entry does not make it clear whether the 'great jam making' was undertaken by the servants alone or whether she put down her pen to help.

The Bloomsbury Cookbook helps to answer this admittedly trivial question. According to Jans Ondaatje Rolls, 'Dora Carrington and Virginia Woolf were the great Bloomsbury jam makers.' This statement is followed by a recipe for raspberry jam from *May Byron's Jam Book* (1923). I own and often use a copy of this marvellous book, but did the Woolfs? Does it matter? And does it matter what Woolf and her circle cooked and ate?

Bee Wilson, reviewing a book on John Stuart Mill in 2009, wrote that 'a life history in which the stomach is wholly absent does not seem quite human', but I wonder just how human we want Virginia and Leonard, Lytton Strachey, Dora Carrington, Maynard Keynes, Vanessa Bell, and others of the Bloomsbury Group to be? Ondaatje Rolls, in a stretch too far, believes that the group were the 'foodies' of their

day, 'despite a profound ignorance of all aspects of food preparation'. It serves her purpose to make this statement (she includes over 170 Bloomsbury recipes), but I don't think it is true. The Bloomsbury decades were not, in general, decades of conspicuous self-indulgence (they included two world wars), and this was the last period in which servants played a large role in households where they could be afforded. Life lived, whether it be intellectual and creative or more mundane, was domestic and centred around a table for most of society. To refer to the group as 'foodies' is to misuse a term relevant only to the 1980s onwards.

So why make so much of the culinary history of this group? After all, except for the recipes and presence of Maynard Keynes's wife, Lydia Lopokova (a petite and delightful interloper resented by the Bloomsbury elite), just about all the food is as English as the climate. One obvious answer is that Ondaatje Rolls (daughter of the very rich Christopher Ondaatje, brother of the novelist Michael) has written a book whose entire royalties will go to The Charleston Trust (google her name and you will find multitudinous links to *The Bloomsbury Cookbook*, though not to her connection to money).

A cookbook is a useful thing. The only use to which *The Bloomsbury Cookbook* as culinary text might be put is that archaic entertainment, the themed dinner party. Who will play Virginia and walk into water rather than do the dishes? 'She used every dish in the place and left all the washing up,' according to Nellie Boxall. Although there are enough recipes to give the title