Whereas the objects on the table — the statuette, and the paper and pen — were always part of both the invention and the disegno of the Lanier portrait, the two pictures in the upper right corner (fig. 31) are additions, though they are all but contemporary with the larger painting. One might come to this conclusion from normal viewing alone, as these pictures seem inessential to the composition, but objective confirmation has recently been provided by the technical report, which reveals that both pictures were painted over the background.

Cleaning has also made a little more distinct some ruled lines which have been overpainted, apparently marking the stone jamb and cill of a window. It appears, therefore, that a window was originally intended for the area where the pictures are now placed, though there are no traces of any other features of this window, or of a view through it. This suggests an abandonment of a design, rather than a later revision, and that at least one of the background pictures was painted immediately after the main portrait. The inclusion of such a window, often yielding a recognisable view, was a standard feature of the more intimate Venetian portraits painted around 1585-1615 and of the Tintoretto studio in particular, and examples brought back by diplomats and travellers during this period inevitably influenced northern portrait painters and their patrons.

In other respects, however, the Lanier portrait retains the Venetian formula for the chamber portrait, where the basic elements — half-length sitter in foreground; covered table with objects; window with view — still permitted the inclusion of significant items to confirm the sitter’s individuality. In Rubens’ early work, The Four Philosophers (1611–14), we see the formula exploited to the full (fig. 32). Although a certain simplicity and unity of composition was sacrificed when the additions were made to the Lanier portrait, in gaining two extraordinary pictures it became, for its first owner, a far more complex pictorial document, and now, for us, it demonstrates the deeper capacities of the early seventeenth century portrait.

To consider the matter of priority, to the eye it seems that the oval picture was painted first. If we imagine it without its companion, it seems to sit comfortably in the space that there remained enough space in the top right corner for a further inclusion. When the dimensions of this second picture were drawn, they were made as large as the space allowed, to the extent that its lovingly detailed, ebonised and gilt-lined frame just touches the dimensions of this second picture. When it was being painted, the thought had not yet occurred that another picture should sit alongside it. The second picture seems to have been painted after it was noticed that when it was being painted the thought had not yet occurred that another picture between the sitter’s head and the right-hand edge of the panel, and we may well believe that when it was being painted the thought had not yet occurred that another picture should sit alongside it. The second picture seems to have been painted after it was noticed that there remained enough space in the top right corner for a further inclusion. When the dimensions of this second picture were drawn, they were made as large as the space allowed, to the extent that its lovingly detailed, ebonised and gilt-lined frame just touches the pegbox of the late beneath.

The oval picture, which is immediately identifiable as a Liberation of St Peter, calls to mind the work of Hendrick van Steenwyck the Younger (c. 1580–1649), and close inspection reveals that it is, in fact, an autograph work signed S WCK, and dated ‘1615’. Within the Lanier portrait, therefore, we have a small version of a subject that Steenwyck seemed to enjoy painting and which never fell out of favour with his clientele, as he is known to have painted more than seventy versions throughout a long career, varying in size, medium, and the details of design. This, however, is an unusual instance of Steenwyck having painted a picture within a picture, though he was frequently given...
work on parts of paintings requiring the architectural ‘perspectives’ in which he specialized, which, when completed, would bear the brushwork of two or even three painters. Another perspective, also in an oval frame, appears on the background wall of a George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham by Daniel Myers, painted in 1626/27.7

At what level are we to perceive this work? Steenwijk has given his smallest Liberation of St Peter such wonderfully fine detail and finish that it cannot be categorised on the visual potential of its setting. Steenwijk’s skill both in painting architecture according to the principles of linear perspective and night scenes, enabled him to create an illusion of cavernous space framed by massive columns, vaulted ceilings, and broad flights of stairs, within which small figures exact the drama of the escape – St Peter, having been unnerved by an angel, walks past the deepening shadows to freedom. Pieces of perspective were much sought after in the early years of the seventeenth century and, in England, were still wondered at and admired, as the English were yet to become accustomed to seeing the correct perspective in their paintings, while English painters were still failing to achieve a convincing sense of space in their work.

A very small number of works by Steenwijk’s influential forerunner in this genre, Hans Vredeman de Vries, had arrived in England prior to 1613. There may have been at least three examples in the collection of Henry, Prince of Wales, and it is at his court that we find an upsurge of interest in perspective and its underlying mathematical principles.8 Prince Henry’s engineer, Salomon de Caus, published his expensively illustrated treatise, La perspective, for his patron in 1612, and it is not unlikely that Steenwijk, already the most desired provider of perspectives to the Flemish art market, had met de Caus, the renowned theorist-practitioner, while the latter still worked at the grand-ducal court in Brussels.8 A few months before de Caus’s publication, Prince Henry’s painter, Robert Peake, almost in apology for the insular style in which he painted, funded the English translation and publication of Sedilia’s First Book of Architecture (London, 1611), while the Prince’s surveyor of works, Inigo Jones, had been introducing the English court to linear perspective with his masque designs since 1605, achieving new standards of

In the context of the Lanier portrait, therefore, are we to see Steenwijk’s contribution as, literally, a superficial feature? Certainly, Sir Roy Strong has observed, the two internal pictures have something of the album amicorum about them, and it is possible to conceive of both pictures adding meaning to that of the Lanier portrait, yet for neither of them to function within it. There are, however, features that suggest that the internal pictures are not to be understood as sitting on the picture plane ‘postage-stamp’ fashion; but as hanging on the wall of the chamber. These include a curtain rod, or possibly a picture rail, running above the two internal pictures, evidence of some overpainting of the background that appears to be contemporary with the two pictures, and some veined marbling. Simply stated, the two pictures and the curtain share the same world.

It does not seem credible that Steenwijk would have sold a separate Liberation of St Peter to Lanier, and then copied it into the larger painting. There would seem little sense in undertaking such effort and expense for a duplicate, and, besides, it would change the larger painting into a portrait of a collector, which, it has been argued, the sitter does not. The remaining possibility, which is to be preferred, is that Steenwijk painted a unique version of the Liberation of St Peter – (his oeuvre suggests an inexhaustible capacity to produce variants of the Apostle’s dangerous escape) – especially for the portrait. The portrait, therefore, purports to show an owned picture, though, in fact, it had no existence beyond the portrait itself. By contributing this Liberation of St Peter, Steenwijk participated in the creation of a simulacrum: a believable yet feigned setting. Realization of this allows the viewer, by means of the painting, to ponder matters of resemblance, reality, and time.

Much of the attraction of a Liberation of St Peter for both painter and purchaser lay in the visual potential of its setting. Steenwijk’s skill both in painting architecture according to the principles of linear perspective and night scenes, enabled him to create an illusion of cavernous space framed by massive columns, vaulted ceilings, and broad flights of stairs, within which small figures exact the drama of the escape – St Peter, having been unnerved by an angel, walks past the deepening shadows to freedom. Pieces of perspective were much sought after in the early years of the seventeenth century and, in England, were still wondered at and admired, as the English were yet to become accustomed to seeing the correct perspective in their paintings, while English painters were still failing to achieve a convincing sense of space in their work.

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architectural complexity with his settings for Oberon in 1611. Steenwijk’s contribution to the Lanier portrait, therefore, caught the new fascination perfectly.

If Prince Henry lived on, Steenwijk might have been induced to begin his permanent residence in England somewhat sooner than he did. However, the drying up of patronage (it should be remembered that the ‘Collector’ Earl of Arundel, Thomas Howard, was also absent from England for much of 1613/1614) denied Steenwijk the opportunity to establish himself in London. Only in late 1617, after the English art market had started to pick up, stimulated by Arundel’s example and by the stirring interest of the new favourite, Buckingham, did Steenwijk move to London and, thereafter, make his particular contribution to the visual re-education of England. The architectural perspective that he provided for Mytens’ Charles I as Prince of Wales (c.1620), covering one quarter of the large canvas, is an example of his association with another leading London-based Dutch artist that endured for at least seven years, and probably much longer: Whereas Mytens eventually fell out of favour with Charles I (excluded only by van Dyck), numerous Steenwijks maintained their place in the collection of a king who would not hesitate to dispose of pictures as his taste became ever more refined.

While any early seventeenth-century connoisseur would have appreciated a Liberation of St Peter by Steenwijk (fig.33) for its technical qualities and sense of drama, for some owners such a subject might also have served as a reminder of an improbable upturn in fortune that had occurred in their lives. One might pause to consider, therefore, whether its story is analogous to any episode in Lanier’s life, had he ever been delivered from any sort of confinement by his own guardian angel? At this point, it becomes necessary to deal with an assertion that Lanier was briefly detained by the Roman Inquisition while accompanying William Cecil, Lord Roos, on his tour of Italy in 1608.12 In a contrast of fortunes, Roos’s tutor, the unfortunate Mr Molle, detained at about the same time, would die in a Roman prison after thirty years’ captivity. This claim would give a very specific significance to the picture, but it must be dismissed, as the arrested individual, reported to be one ‘Lanee’, on deeper investigation proves not to be Lanier but a certain Mr Lane of Ashborne.13

It seems probable that Lanier was never held under lock and key in his life. We would do better to consider how, around the time his portrait was painted, he might have conceived his soul to be enchained, and what, he believed, would set him free. There appear to be some similarities between the message to be derived from the Liberation of St Peter and the epigram inscribed on the paper: VT RE BORES RUMOS ITOS QUE LA LIBERATION LA ABOR. Both, in their different ways, speak of a release. This, Lanier obtains through devoting all his energies and his mental powers to his music. Not to do so would be to allow his mind to brood on his ‘miserable fate’, which probably meant for him a near-disastrous inactivity and an enforced retirement from social intercourse could easily tip a Jacobean gentleman’s mind into melancholy and introspection, a kind of imprisonment of the mind. We know that for many months after Salisbury’s death Lanier was unsure what to do; whether, as he put it, ‘to turne Courtier or Cloune’.14 He mentioned his dilemma in a brief note of remembrance to Sir Dudley Carleton, the English ambassador in Venice, which he pressed upon the returning embassy secretary, Isaac Wake. Lanier had last seen Carletons when visiting Venice two years previously. Since then, not only had his patron Salisbury died, but his gentleman’s mind into melancholy and introspection, a kind of imprisonment of the mind. We know that for many months after Salisbury’s death Lanier was unsure what to do; whether, as he put it, ‘to turne Courtier or Cloune’.14 He mentioned his dilemma in a brief note of remembrance to Sir Dudley Carleton, the English ambassador in Venice, which he pressed upon the returning embassy secretary, Isaac Wake. Lanier had last seen Carletons when visiting Venice two years previously. Since then, not only had his patron Salisbury died, but his
The second picture (fig.34) creates worlds within worlds, for it is of an artist, brush and palette in hand, putting the finishing touches to a portrait. The gaze of the sitter in that portrait passes through four worlds separated by threepicture planes to meet our own. More questions of identity arise, as the painter and sitter are undoubtedly individuals known to Lanier. The painter, wearing a ruff of two or three layers, is the model of refinement, the pictor datus. His dark hair is cropped, short, with a short fringe and bare ears in the Italian fashion; otherwise, his only distinguishing feature is a long, heavy nose. He is certainly not an old painter, and he is right-handed. The sitter, whom we see only in his portrait, wears, in marked contrast to the formal attire of the gentleman who is painting him, an open shirt the negligent attire associated with love-madness and also melancholy. It was commonly held in the Renaissance and Baroque periods that the former complaint often progressed to the latter. In the poem Diaphantus (1604), for example, the eponymous character, we are told: ‘Puts off his cloathes, his shirt he only wears, Much like mad-Hamlet; only passion tears’.

Possibly more relevant to our inquiry, the artist, was believed to be susceptible to a kind of melancholy that of the imagination, and when so afflicted was, again, recognizable by his disordered dress.

The Lanier portrait is a private portrait, and its concerns are those of identity, not status, and friendships, not hierarchical relationships. These friendships embrace the artists responsible for both the portrait and its internal pictures; indeed, it is hard to account for Steenwijk’s Liberation of St Peter if not as a gift. The adjacent picture, of portraitist and sitter, may be a similar offering, though it is tempting to consider the possibility that Lanier, whom we know to have been an amateur painter, painted it himself. Its painter clearly took delight in lining the wall shelf with vessels of liquid and books (signifying the erudite artist), and in including the lover- coloured knots of the draftboard raval. As to the identities of portraitist and sitter, if the picture shows an antecedent that the Lanier portrait seeks to emulate, the possibilities are wide and various, going back to the ever exemplary Sir Philip Sidney sitting to Veronese in 1574.

It is more probable, however, that the small picture refers to the personalities involved with the larger portrait, connecting the various elements and memorialising Lanier’s inclusion within a painter’s studio fraternity. Despite the difficulties of working on such a small scale, an attempt at a true resemblance of the sitter appears to have been made. We note a thin face, long, unruly hair, and most noticeably, dark eyes with a stare of concentration that might be characteristic of the person. Might this be none other than Steenwijk, whose portrait, (fig. 36) showing similar features but in an older man, was drawn by van Dyck. At the beginning of January A. W. van der Goes left Antwerp to paint the portrait of the Count of Egmond and so the master of Diaphantus (fig. 37), dated 1604, was left behind.

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A musician of Lanier’s sensitivity shared the same transcendent imagination as the best painters and the best poets of the age. Melancholy might have been the price they had to pay for their ability to reach into the metaphysical, but it is this ability to slip easily through one world of their creating into another, and then another, which the modern mind struggles to comprehend, yet eucies. Artists of the period occasionally created within their portraits planes of reality reserved for themselves, from where they gaze back at the viewer with impunity, sometimes communing with other figures on intermediate or even deeper planes. In the early 1550s, Sofonisba Anguissola painted her friend and mentor, Bernardo Campi, painting her, a self-portrait (fig.35) which misleadingly records another painter’s responsibility for it; alternatively, a double portrait, half of which claims to paint the other half.22 Closer to the Lanier portrait in time (c.1590) and school, the painter, Johann von Aachen, (fig.37) in a roundel only 10 centimetres wide, turns his head away from the portrait he is completing of the sculptor and painter, Adrian de Vries, to meet the eye of the viewer, while behind, Paulus van Vianen, the goldsmith and medallist, observes from his own framed portrait.23 All three friends, artists at the court of the Emperor Rudolf II, somehow overcome their internal separation to look out as a group from the actual painting. Like these paintings, the Lanier portrait, with its inner pictures, is a memorial of fellowship between artists, constructed using the very gifts of imagination that bound them together and set them apart from others.

21. For the icon as not mere representation but a conduit to a real presence, see most recently Wilks, Prince Henry Revived, pp. 10-19; also Roy Strong’s definitive study, The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture, London, 1969.

22. Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale.