

## Cold Open

I am extremely glad to be able to use my Art History degree for this script because it helped me bring out my old Art History texts and also realize that I cannot for the life of me define classicism off the top of my head. Also, my brain kept autocorrecting it to “classist”, which was then my sociology degree speaking. Now, I just have to work on the archaeology and linguistics part of me. Looking forward to that day.

With all that being said –

## Intro

In the 1980s, *The Sun* – who you might know as an incredibly reliable source of news for everyone who has knocked their head into a wall at one point – released a story called *Blazing Curse of the Crying Boy*<sup>1</sup>.

Ron and May Hall experienced a devastating house fire that ruined their beloved home. Despite everything being absolutely fucked, there was one thing that seemingly survived all of this – a painting of a crying boy.

According to Dr. David Clarke (Associate Professor in the Department of Media Arts and Communication at Sheffield Hallam University), the story grew from there with the help of Ron Hall’s firefighter brother who then stated that he knew about a bunch of other instances that were similar to this – a house fire with a surviving crying boy painting – and many other media outlets who gave story after story of crying boy + house fire pairings<sup>2</sup>.

I want to encourage everyone to read *The Curse of the Crying Boy* as written by Dr. Clarke as it’s a beautiful dive into how the media can play a huge role in fear mongering, something that we talk about a lot on the show. He basically wrote a perfect script for me to read off – how this story came about, how the story spread, how people attempted to control it, and how this story still goes and goes without question or further investigation.

He even discussed how he may have played a role in the revival of the story, after being invited onto *Most Haunted* – a show I also watched many moons ago – when they investigated the Crying Boy. You know the game, creamies – He played the role of a reliable journalist that convinces you even more about the reality of it, simply by providing facts that can be twisted into a story by the show runners. He may have had the best intention to provide historical information, but what they did with it – beyond his control.

So, with Dr. David Clarke’s examination, where can I go with this?

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<sup>1</sup> [Blazing Curse of the Crying Boy - Dr. David Clarke](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Blazing Curse of the Crying Boy - Dr. David Clarke](#)

Let's talk about the art of haunted/creepy ass paintings!

## The Art of Creepy Ass Paintings

If you're someone who isn't familiar with *The Crying Boy*, let me use my art history degree for once in my life – outside of replica fan art – and get you right and ready.

*The Crying Boy* is one of a series of paintings by Giovanni Bragolin (real name “Bruno Amadio”<sup>3</sup>) that depict young crying/tearful children. The basic composition and make up of these paintings are of a child (can be a boy or a girl), from mid torso up or just shoulder up, looking straight at you. They are not crying in these paintings specifically, but they *are* teary eyed and have a teardrop coming down their cheeks.

According to a Bragolin focused website, Bragolin followed **classicism** – “[painting] mainly in a rustic and realistic style”<sup>4</sup>. For those unfamiliar with classicism, this is art that follows Greek and Roman values – meaning they are “aspiring to the qualities of restraint, balance, and rational order exemplified by the ancient Greeks and Romans”<sup>5</sup>. Think of *Oath of the Horatii* (her-ah-tee) (1786) by Jacques-Louis David or the Golden Ratio.



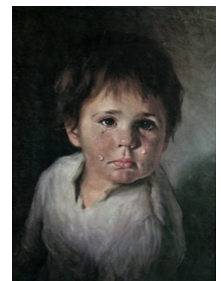
Let's now look/talk about the specific *Crying Boy* that is embroiled in all this drama – the funny thing is – it varies. There's the specific crying boy that's listed on the wiki page and there's the others that are featured on the Mirror's report about the Jolly Angler pub in Manchester and a bunch of other ones.

I'm going to be specifically talking about the one featured on the wiki page and the one that Steve Punt burns on his show *Punt PI* as it's actually gone into some deeper research about the painting itself – going as far as burning a copy<sup>6</sup>.

In *Punt PI*, we see a painting of a half turned young boy dressed in a blue coat. He is looking directly at you. As this is a photo of the painting, the tones look a little bit more blue - however in the episode it's more warm and brown. It's a simple portrait of a young boy.



In the wiki page<sup>7</sup>, we have a different crying boy painting (left hand). This specific painting is of a young boy, probably a toddler, looking forward but off to the viewer's right shoulder. The boy is depicted with tears and a slight frown. The painting is warm toned, but then again you can see a slight ref. Figure is proportional and realistic. Certainly a bit more evocative than the other example. However, on the Bragolin website (to the right) we



<sup>3</sup> [Giovanni Bragolin - Wikipedia](#)

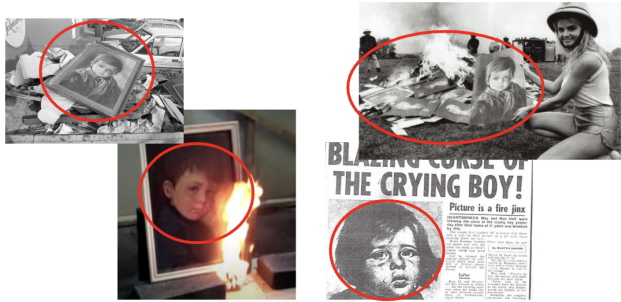
<sup>4</sup> [bragolin](#)

<sup>5</sup> Art History - Marilyn Stokstad

<sup>6</sup> [Punt PI tries to burn 'cursed' Crying Boy painting \(BBC Radio 4\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The Crying Boy - Wikipedia](#)

have a different coloring. So, that at least lends some sort of credence to all those people who say to visit museums because it's a different feeling from seeing them online. One thing I will assure you though is that these will never be in my possession due to the subject matter but also cos I'm a bit of a chicken. Ben, I'd now like you to move to the first slide of the powerpoint I gave you. For those listening, I hope you're following along through the images provided in the doc. Don't worry, I'll be verbally describing them as well.



I'd also like to bring up the fact that in investigating which specific painting it was, it seemed as though it was just generally one of the crying boys from Bragolin's crying boy series<sup>8</sup>.

Now, knowing what these paintings look like – you may think to yourself: they're not even scary JD! I demand you tell me what the fuck is going on!

## Common Creeps

Before I get too deep into *The Crying Boy*, let's take a look at haunted paintings in general.

With the help of Moon Mausoleom's *Cursed and Haunted Paintings* article<sup>9</sup> I'm going to walk you through some well known paintings. It's at this moment that I'm going to invite you to think of some commonalities, some differences, and really pay attention to the descriptions and ideas that I give you with these 4 paintings. Ben, please go ahead and click on the next slide, so you can see these bad boys too.

**[Pause for question:** What I want you to do right now, Ben is to take at least 3 seconds to look at each slide starting from the slide that says "YOU'RE HERE", then go back to the "YOU'RE HERE" when you're done. I want you to just keep track of your feelings and thoughts in those 3 seconds and hold onto them as I go through the paintings.



*Man Proposes, God Disposes* by Edwin Landseer (1864)




This painting features two polar bears at the remains of a ship, tearing it apart. At the left, a bear is tearing apart fabric and a wooden pole. At the right, a bear is tearing apart bones with some muscle in it. You can guess by the title and subject matter that this is

<sup>8</sup> [10 Unsettling Truths About the Crying Boy Paintings Curse - Listverse](#) (image source)

<sup>9</sup> [Cursed and Haunted Paintings - Moon Mausoleum](#)

	<p>commentary on our need as humans need to make advances and how nature will always win one way or another.</p> <p>The lore around this is that a student once stabbed themselves in the eye with a pencil and claimed that the painting made them do it. At Royal Holloway University, students feel an aura of doom and gloom from this painting and claim that if you sit in front of it during exam season, you will fail your exams. This led to the university ultimately draping the Union Jack over it to ease student fears.</p>
<p><i>The Rain Woman</i> by Svetlana Telets (1996)</p>  A painting of a woman with a very long, narrow face and a wide-brimmed black hat. She is wearing black clothing. Her eyes are closed. The background is a mix of light and dark tones.	<p>In this painting, we have a woman with elongated proportions. She's wearing a wide brimmed hat and black clothing that covers most of her body with only her face showing. It is a bust up view of the woman. She has her eyes closed. The aura of it is melancholy and a little blue.</p> <p>The lore around it is that Telets painted this in a sort of daze and kind of didn't know where it came from. Additionally, for those who view the painting - they get insomnia and a general sense of anxiety.</p> <p>People who purchased the painting claimed that the rain woman followed them around – in their house and dreams. Someone specifically claimed that they were seeing “white eyes appearing everywhere he looked” – resulting in them giving the painting back.</p>
<p><i>The Dead Mother</i> by Edvard Munch (1900)</p>  A painting of a young child in a white dress standing in the foreground. In the background, a woman is lying in a bed, appearing to be dead. The child's hands are over their ears. The color palette is dominated by warm tones for the child and cool, blue tones for the woman.	<p>In this painting, in the foreground, we have a child that is facing us and has their hands over their ears. In the background, there is a woman in the bed – our assumption based on the title is that this person is dead and is the mother of the child in front of us.</p> <p>The child is warm in colour and the woman behind the child is blue tinted. Most of the painting is taken up by the child in the front.</p> <p>The lore around this painting is that it is cursed and haunts the people who have seen it. The little girl's eyes follow you wherever</p>

	<p>you go and the girl even leaves the frame of the painting. Additionally, people claim to hear the sound of fabric rustling – as if the woman in the bed is moving around.</p>
<p><i>Untitled</i> by Laura P. (1994)</p> 	<p>In this painting, we have a wagon/carriage with a red top taking center stage, set outdoors. There is a barn of some sort behind this carriage. Off to the left of the carriage, we have a figure of some sort blending in partially with the background.</p> <p>The lore of this is that Laura was haunted in some way – her stuff went missing, was misplaced, and moved around. Just all sorts of stuff happened to her.</p> <p>Additionally, people claim that the figure in the photo haunts them.</p>
<p><i>The Hands Resist Him</i> by Bill Stoneham (1972)</p> 	<p>In this painting, we have two subjects on the right. They are in a doorway of some sort. The two subjects (taking up 75% of the painting) are children off to the left of the frame. Behind them is a door with windows on it. In the window, you can see several disembodied hands. On the top section of the window, there is a circle.</p> <p>The lore of this is that it appeared on eBay in the 2000s, due to a couple attempting to get rid of it. Much like the Munch painting, the subjects reportedly leave the frame, move around in it, and just in general get really strange.</p>

Now that I've given you some examples of haunted paintings, what can you glean from them?

**[Pause for question:** Ben, are you able to compare what you felt about those paintings when you looked at them without context vs. when I gave you context?]

Let's consider the paintings themselves first. Many of these paintings have an element of a 'creep' factor, regardless of knowing the lore or history behind it. *Hands Resist Him* has an element of uncanny valley that really invites you to look as long as you can at the painting, no matter how weird it may be. You look at the two subjects and wonder why they're a little bit off or why it's so close yet still so far from reality.

*Man Proposes, God Disposes* makes you think deeply about the two polar bears and the destruction they're inflicting on the remains before them. You get the heebie jeebies at the idea that in this destruction, there were once humans but nature has won out in the end in the face of the human desire to conquer.

*Untitled* by Laura P. is a somewhat serene scene until you catch the headless figure that blends in with the background. You're calmed and then all at once freaked out by this figure hiding near this carriage and you wonder why it's there and where its head is.

You get a little creeped out just by looking.

Even before we get to the creepy shit that happens when you see/have the painting, there's also the element of the story of the painting itself: whether that be how the painting came about or the topic of the painting.

For example, the subject of *Man Proposes, God Disposes* is the wreck of Sir John Franklin's 1845 expedition<sup>10</sup> that ended in the loss of the lives of 129 men. This provides a dark history to the painting that could already stand alone as daunting – with the images of the polar bears tearing apart a wreck and some ribs. Adding that background to this grizzly image gets you right on the path of further darkness.

We then have *The Rain Woman* by Svetlana Telets where it's less about the history and more of how the painting came about. Telets created this painting in a sort of daze, after months of feeling like something had been watching her. This is much like *Untitled* by Laura P. where she also painted her work in a daze of sorts and was then bothered by something in her home.

Then we get into the curse/haunting aspect of the paintings. What do they have in common? There's 1) being haunted by the existence of the painting and 2) being cursed/haunted by the subject in the painting.

"Being haunted by the existence of the painting" isn't necessarily that the painting itself is giving you the creeps, but that the mere existence of this painting or being in the presence of it haunts the viewer/owner. We have *The Rain Woman* and *Man Proposes, God Disposes* as examples of this. Both simply exist but once you experience them, you don't need to own them for them to impact you. *TRW* gets you in your dreams and *MP,GD* fucks up your exam scores.

There's fear there in the fact that you don't even need to own this thing for it to fuck you up one way or another. There is no escaping it after you've looked at it. It doesn't need to hang in your living room for you to be haunted by it. You looked? You're fucked.

Then we have "being cursed/haunted by the subject in the painting". This applies to most of the paintings I told you about but I'll use *Untitled* by Laura P. as an example. Laura experienced disturbances in her house due to the painting and the figure in it. Then we have once again

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<sup>10</sup> [Franklin's lost expedition - Wikipedia](#)

*MP, GD* with that example of fucking up your exam scores and making someone stab themselves in the eye with a pencil.

These commonalities exist in many of the paintings that I've seen in lists about haunted paintings and I hope they make sense to you and that you consider them the next time you're out trying to buy a haunted painting. Who knows, maybe I'll even do up one of my own Haunted Doll-esque guides to how to buy them. Maybe. I'm too chicken.

Let's now take a look at *Crying Boy* with this in mind.

The painting, according to the Villains wiki profile – which I hope is still up by the time you get this episode because there was a 3 week warning the week I was writing this, that the page was going to come down because it was a stub page. If it's down, I've got the PDF file for you to access on the show's website, don't worry.

Anyway, according to the Villains wiki profile<sup>11</sup> – the painting's abilities are “curse affliction” and “manifestation”. Curse affliction relates to the idea that if you own this, your house is bound to go down in flames with it being the only survivor. The “manifestation” I believe relates to the fact that it manifests the flames that your house gets engulfed in. Cute!

So, let's start off with “being haunted by the existence of the painting” – I mentioned that for some of the examples, the mere idea of the haunted painting existing haunts people. You might wonder – knowing the lore of this little cat – how? How does this work with the painting?

Well, I'm going to place the idea that the mere existence of this painting and the stories about it really worried a lot of people and lead to mass burnings of it. The *idea* that someone could own this painting and then their house could go down in flames really fucked with people so much. Even now, this “curse” haunts the painting itself – making it so that the idea of having/owning this painting can send heebie jeebies up someone's spine.

As someone who has spent a couple of weeks looking at this painting on and off, I considered whether this would affect me – if I should stop looking at it. I don't think I could even own a print out of this painting – the wiki page gives me the creeps and that's all I can take from it. Regardless of my belief in curses and haunted objects, the story attached to it is enough to touch on my superstitious heart.

Now let's get into “being cursed/haunted by the subject in the painting”. The “curse” or “haunting” aspect of this painting lies in its apparent ability to manifest a mysterious fire in your house just because it's inside of it. This “curse” is so effective that even those who hadn't experienced any effects from it were convinced enough to throw the painting away and just be free of it. This little boy's impact was so strong that it just fucking shook people.

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<sup>11</sup> [Crying Boy | Villains Wiki](#)

The “art” of the haunted painting goes further than its creep factor due to its appearance but how strongly you can convince people of the impact that the painting can have on your life – whether it be from pencil stabbing yourself in the eye to seeing white eyes everywhere you go to your house going down in flames.

Now that we’ve talked about the “art” of haunted paintings – what makes them scary – let’s now look at why people are scared of them!

## A Plague on Both Your Houses & Keeping an Eye out for Selener

Curses! They’re just like us – they help people cope with uncertainty and explain away chaos. What does that have to do with this? Well, you know – *Crying Boy* is haunted but it’s also specifically *cursed*. How? It’s basically the opposite of the evil eye bracelet that my sister in law gave me – instead of inviting good and warding off the bad (specifically mine covers happiness and wellbeing).

When it comes to coping with uncertainty and explaining away chaos – curses can become the thing that you blame when something bad happens to you or to the people near and dear to you. According to our besties Ken Drinkwater and Neil Dagnall, who wrote *Why do people believe in curses* for *The Conversation*<sup>12</sup>, people can and do use curses to rationalize the bizarre – they chalk up all the bad stuff that happened to them to a curse of some sort.

Further, Drinkwater and Dagnall claim that people who believe in curses usually will kind of find ways to have external forces affirm their belief in the thing. For example, if I believe that my family is cursed – I can gather ‘evidence’ based on things that have happened in my life that are negative. My brother’s car was stolen? Cos of that curse. My uncle passed away? Cos of that curse. I have chronic illness – Cos of that curse. Think of when people say “it’s because of that phone” when young people express some sort of trouble. Their eyes hurt – it’s because of that phone. My back aches – it’s because of that phone. My boyfriend broke up with me – it’s because of that phone. Etc.

Consider the paintings I told you about before – what are the perfectly normal (albeit terrible) things that happen to people that end up getting blamed on the paintings.

For *Man Proposes, God Disposes* by Edwin Landseer, put yourself in the mind of a college student – if they’re already aware of the “curse” of the painting, they might start to think: oh god, I’m sitting in front of it I’m already fucked. This could make them think – why would I try if this painting has already cursed me? The burden of fucking up is lifted from you because now it’s this painting’s fault.

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<sup>12</sup> [Why do people believe in curses?](#)



Then let's look at *The Rain Woman* and *Untitled* by Laura P. – while painting these works, the painters were both in a daze and felt like they were not controlling their bodies. Think of yourself when you're in the zone – do you ever sometimes feel like you're speeding through something and it all happened just out of nowhere and out of your control?

Sometimes, I will draw something and it'll feel like it wasn't me who did it because a) it turned out good b) it came out of me easily and a bunch of other things. Instead of considering that I was in the zone and maybe I picked a decent subject that I am familiar with and can crank out a drawing really easily about – I can chalk it up to the fact that it was some sort of out of body experience that was beyond me. Additionally, if the painters already had this sort of belief that they painted outside of their control – the strange things that happened around their homes may also be attributed to the strangeness they experienced while painting something.

This strange curse or feeling can then take on the burden of all the bad or strange things that happened to you.

Let's also consider *The Crying Boy* and how popular it might have been at the peak of its production. It was a mass produced painting. It wasn't some sort of limited edition piece that only a few people had. It wasn't a full painting – it was a print. Think of how many people had that in their homes. Then, think of the rate/statistics of house fires during that time.

I couldn't find one specifically for the 80s<sup>13</sup> but you can imagine, based off the 1979 estimate of 308,000<sup>14</sup> – there were quite a lot. Now, imagine the sorts of things inside these houses – what do they have in common? Since *The Crying Boy* was mass produced and it was reported that 50,000 paintings sold in the UK alone<sup>15</sup>... you know the deal – large numbers, right?

If about 2,500 paintings were sent in during the mass burning arranged by *The Sun*, think of how many others were out there. Then consider the fact that the claim is that this painting was found at 60 house fires. Law of large numbers, baby. I think. I probably used that wrong, maybe statistically – this painting would have been found at least at some of those 300,000 fires. Right?

Did those 60 housefires come with the story or did they arise afterwards? Who knows, not me certainly.

One more thing before I go is something I considered when it comes to haunted paintings with human subjects.

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<sup>13</sup> [0 A publication of the Government Statistical Service](#) - this was the closest I thought I could get, and I got my hopes up so high man.

<sup>14</sup> [Fires \(Statistics\) - Hansard](#)

<sup>15</sup> [10 Unsettling Truths About the Crying Boy Paintings Curse - Listverse](#) (this isn't as factual and a lot of the myths on this are debunked even if it says it was fact checked in 2022, but I am using the numbers for the print copies sold – which might not be factual, but 50,000 is a common number claimed regarding the number of paintings sold/bought in the UK. This is even reported in the Dr. David Clark article).

**[Pause for question:** Ben, have you ever experienced the feeling of staring at a painting and feeling like it was following you? I tried to think about all the museums we've visited together back in our college days and all I remember was that one painting that had such thick patches of oil paint on it that I really wanted to take a bite of.]

That's right y'all we're going to talk about something that afflicts Mona Lisa and so many other human paintings.

No, you're not the only one buns out, weiner – keeping an eye out on Selener. Those eyes? They feel like they're following you? Don't worry, they don't. The general idea of this seems to be that as the subject of the painting is painted in a way that they are looking at you – all according to the appropriate methods of doing so. Basically, if they're painted to look at you, your mind makes sense of it as such so that when you move, you still perceive it to be following you. Similarly, if they are not painted to appear to look at the viewer, no matter what position you're in, they will not appear to look at you<sup>16</sup>.

A 2004 study<sup>17</sup> conducted at Ohio State University, supports this further with its findings that we perceive the image by way of the “visual information” given to us by the painting itself. If we're correctly judging a painting to be looking at us, we're going to go with that assumption as if it was a real thing happening before us. I invite you to consider this the next time you encounter a painting with a figure painting in it – look at the eyes! As you move away, what does it do? Don't forget to let us know through [iscreamyoumeme@gmail.com](mailto:iscreamyoumeme@gmail.com), bestie!

## Conclusion

So, TL;DR – cursed paintings are freaky to look at and curses can help us cope with shit happening to us. There's an art to cursed/haunted paintings – the story of its creation, the history, and the painting itself works together to give you the heebie jeebies, making an involved art piece. Sort of like performance art except you're not locked in a glass box, you're just being haunted.

Now, with that being said – would I create a Haunted Painting Classified Buyer's Survival Guide to help you buy that painting you've been keeping an eye out on (that's been keeping an eye out on you in return)? Well, that's for JD several months from now to decide when we have to advertise this episode. What I can say is that the closer you believe in superstitions and curses and warding and all that, the more you might be susceptible – not to the curse, but to believing in the curse. I'm just a little stitious and you might be more super, but you best believe that regardless of my belief in it – I just won't be buying one for myself. No matter how much I joke about that Patreon tier Haunted Doll benefit – that's all on Ben. Not me, baby.

Happy buying!

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<sup>16</sup> [Why do the eyes in paintings seem to follow you sometimes? | HowStuffWorks](#)

<sup>17</sup> [The Mystery of Portraiture: Why Do the Eyes in Paintings Seem to Follow You Sometimes?](#)

[SLIDES FOR BEN]