

in absentia on all great voyages, English and others, from Cook onwards.

Ellis's Banksian patronage was mediated through that devil-may-care and rather whimsical man Charles Clerke (1743-79). Consumptive, ailing, dying, Clerke 'in the *Resolution* at sea', bereft of Cook and burdened with his command, wrote to Banks on 10 August 1779 off Kamchatka. This valedictory letter—Clerke knew he was to die soon—is a 'document that carries most pathos in all the records of these voyages'.⁸ It gives us, too, some of our most valuable clues concerning Ellis's rise to notice, to his emergence, in short, as a scientific artist.

Clerke, we surely must conclude, had seen some early talent in his surgeon's mate. Perhaps he discerned it during that first desperate 'damn'd long stretch'⁹ from England to the Cape between August and November 1776 as Clerke, belatedly released to his command from the King's Bench Prison, pushed *Discovery* to overhaul Cook, three weeks in front. Did Clerke see in Ellis, too, a kindred spirit 'down on his luck', for Ellis, slender evidence suggests, was, like Clerke, not a man of unlimited means? Together anyway, decided Clerke, they would 'serve' Banks in art, in science, in collecting.

Clerke willed to Banks in that last letter the 'best collections of all kinds of matter I could that have fallen in our way in the course of the voyage'. Collecting, however, was hindered by poor health. Among what there was Banks might 'find many . . . worthy of your attention and acceptance. I have bequeated you the whole of every kind, there are great abundance so that you will have an ample choice'.¹⁰

But abundance of what? Drawings, specimens, observations, artifacts? There came also with the collection 'a very worthy young man', W. W. Ellis. This courier would 'furnish [Banks] with some drawings & accounts of the various birds which will come into your possession'. This surgeon's mate, dictated Clerke to King,

has been very useful to me in your [*i.e.* Banks's] service in that particular, & is I beleive [*sic*] a very worthy young man & I hope will prove worthy of any services that may be in your way to confer upon him.¹¹

Worthiness, art, science and a dying commander's testimonial therefore gained Ellis, newly arrived at Deptford in October 1780, a ready *entrée* into the Banksian salons at Soho Square. By Banks he was certainly 'noticed'.

But, just over twelve months later, relations between patron and artist were low and they involved money. Like the Forsters before him—and others would follow—Ellis threw himself on Banks's generosity. His collateral was his drawings.

Ellis, bludgeoned, blinded, fooled, avaricious merely (we do not know precisely) had turned in his poverty first to a publisher and offered to