

ANGLAIS SPE (7)

29-11-12

Reynolds and Gainsborough Portraits and Landscapes in the Classical period

It roughly corresponds to the period 1760-1790.

- **1760** : First public exhibition in London.
- **1760** : Year of the **accession of George III**. **Georgian Period** till 1830. He went mad after 1789 but was fully English as opposed to his *German-born grandfather*. He keenly wanted to support the Art.

Growing sense of a refined metropolitan culture. Emergence of **art exhibitions** and founding of the **Royal Academy**.

Allan Ramsay established himself in London and had been indeed Hogarth's main rival.

* *Norman McLeod, Scottish chief* (1747)

cf. Apollo Belvedere (paragon of **male beauty**)

Academic style, relying on **previous postures** (*Louis XIV*) > dignity and style. **Unsubstantial** air to the figure, delicately poised against the rocky background. Ramsay was relegated because of Reynolds, so he renewed himself in **delicate fragile female portraiture**.

* *The Artist's wife*

1. Reynolds

Joshua Reynolds was the President of the Academy and the main theorist out there. Reynolds was born in 17. He became Sir Joshua, the most socially prestigious artist among English artists up to late 9th century. Public notability + highly successful **businessman** : very acute/strong business acumen. Early 1780s, **1200 pounds** = his most expensive picture = success and standing. He had rather humble beginnings at first and was apprentice to Thompson, the last of the *counsciousless portrait-painter*. Shortly afterwards he went to Rome, were instead of cultivating friendships, he immerged himself in the **great Roman tradition**. Many of his paintings are based on allusions and references to paintings by the old masters, including many that were not so famous at the time. His range of knowledge and scholarship in matters of Continental paintings was very extensive.

Historic and Heroic Portraits

* *Commodore Keppel, Naval Officer* (1753)

Imposing, bulked and manly figure (*vigueur mais classe et retenue*). Vivid and impressive posture. The **stormy background** shims in with the contemporary discourse in politics. Uniform, sword at his side. He probably has escaped from a shipwreck. This painting was not done at a time when Britain was at war (1740-1746, 1756-1763, 1775-1783 and 1791-1815)

* *Lord Heathfield, Commander of the Fortress at Gibraltar* (1787)

He successfully defended the place against the Spanish. Playing casually with a key, he looks at Heaven in an inspired way (*sublime quality of spirit suggested*), the stormy twilight style suggests that perhaps, a **battle** has just taken place. Storm or smokes of fires and battles? The key which he is wielding might also remind us of Saint Peter. Rather **unusual composition of the portrait**. The sitter is no longer **at the center**. Wider en-plat space around the figure.

Dicentering = novelty/innovation to keep up interest and surprise among the public, but also a way of paying fuller justice to the **sublime qualities** of the subject.

Portraits in Disguise

Blurred frontiers between History and Mythological Portraits.

* *The Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* (1762)

Modern Venus. Bas-relief depicting the Judgment of Paris. On the console beside her : twin doves. Hence the noble sitter herself is being likened to the goddess. Simple **majestic antique dress**. Reynolds was strongly hostile to the accurate depiction of contemporary clothes (and fashions of the moment). He thought that painting people went strongly against the **potential immortality of the work of art**. He was actually heading at the ideal, the intemporal. Privileging the expression of the soul over the likeness or the exactness in portraiture.

* *Lady Sarah Lennox Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces* (1765)

Interest in **Greek Antiquity** (*at the time of first archeological works*). Winckelmann was beginning to publish his works. Two titles : the portrait title and the historical/mythological title.

Mock-Heroic, Mock-Historical ?

* *David Garrick between Comedy and Tragedy* (1763)

David Garrick was the most famous actor at the time, but also a member of a highly select clique of which Reynolds also was a member (associated with Samuel Johnson, the Arbiter of Taste).

Shaftesbury's essay *The Notion of a Historical Draft* (1712) had insisted on *Hercules hesitating between Virtue and Pleasure*, because it was the ideal subject of history painting with all its moral associations.

Here, Garrick seems **unheroic**, apologizing lightly to the figure of the Tragic Muse.

Both women correspond to different traditions as well. The tragic Muse on the right is more in agreement with the Classical tradition. She is depicted in profile (*Ancient Medals*) and conversely, the Comic Muse is depicted in a warmth and richness of tone that would locate her in the Venetian Colorist Tradition.

Contemporary History Painting

* Benjamin's West's *Death of General Wolfe* (1770)

Adaptation of the Pieta. Contemporary **patriotic version of Christ**. Benjamin West, member of the Academy, was also the first notable American painter. Contemporary clothes (British uniforms). Noble savage in the left corner (pensive yet masculine attitude).

Decorous Horror

* *Count Ugolino and his Children* (1773)

Histoire racontée dans l'Enfer de Dante (avec celle de Paolo et Francesca)

Tyran de Pise du XIIIe siècle, il avait entretenu une hostilité violente contre l'archevêque, qui l'avait enfermé puis emmuré dans un donjon avec sa famille. Il a mangé ses propres enfants. Au fond de l'étang gelé, il dévore le crâne de l'évêque pour l'éternité.

Selecting a particular moment, in which *Ugolino* realizes that they are immured in the donjon. **Haggard expression** on his face. Strong emotion and also perhaps **psychological disturbance**. Isolation and dramatic chiaroscuro. The Painters of the Bologna School (in the previous century) said those **gore and tragic subjects** should be treated **sparsely and with subtlety**. Twelve figures was the absolute maximum for a history painting to avoid crowded compositions.

Reynold's Variety

* *Ms. Abington as Miss Prue* (1771)

Ornaments on the dress. Sense of arbitrariness, element of contingency, evidence of a certain historical rift between the tradition and the contemporary moment.

* *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse*

cf. Michelangelo's *Sibyls* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

The Fancy Pictures : Children, Emotion and Exploitation

The Age of sensibility = Modern sensibility of **bourgeois society**.

* *Miss Bowles*

She's playing with her dog in a nice garden, showing a joyful enchanting smile.

* *The Strawberry Girl*

Little beggar/Beaten child selling fruits in the street to survive. Elements of vulnerability and pathos. He used children from working classes as **raw material** and sketched them for later compositions.

Text no.1 : Opposition simplicity/refined elegance, sublime/sensual, spirit/body, line/color, liberal/mechanical.

Text no.2 : *Reynolds on Gainsborough* (1788)

"(...) It is certain, that all those odd scratches and marks which, on a close examination, are so observable in G's pictures, and which even the experienced painters appear rather the effect of accident than design. This chaos, this uncouth and shapeless appearance, by a kind of magic, at a certain distance assumes form, and all the parts seem to drop into their proper places..."

Hommage et mise en garde contre le *touch pencil*.

2. Gainsborough

Born in Sudbury (Suffolk), son of an unsuccessful cloth merchant. Went to London in 1740s, where he was apprenticed to Gravelot, a French foremost engraver at the time (spread of Rococo fashion in England at the time). Neither of them ever went to Italy.

Early Dutch-style landscapes

* *Cornard's Wood / Gainsborough's Forest* (1748)

Oil-painting view for the **Foundling Hospital of London**. Shortly before his death, his memory might have failed him about the date. He successfully adapted the Dutch style to the English landscape. One woodcutter working, another having a nice chat with a maid, one travelling peddler, one figure on a horseback = different social works and gestures. Opposition/contrast between cultivated nature (in which human activity is present, emphasized with play on lights and shadows) on the right, and untamed/wild nature (solitary pond) on the left. At that time, the English countryside was changing rapidly, as landlords would enclose many lands. It was called the Process of enclosure of the Commons. Aggravation de la condition de beaucoup de paysans, qui voyaient leur mode de vie changer (= plus droit d'aller couper du bois pour se chauffer).

Fusing Conversation and Landscape

* *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews* (c. 1750)

De Suffolk à Ipswich, Gainsborough reprend la pratique de la conversation, souvent campée en extérieur (dans un jardin) et en fait un paysage à part entière.

- Originalité dans la **luminosité** frappante dans laquelle le paysage est représenté. Technique hogarthienne (*wet on wet*) = **grande fluidité**.
- Le paysage est improved = régularité des sillons du champ à moitié maçonné, enclosure derrière où paissent des moutons.
- Relative **raideur** des personnages. Héritage formel des *Conversation Pieces*, mais aussi manière de suggérer les tensions ou les frustrations inhérentes à un mariage arrangé. Commentaire oblique et irrévérencieux.

Poetry and Portrait

* *The Painter's daughters chasing a butterfly*

Culte de l'enfance. Influence des grands maîtres du **rococo français**. Motif en V des deux mains jointes = suggestion du papillon (mise en abyme, écho).

Papillon = emblème de la **fragilité** de l'espérance dans cette « vallée de larmes ». L'enfance, c'est le temps de l'innocence, de la joie et de la grâce, toutes trois si éphémères.

* *William Wollaston*

Indignité du **musicien professionnel** saisi dans l'exercice de son métier, mais pose détendue, informelle. Tendresse pour un certain mode de vie, joyeux et informel.

Fashionable Portraits

1759 : Il s'installe à Bath, THE Fashionable Neoclassical City (le 2^e centre de la culture anglaise). Urbanisme néoclassique. Culmination de l'élégance architecturale de cette époque. Jusqu'en 1774. Il se taille un grand succès, à tel point que c'est le **seul peintre de province** qui sera admis à l'Académie.

* *Mary, Countess Howe* (1763)

Robe exquise, cou enveloppé dans un collier de perle, visage extrêmement séduisant mais d'un **grand réalisme**. Pour G., le portrait, c'est la **ressemblance** la plus exacte, la plus minutieuse.
= Likeness over ideal expression.

* *The Linley Sisters* (1772)

Chanteuse exemplaire d'une époque où la **liberté des femmes** est accrue. Epoque de relative démocratisation. Epoque de pleines ascendances et de changements des milieux. Vie publique plus ample. On fraye entre classes.

Reviving Van Dyke

* *The Blue Boy* (1770)

Démocratisation. Défi, car normalement, on ne peut pas choisir de **couleurs froides** pour le centre d'une composition.

* *Mrs. Thomas Graham* (1777)

Licence de mœurs. Grande élégance de Van Dyke. Liberté et fantaisie supplémentaire à l'esprit **extravagant** du temps.

Late Portrait : Pre-Romanticism ?

Sensibilité morbide, pressentiment que les temps sont en train de changer, et qu'une **certaine Angleterre est en train de disparaître**. Mélancolie.

G avait coutume de peindre à la chandelle, dans une lumière tamisée lui permettait de saisir les volumes élémentaires, et il peignait avec des pinceaux extrêmement longs pour pouvoir mettre sa toile à côté du modèle. Il ne peignait pas la nature devant le motif, mais plutôt d'après de petits **modèle miniatures** de compositions paysagères faites avec des cailloux et de la mousse (*pebbles and moss*).

* *The Morning Walk* (1785)

Elégance du couple à la mode.

* *Mrs. Sheridan* (1787)

Arrière-plan romanesque et rêveur. Elizabeth Linley avait épousé un dramaturge brillant mais infidèle, et menait donc une **vie solitaire** et **désolée** après avoir, pour lui (et à cause des convenances), abandonné une carrière prometteuse en tant que cantatrice. Illustration emblématique de la femme abandonnée qui fascine la littérature, avec un paysage crépusculaire.

English Arcadia

Rival et contrepartie de Reynolds, Gainsborough était aussi un grand peintre de paysage, très admiré de Constable (*Suffolk*), mais il avait un **rapport conflictuel** avec l'académisme : le **caractère intime, les textures délicates et raffinées de ses tableaux** étaient en opposition aux **conditions d'exposition** (entassement des œuvres les unes sur les autres). C'est ainsi qu'il s'est plusieurs fois retiré temporairement de l'Académie, n'admettant pas ses modes d'exposition.

Ce n'était pas un rebelle, mais sur le plan personnel et artistique, il aimait garder un **quant-à-soi**, une **autonomie**. Ce qu'il aurait voulu, c'est se retirer à la campagne avec quelques livres, de la musique, et peindre des portraits de paysage. Beaucoup de ces œuvres n'ont jamais trouvé d'acheteur. Paysage > genre encore **très peu en demande**.

* *The Watering Place* (1777)

"The best landscape ever made in England." (Horace Walpole)

S'éloigne de l'influence hollandaise de ses débuts. A mi-chemin entre **Naturalisme** (= Tradition flamande de **Rubens**) et **Idéalisation romaine** (= **Le Lorrain**), mais exubérance contenue, adoucie à l'anglaise, rendue plus pensive : autant de qualités qui feront voir un lui un peintre éminemment anglais. *Watering Place* désigne à la fois un point d'eau et un abreuvoir.

Market Carts, Woodcutters and Cottage Girls

* *The Market Cart* (1786)

Figures humaines + représentation virtuose et jubilatoire de paysages. Pratique constante du dessin. Sentiment **mi-joyeux mi-mélancolique** d'un **mode de vie traditionnel en train de disparaître**, mélancolie latente dans l'élément de surprise du bûcheron surgissant de l'ombre du sous-bois. Fascination pour la **Fable** d'Esopé de la *Mort et du Bûcheron*.

* *Cottage Girl with Dog and Pitcher* (1785)

cf. *Petit mendiant* de Morillo

Mélancolie fragile et complaisante.

Cruche = Symbole de la fragilité et de l'innocence. Caractère éphémère de la virginité.

* **Esquisse au fusain**

« **Odd scratches and Marks** »

Goût de l'exécution facile et pittoresque, sens de l'improvisation, traits capricieux formant une grande part de son inspiration.

* **Etude pour Diane et Actéon**

Etude pour un **sujet mythologique dans le grand style** (reprise par **Camille Corot**). Excentricité et modernité de son rapport au dessin.